



Newsletter

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

The 2015 season is now almost over. Lots of boxes have been checked, and dormice and other box occupants recorded. Most of the dormice are pretty much ready for hibernation, so it's almost time to hang up our dusters for the winter.

It's been a busy year for Surrey Dormouse Group:

- we've become an independent organisation
- checked more boxes than ever before
- started monitoring four new sites
- run a dormouse ecology course
- had a stall at our first ever public event (Roar and Explore)
- and we've got a new logo!

Thanks to everyone who has helped us achieve all this!

SDG gets a logo!

We are very excited to unveil our official Surrey Dormouse Group logo!

We were looking for something that could be used on all SDG literature, the website and Facebook page and also on items such as stickers and badges and potentially clothing, for future events

The logo needed to be relatively simple and easily reproduced in different sizes and ideally different from other groups

We had a few designs drawn up but, after gathering comments from some of our licence holders, went for a simple design of a sleepy dormouse surrounded by the group name

Our final logo was designed by Ken Iizuka, who describes himself as "an illustrator living in Brighton who enjoys pizza"

We'd like to thank Ken for all the time he spent designing the logo and for putting up with our amendments during the process!

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SDG Dormouse Ecology Course

The Ecology Course took place on 22nd August at the Ark in Guildford, with a classroom session in the morning and a visit to a nearby site in the afternoon.

Attendance on one of these courses is required by Natural England for anyone wanting to apply for a dormouse handling licence but it is also useful, and fun, for anyone who just wants to find out more about dormice. We had the full range of dormice on the box check, a pregnant female, adults, juveniles, pinkies, greys, so everyone got a full dormouse experience!

Text and photos by Kathryn Killner



"I really enjoyed the dormouse course in August. Pitched just right, it was a good mix of information and practical experience. For someone who adores dormice the day was lovely, and as someone looking to gain knowledge and in the future a dormouse licence, it was really informative and increased my understanding a great deal. Looking at gnawed nuts, discussing dormice needs and their conservation were just some of the activities throughout the morning. Best of all the nest box check in the afternoon was filled with dormice! Obliging families of dormice, what more could you ask for? Oh yes, and Dave, Kathryn, Julie and fellow coursemates were great too! Great day. Perfect course :) Highly recommended." Helen Cavilla



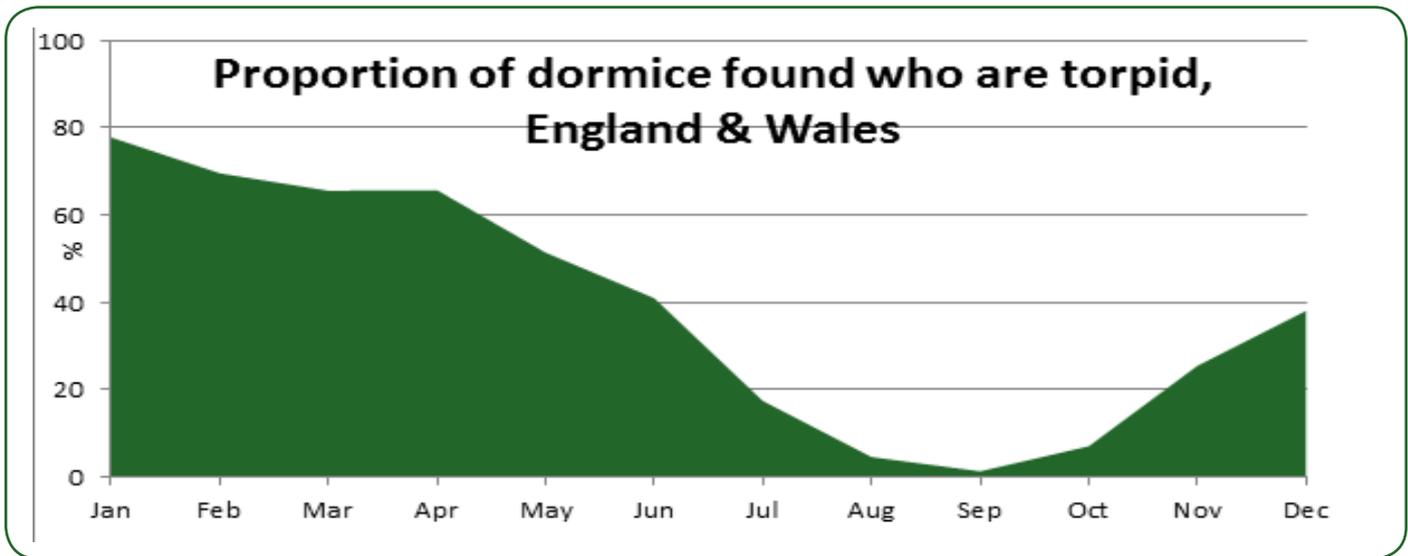
How are our data used?

Ian White, Dormouse and Training Officer for the People's Trust for Endangered Species, writes about the National Dormouse Monitoring Programme, which we contribute to.

There had been very few studies on hazel dormice *Muscardinus avellanarius* in Britain before the 1980s. Although people were familiar with their presence in woodlands, knowledge of the species was limited. A Mammal Society Dormouse Survey in 1984 suggested that there had been a decline in both the range and population size of the dormouse in Britain. This prompted the Nature Conservancy Council (later English Nature) to fund Pat Morris and Paul Bright of Royal Holloway, University of London to investigate the question of why dormice were rare and becoming rarer, in Britain. The discovery, by Doug Woods in Somerset, that dormice would readily use special nest boxes, made it possible that this question, and general dormouse ecology, could be investigated. In 1988 boxes were put up at 5 sites in Somerset and

Herefordshire and over 35 visits, 384 dormice were found and biometric data recorded. Since then, nest boxes have been positioned at many other sites to achieve regular monitoring of the species across England and Wales, a system now known as the National Dormouse Monitoring Programme (NDMP).

The NDMP requires a minimum of 50 boxes to be erected approximately 20 metres apart, at a site where dormice are known to be present. They are checked a minimum of twice a year in either May or June and in September or October to give an indication of the pre-breeding and post-breeding population. The number of dormice found in the boxes is recorded, along with basic biometric data such as sex and weight, and the



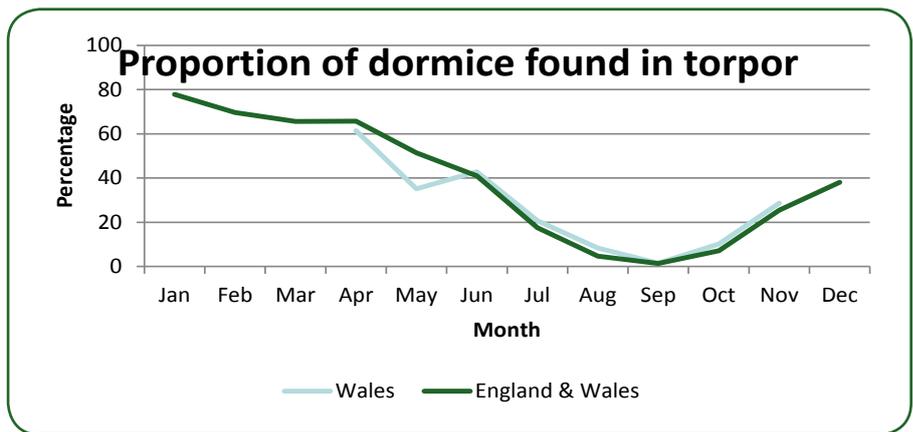
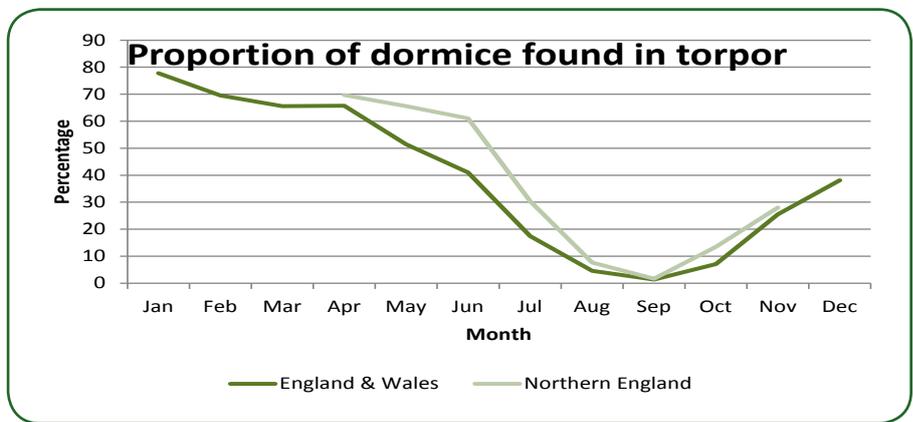
results are submitted annually to the People’s Trust for Endangered Species (PTES). The cumulative results provide the data for the national dormouse population trend analysis.

From small beginnings, the NDMP has grown substantially. In 2011 339 sites were registered, a total of 116, 883 individual boxes were checked throughout the year and 9,333 dormice were recorded. In 2014 there were 50 new sites, a total of 135,024 box checks were made and 6, 831 dormice recorded. There are currently over 90,000 dormouse records in the database and it grows every year. The NDMP is analysed every year to look at the national dormouse population trend and it has shown that after a steep decline up to the year 2000, that decline now appears to have slowed. It would be nice to think that the decline has slowed due to the result of 20 years of conservation effort but of course that is very difficult to determine.

There are some simple analyses that can be done. For example nationally, in April 65% of dormice are recorded in torpor; this drops to 1% in September and then starts to increase as dormice ready themselves for hibernation. If we compare the national data with the data from Northern England, the activity period is reduced. This is not unexpected but it is a surprise that a climatic event can so easily be seen from the measurement of a single variable i.e. are dormice torpid or active. More intriguing

is the data from Wales. This shows that fewer dormice are recorded in torpor in May than in June and there are more litters born in Wales in June than in any other region. It would be easy to dismiss this as an anomaly but this is from a 25 year dataset.

The NDMP has not been fully analysed and PTES are shortly to undertake a more comprehensive study of the data; it will be interesting to see what it can tell us.



Site focus: The Roughs

Joanne Balch and Hannah Wilson introduce us to the newest SDG site

In May of this year SDG was approached by Guildford Borough Council who asked if we had the capacity to monitor three of their Merrow sites for them, since they were finding it hard to fit in monitoring amongst their increasing work loads.

We had some knowledge of these sites since we had used them in the past for training purposes and knew dormice were present once upon a time, although not being checked for some time we were unsure if this would still be the case.

On a sunny June morning we set out with Julie to locate and assess the sites to see what condition they would be in. We knew there were three compartments of boxes close together, each containing 50 boxes in a place originally known as Merrow Downs. We had a rough map of the area and outline of the site locations with some hand drawn site maps to interpret.

After about two hours of following a series of paths down from Newlands Corner, getting rather lost, and using Google Maps on our phones here and there, we haphazardly stumbled across the first, very dilapidated, box on a tree and, following a very overgrown path further down the hill, many more boxes in a state of disrepair! We determined that this was the Roughts 2. Not to be deterred by this disappointing find we went in search of the Roughts 3 at the bottom of the hill. Success!!! We found all 50 boxes, most of which were in good condition and, even better..... dormice!!! A total of six dormice were found across three of the boxes, as well as numerous bees and birds nests. Feeling extremely elated we headed back up the hill towards the car park and in the process searched for the Roughts 1. We found this almost immediately and once again this revealed all 50 boxes and a single dormouse! To top off our very successful day we even found a much more direct path back to the carpark in about 20mins!!!

The remainder of this year has focused on the Roughts 3, with subsequent visits entailing remapping and renumbering the site and replacing any boxes. We opened the site up to volunteers in August of this year and have found dormice every month since. We believe we have seen the same adult male every month due to a distinctive ear nick, and were also lucky to find a young family of four greys with their eyes closed, accompanied by a lactating female. All good signs for a breeding population of dormice within the area.



Occupied dormouse nest at the Roughts (photo by Hannah Wilson)

Guildford Borough Council have kindly provided us with a number of boxes which will enable us to replace a small number of boxes at the Roughts 1 and to hopefully set up the Roughts 2 from scratch. Work on this will most likely be in the spring of 2016 with the help of any willing volunteers, so keep your eyes peeled for an email next year!!



Dormouse found at the Roughts (photo by Hannah Wilson)

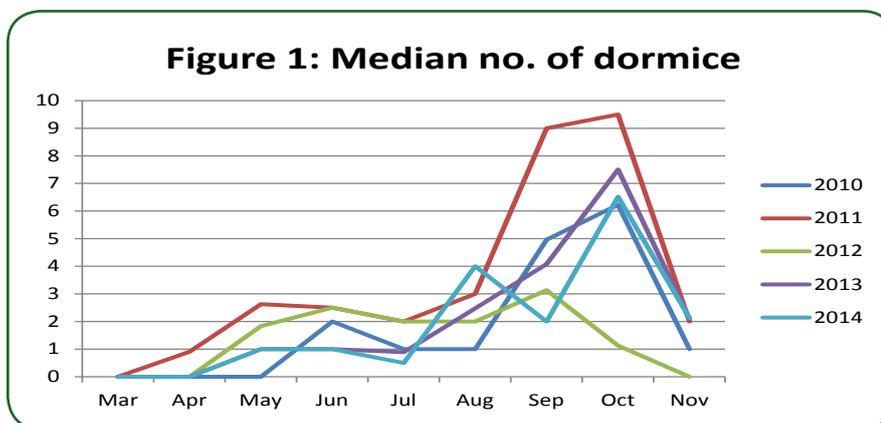
How did 2014 compare to previous years for dormice in Surrey?

In the last issue of this newsletter we looked at what SDG found in 2014. But how did this compare to previous years? Annabelle South trawls through the database to find out...

Was 2014 a good year for dormice or not? I looked at the data from SDG sites for 2010-2013, to compare it to what we found last year.

Numbers of dormice

The comparison isn't straightforward - we've increased the number of sites (and the number of boxes on some of those sites) in recent years. In order to make it a fair comparison, I standardised the figures to give the number of dormice found per 50 boxes checked.



Over the 5 years (2010-14) SDG have found almost 1,900 dormice. As you know, the numbers of dormice found varies dramatically over the year. Figure 1 shows the median average number of dormice found per 50 boxes checked over the course of the year for each of the years we're looking at. It follows a broadly similar pattern to the other years in the period, below the bumper year of 2011, but better than some of the other years.

Interestingly, over the 5 year period there's only been one month (June 2011) in which every single site checked had at least one dormouse.

One noticeable difference between 2014 and previous years is the maximum number of dormice found per 50 boxes. For the 2010-13 period, the maximum for any site was 24 dormice per 50 boxes. 2014 beat that, with 27 dormice per 50 boxes found at Juniper Hill and 25 per 50 boxes at Merrow 4 in September.

Weights of dormice

I compared the mean average weight of adult dormice found each month in 2014 to that of dormice found in each month in the period 2010-13. As you can see from Figure 2, dormice in the first few months of 2014 were lighter than those in previous years. This difference was statistically significant. By July this difference had disappeared, and, in the latter half of the year dormice in 2014 were heavier than the average for 2010-13.

The heaviest dormouse found in this period was a 35.5g giant at Merrow 2, in August 2012. The heaviest dormouse found in 2014 was 33g, at Sheepleas Shere Road in October.

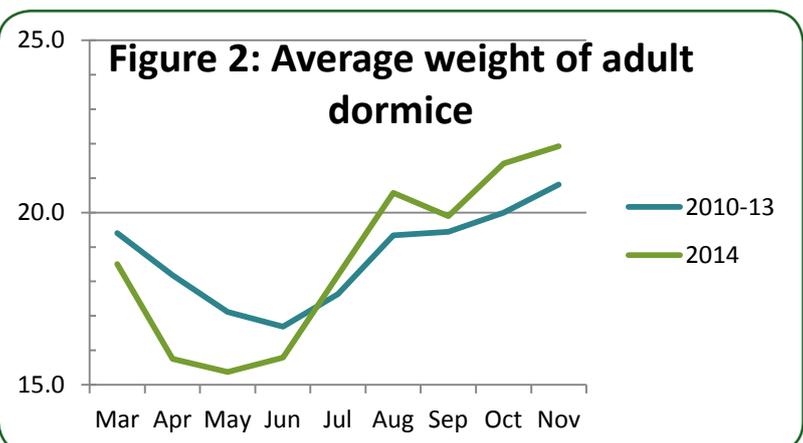
Earliest young

The earliest young reported were pinkies found in May (in both 2010 and 2011). In 2014 dormice seem to have been rather slower off the mark, with the first young (both pinkies and greys) not found until July.

Notable notes

Some intriguing stories come from the notes people add to their records. A couple that stood out for me were:

- A weasel was found in a dormouse box at Juniper Hill in October 2012
- A pygmy shrew built a nest on top of a dormouse skeleton (presumably the dormouse was dead before the shrew started building its nest). Nice.



Save the date: National Dormouse Conference

The People's Trust for Endangered Species will be holding a National Dormouse Conference on 9th-10th September 2016 at Reading University. Book your time off work now! More details will follow in the next issue of this newsletter, but if you're impatient you can keep an eye on the [conferences page of the PTES website](#).

Good news from Gatwick

Congratulations to our neighbours at Gatwick Airport (which straddles the Surrey-Sussex border). After three years of box checks they finally found their first (and second) dormouse! You'd be surprised what creatures lurk just a few metres from the runway... You can read more about the wild side of the airport on the [Biodiversity Gatwick blog](#).

Fat dormice

This autumn has really seen a bumper crop of chubby dormice, including a 34.5g Polesden Lacey giant. Other sites have been getting close to this, with several dormice well over the 30g mark. It must have been a fruitful autumn. Hopefully all the extra weight will help them get through the winter.



34.5g dormouse, Polesden Lacey (photo by Chris South)

And finally...

As ever, we'd love to hear what you think of the SDG newsletter, 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

info@surreydormousegroup.org.uk 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.uk



Dormouse found at the Roughs (photo by Hannah Wilson)



Chubby dormouse (photo by Jess Smith)