

Surrey Dormouse Group Newsletter

Welcome to the first issue of the Surrey Dormouse Group Newsletter!

Thank you for supporting SDG as we venture into our first season of independence. We now have 78 members and are continuing to grow. Your help and financial support will ensure we continue to monitor dormice across Surrey, and provide safe and secure places for them to nest.

The 2015 season is now well under way. It got off to a good start in March, with several dormice being found, including the big fellow in the top photo – 25g is a pretty impressive weight after months of hibernation!

Many of the dormice found so far this year have been torpid, which makes for nice photo opportunities, but may be a reflection of shortage of food and / or cold weather.

The other interesting trend this year seems to be the unusually high number of dormice found in empty boxes – making nests is so last season. The small number we saw last year has probably already been exceeded.



25g dormouse found in March (photo courtesy of Martin D'Arcy)



Torpid dormouse (photo courtesy of Kathryn Killner)



Dormouse in empty box (photo courtesy of Kathryn Killner)

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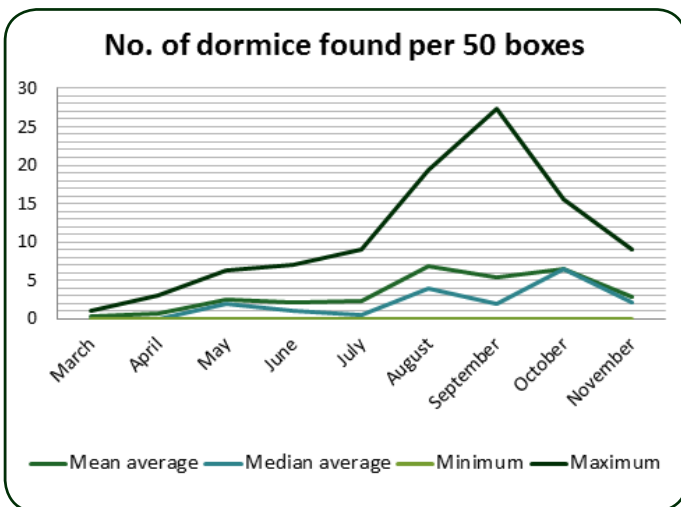
How was 2014 for Surrey dormice?

Last year SDG members checked a total of 7076 boxes from 18 sites. Data from each SDG box check are reported to the National Dormouse Monitoring Programme, to feed into their national analyses – you can read about how 2014 was for dormice nationally in the [Dormouse Monitor](#). Here's a summary of the data from Surrey.

How many dormice?

We saw a total of 487 dormice over 2014. That works out at a mean average of 3 dormice per 50 boxes checked, but the numbers seen at individual box checks ranged from 0 per 50 boxes to 27 per 50 boxes. At a third of box checks no dormice were found. The median number of dormice found per 50 boxes checked was 1, which is probably a more representative average, given that a few large numbers are skewing the mean. Some sites that with quiet starts to the season had large numbers later in the year. On average, we also found 2 empty dormouse nests per 50 boxes (ranging from 0 to 18).

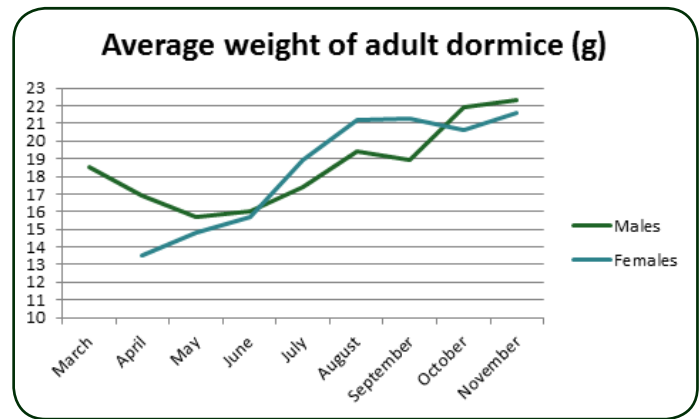
When did we see them?



The earliest dormouse was a 20g torpid male, found on the 6th March at Nower Wood, and the latest ones were 3 found at Polesden Lacey at the beginning of December (that's not to say others weren't around earlier or later – just we weren't checking so didn't find them). As you can see from the graph above, average numbers were highest in August to October, and lowest in March and April.

How much did they weigh?

Females weighed slightly more on average than males (19g vs 18.7g), but this changed considerably over the course of the year, as you can see from the graph. The heaviest dormouse recorded was a 33g female found at Sheepleas, There, in October.



Other interesting features

Dormice with white tail tips were reported 36 times over the year, including a family of juveniles, all with white tail tips, found at Norbury Park. There were 9 dormice with stubby tails.



Dormouse with a white tail tip (photo courtesy of Julie Russ)

Youngsters

The earliest pinkies were found on 20th July at Norbury Park. On that same box check the earliest greys were also found. The latest pinkies were found on 25th September at Juniper Hill, and the latest greys were found on 20th October at Combe Bottom.

The largest number of dormice found in one box was 8 (mother with young): boxes with 8 dormice were found at Sheepleas Green Dene and Juniper Hill.

Other box occupants

Apart from birds (which seem to take over a large number of boxes in spring at some sites) and invertebrates, the most common other occupants were wood mice (162 were seen, 21 of which were found in dormice nests) and yellow necked mice (29 were seen, only one of which was in a dormouse nest). There were additionally 12 Apodemus mice (species not determined). The other box occupant occasionally found was the pigmy shrew, only 7 reported over the whole year (2 of which were in one box). Moles have never before been found in boxes (see [page 6](#)).

Annabelle South

Working towards a Dormouse Handling Licence with Surrey Dormouse Group

The Hazel Dormouse is a protected species, which means anyone who wishes to handle dormice needs to be licenced to do so by Natural England. Members of SDG will be familiar with box checks being carried out under the leadership of a licence holder, who supervises all box checking activity. Those of you who enjoy participating in the checks under supervision do not need to hold an individual licence. The following information is **important** for anyone who wants SDG support to apply for a dormouse handling licence.

SDG supports the training approach detailed on the [PTES website](#), in fact a previous SDG Training Scheme was one of the inputs used to define the new structure in 2013. This webpage also contains helpful information such as a photo guide to sexing dormice, and videos.

SDG recognised a need for wider training for those working towards a licence and in 2009 developed a structured scheme, which ran successfully for 3 years. This scheme required some additional skills and experiences to those defined in the one above. Members of SDG working towards a licence, and who are looking for SDG support for their application, need to be aware of our approach and our additional requirements:

Support for licence applications

If you require both your references from SDG, one will be from Dave Williams, and the second from another of the box check leaders. You must request support from whoever you want to be your second referee as early as possible in your training. They may require you to demonstrate extra skills to those given on the PTES Training log and may offer to act as your mentor throughout your training. It is possible that some restrict how many trainees they support for a given year.

Once your other referee has recommended you for approval, Dave must see you handle dormice. He may need to see you handle several times in order to see your skills across various ages and states of dormice. You must make him aware of your intentions to gain a licence and it is your responsibility to join some of his box checking sessions so that he can observe your handling.

Mandatory courses

- **The Dormouse Ecology Training Day:** This is 'advisable' for Natural England but mandatory for SDG support. Dave Williams has been giving these courses for many years and will continue to run one annually. These courses will be advertised initially via SDG and then opened to non members. We are running one this year on 22 August in Guildford. It's a full day with classroom work in the morning, followed by a box check in the afternoon. There will be a charge for the day £45 for individuals, £65 for organisations. You'll need to bring lunch. It does not include hands-on dormouse handling, this is a separate course, but hopefully should include seeing dormice during the box check. If you wish to register your interest ahead of the final details being issued please email info@surreydormousegroup.org.uk Other courses are available and acceptable with an attendance certificate (see [page 6](#) for details of a PTES course).
- **A Dormouse Handling Course:** Wildwood in Kent run courses, and you will be given an attendance certificate.

Examples of additional skills and experiences

- Although not explicit in the PTES Training log you will be required to experience dormouse pinkies.
- Ideally you should attend a nut hunt, or be able to find and identify nibbled nuts.
- Ideally you should help with a site installation, including making a map. At the very least you should be able to install a box on a tree.
- You should be competent at dealing with all other box occupants.
- You should be competent at recording data during the check and then entering it into the PTES database.
- If you wish to lead box checks you should experience that under the supervision of your second supporter.

Finally it is your responsibility to have your Training Log on a box check for the site leader to sign off your experience, licence holders may not be open to signing off any experience retrospectively. All site leaders will sign off your experience on your Training Log even if you do not require SDG support for your licence.



Handling a dormouse (photo courtesy of Julie Mottishaw)



Box checking (photo courtesy of Julie Mottishaw)

Julie Mottishaw

SDG at Roar and Explore!

Despite the torrential rain early in the evening, our very first SDG public event, at Chessington World of Adventures' Roar and Explore evening, was a great success.

The event was held to raise funds for conservation both in the UK & abroad and to give local organisations, such as ours, Surrey Bat Group and Kingston Biodiversity, to name but a few, the opportunity to talk to visitors and spread the word about our work.

Visitors had the chance to win fabulous prizes in the auction and on the tombola, as well as the opportunity to look round the animal exhibits, kept open out of hours for the event.

With over 1300 visitors during the evening, there was a lot of interest in our stand. The children very much enjoyed decorating (and eating!) our delicious dormouse-shaped biscuits and many of them went home sporting one of our stickers; a lucky few took home a new friend in the shape of a cute pom pom dormouse as well.



The SDG stand (photo courtesy of Jo Balch)



Dormouse biscuits decorated by children (photo courtesy of Jo Balch)



The SDG stand and volunteers (photo courtesy of Kathryn Killner)



Pom pom dormice (photo courtesy of Kathryn Killner)

We learned a lot about what works well on a stand and which items and activities generate the most interest from both adults and children and have a number of ideas for next time.

A big thank you goes out to everyone who helped out, both beforehand and during the evening, to those who came to visit us on the stand and to Chessington World of Adventures for inviting us to take part. We have already had some enquiries from some potential new supporters so, all in all, the evening was a great success - watch this space for news of future events!

Kathryn Killner & Jo Balch

Site focus: Polesden Lacey

Polesden Lacey is one of our newest dormouse monitoring sites, as this is the first year we are carrying out monthly box checks. The site is part of the National Trust's Polesden Lacey estate, which was once home to Edwardian socialite Mrs Greville, and the place the future King George VI and Queen Mother spent their honeymoon.

Our monitoring site is in the part of Ranmore Common known as Dorking Wood, and is not far from the church of St Barnabus. It is Ancient Woodland, a Site of Special Scientific Interest and part of the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Home to a wide variety of bird life, the wood is also visited by three types of deer, including Red Deer. 39 dormouse boxes are already installed, and we hope, in time, to increase the total number to 50.

Dorking Wood came to fame briefly in the 1960s when bags of money stolen in the Great Train Robbery were discovered there by a couple on their way to work. The bags contained £100,900 in cash as well as evidence that helped lead to the conviction of Brian Field, one of the masterminds behind the robbery.

We haven't discovered any hoards of cash so far during our box checks, but we're keeping our eyes open. At our June box check we did discover this little treasure (right).



Installing nest boxes at Polesden Lacey (photo courtesy of Annabelle South)



Our first dormouse of 2015 at Polesden Lacey (photo courtesy of Annabelle South)

Annabelle South



Dormouse biscuit (photo courtesy of Jo Balch)

Fundraising for SDG

SDG is now independent of Surrey Wildlife Trust so must raise money to cover costs such as insurance, dormouse boxes and other monitoring equipment to maintain our current sites, and create new ones. If you would like to help out with a SDG stand at an event like Roar and Explore, or have other ideas of how to raise money for SDG, please email info@surreydormousegroup.org.uk

Why not organise a cake sale at work? Or use your craft talents to create dormouse-inspired items to sell for SDG?

News from the People's Trust for Endangered Species

Training courses

PTES are running two Dormouse ecology, conservation and woodland management training courses at their woodland reserve on the Isle of Wight. These three day courses will look at the ecology of dormice, their conservation and relevant legislation. In addition they cover how to survey for dormice, how to set up a regular monitoring site and the requirements both to obtain a disturbance license and a mitigation license.

There will be plenty of opportunity to check nest boxes and we would expect that all participants will have the opportunity to handle dormice in a number of life stages. This will be useful for people beginning training for their dormouse license.

Dates available are 7-9th September and 6-8th October 2015. For further information please visit www.ptes.org/events or contact ian.white@ptes.org

Photos

PTES are always in need of photos of dormice and people undertaking box checks for their publications, including the dormouse monitor magazine, leaflets, website and social media pages. If you have any high quality images you are happy for them to use (with credit) please send them to zoe.roden@ptes.org Thankyou! *Lauren Alexander*

And finally...

Martin D'Arcy posted this exciting photo from his June box check on the SDG Facebook group – a mole in a dormouse box. How did it get there?

Sadly it's not a new type of tree-climbing mole. When Martin found the body of a dead mole near a dormouse box, he couldn't resist a cheeky photo.

This is the first issue of our newsletter. We'd love to hear what you think of it, and even better, for you to get involved in the next issue. If you have any (genuine or entertaining) photos for the next issue of the newsletter, or would like to write an article, or suggest something we should cover, please email Annabelle.south@btinternet.com

Thanks to everyone who has contributed to this newsletter.

Useful links

- [Surrey Dormouse Group](#)
- [Surrey Dormouse Group Facebook group](#)
- [PTES training information](#)
- [Dormouse Monitor](#)
- [Wildwood](#)
- [British Wildlife Centre](#)

Contact us

info@surreydormousegroup.org



Dormouse and nest (photo courtesy of Andrew Rothwell, 2012)



Mole in a dormouse box (photo courtesy of Martin D'Arcy)