



Dormouse Monitoring in the Rockingham Forest



Dormice are undeniably cute, but more than that they form an important part of ecosystem. Dormice are very fussy about the habitat they live in; it needs to have a wide diversity of foodplants to support them from waking up in spring until they hibernate in autumn. They also need a good dense network of branches so they can travel safely through the trees and bushes without coming down to they ground. Because of this they are used as an indicator species, where we find dormice, we know we have a path of well-managed woodland or hedgerow that will support a wide range of other species.

Dormouse numbers and range in the UK have both decreased drastically over the past century with the current stronghold being in the southwest. Here in Northamptonshire we are right on the edge of their range and have a handful of populations hanging on. It is important that we monitor how they are doing here. Recently we have focused on monitoring the populations we know about but we are wondering if there might be more populations to discover.



To do this we need your help!

We are setting up a scheme to lend out footprints survey kits to local volunteers and/or groups who are interested in taking on responsibility to survey a particular site for a season¹. We would like your help promoting this to your group as we think some of them might be interested in helping us gather data and seeing a new side to some local woodlands along the way.

The surveys are fairly intensive requiring fortnightly checks for at least a few months over the spring/summer/autumn so we recommend people work in small local teams to share the work and make it a more social activity. No prior expertise is needed as we will set up a training event held by the Wildlife Trust BCN at the start of the season.

We will be on hand to help you instal the footprint tunnels at your chose site, then leave you to carry out the fortnightly checks to look for footprints and to

¹ Dormouse survey season runs from spring to autumn, but tunnels needn't be out the whole time.



apply fresh ink and card to the tunnels. We will of course be available to provide advice throughout this time but are unlikely to be able to attend many checks.

Dormice have a very distinctive footprint compared to other small rodents so provided clear prints are obtained it is easy to identify them, but experienced staff and volunteers will be here to help with any queries.

We are working with local landowners who manage areas of woodland and/or scrub in the Rockingham Forest area to identify suitable areas, but if you own or know of a site you think might be suitable do get in touch.

Potential sites for surveying:

- Collyweston Great Wood
- Easton Hornstocks
- Fineshade Wood
- Bulwick Estate
- Other woodlands with landholder permission
- Short Wood
- Glaphorn Cow Pasture
- Laundimer Woods? (tbc)
- Brampton Ash/Stoke Wood

We anticipate only surveying a few woodlands each year, but plan for this project to last several years, as long as there is local interest.

Please note that the chances of seeing a dormouse during these surveys is virtually nil as they are set up to detect where a dormouse has been rather than to disturb them. Even so the data you collect will help build our understanding of where these rare creatures are found in our neck of the woods.

We do also run dormouse box checks at a few woods led by a licenced volunteer/staff member since dormice are a legally protected species. Even these seldom encounter dormice due to them being at fairly low population densities here on the edge of heir range, but we do come across their distinctive nests to confirm they are still around.

To find out more about this project please get in touch with Gwen Hitchcock via ecologygroups@wildlifebcn.org.

