



Newsletter

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

It seems like 2016 has got off to a flying start for Surrey Dormouse Group. We've visited the British Wildlife Centre and had a talk from renowned dormouseologist (if that's the word) Pat Morris. We've set up a new site on Box Hill. Box checks in March turned up an unusually high number of dormice for the time of year, perhaps because of the weird winter weather.

This issue of the newsletter has a particular focus on managing habitat for dormice, with reports from two of the group's sites: St Cross in Haslemere, and Chilworth.

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Changes planned at Newlands Corner - the story so far

Kathryn Killner

Most of you will be familiar with Newlands Corner, not only as a meeting place for some of our box checks but also as a local beauty spot, enjoyed by a wide range of people.

Newlands Corner is owned by the Albury Estate and managed by Surrey Wildlife Trust on behalf of Surrey County Council. The plan is to make the countryside self-financing by 2021, and to achieve this, £400k has been approved to fund Phase 1 for this year (detailed below), with additional funding to be agreed for Phase 2. In addition to this, SWT is keen to attract people out into the countryside who do not currently visit and believe the play structures especially will encourage more people to visit Newlands Corner and to explore the woodlands.

Phase 1

- Refurbish the toilets and install new benches around the site
- Introduce a covered seating area
- Upgrade the all-access trail for people with disabilities and for pushchairs
- Introduce a range of parking charges, with the money received being used to cover the cost of managing the whole SCC countryside estate
- Introduce a play trail across 2 acres of the woodland, including the building of artificial play structures

- A road safety scheme to slow down traffic on the approach roads, being funded by the Guildford Local Committee

Phase 2

- Replace the existing café with a new café building, visitor centre and 'shopping opportunity', built on part of the current car park, with the first set of plans showing this building as blocking the view
- Extend the car park and introduce a coach park

There has been considerable public opposition to the proposals, including a petition signed by nearly 11,000 people. It is understood that Phase 2 has been taken off the agenda for the moment.

The Surrey Dormouse Group committee has expressed concerns around the parking charges and their potential impact on our members, as well as any possible disturbance to the dormice in the area.

The Save Newlands Corner campaign group believes that the area should be left as a natural space for all to enjoy, free from any more development, except to maintain the existing toilets, trails and buildings, and are against any parking charges. Members of the campaign group have staged protests at Newlands Corner itself, attended SCC Cabinet meetings to query many of the facts and figures behind the proposals, and are continuing to raise public awareness. They have proposed setting up a 'Friends of Newlands Corner' charitable trust to take over from SCC & SWT, to maintain the current natural environment at minimal cost and remove the need for parking charges.

For details of the proposed play structures
www.davieswhite.co.uk/newlandscorner

For more information on the Save Newlands Corner campaign www.savenewlandscorner.com

For more information from SWT
www.surreywildlifetrust.org/reserves/changes-newlands-corner

St. Cross: Adventures in managing a private woodland

Gareth Matthes and Dave Williams report on managing a private woodland for dormice in leafy Haslemere

In 2003 Dave Williams and Gareth Matthes visited a concerned lady whose cat had brought a dormouse into a property off Bunch Lane, Haslemere. Dave realised that the privately owned wood to the rear of the property was a likely candidate to support Dormice and by 2004 we had 50 boxes installed in the wood and registered under the National Dormouse Monitoring Programme. At about 1.3ha in area, the wood supported stored sweet chestnut coppice. This had not been managed for 20+ years, although the wood still maintained younger more open dense bramble areas created following damage during the 1987 to 1990 storms. This small wood is within a larger 20ha woodland complex east of Bunch Lane that includes ancient wet alder woodland and further north across Bunch Lane links to several km squares of private and National Trust woodland.

A rough estimate of minimum pre-breeding density can be made by using the number of dormice found in boxes in May divided by the area (in ha) covered by the nest box scheme. In May 2006 four dormice were found in boxes (density of 3 animals per ha), with an autumn peak count of 15 dormice (about 11 dormice per ha). During this time Bunch Lane population density was in the top 25% of the 120 NDMP sites. However, peak counts dropped to eight dormice in 2009 and has continued to fall slowly with the 2014 and 2015 peak counts of 3 dormice.

The woodland had become easier to monitor with brambles no longer impeding access to boxes and an understorey of birch was developing beneath the ever maturing sweet-chestnuts. This change in woodland

structure prompted Dave and Gareth, with permission from the owner, to start managing the wood and open up small 200 to 400m² compartments each year and planting up with hazel. Glades created in 2010 are now starting to provide scrubby habitat for dormice.

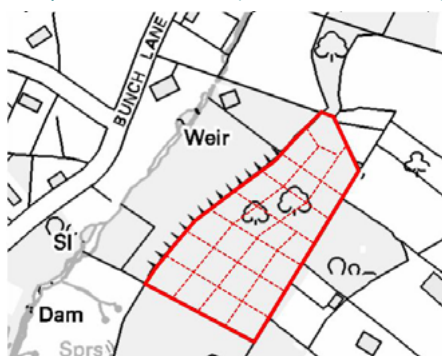


Glades now providing scrubby habitat (photo courtesy of Dave Williams)

However, it became increasingly obvious that we needed to create more compartments! It is recommended that dormice woods are coppiced on a 15-20 year cycle. A 1.3ha wood could be split into about 26 compartments each covering about 400 to 600m² as illustrated on the map below, with one to two compartments managed each year (i.e. 17-18 year coppice cycle). By creating a 20 to 25sqm compartment this allows light to penetrate beneath mature coppice stools.

In 2013 help came in the form of the Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust volunteers, a 15-20 strong

St. Cross 1.3ha in area, with 26 Wood Compartments armed (each 400 to 600m²)



highly motivated conservation group who assisted with coppicing and creating compartments twice each year. For the ARCT this represents an away fixture, where rather than managing a heathland for reptiles they helped SDG maintain the wood for Dormice as well as creating glades for reptiles, with grass snake having been observed at St. Cross. In 2014 the ARCT team cleared a glade on St. Cross, which they then planted-up with hazel in 2015 (see Photo 2), with a further glade cleared in Autumn 2015, planted up by Haslemere Scouts (see Photo 3) in early 2016.



Photo 2 (courtesy of Dave Williams)



Photo 3 (courtesy of Dave Williams)

If anyone is interested in attending Robin Bassett's tasks with the Tuesday team of volunteers, you can contact Robin as follows: a: The Witley Centre, Witley, Godalming, Surrey, GU8 5QA t: 01428 681059 Robin.Bassett@arc-trust.org www.arc-trust.org



Chilworth: Habitat work undertaken in February 2016

Phil Truluck & Julie Mottishaw update us on what's been happening at Chilworth

Chilworth, owned by Guildford Borough Council, is an interesting site. It shares the woodland with the remains of the Gunpowder Mills, built over 300 years ago, and 30 boxes are placed around mill features such as deep excavations and mounds.

Regular monitoring started in 2009. Dormice numbers were good from the start, annual totals ranged from 13 to 32 – until 2014 when only 6 were seen all year. What had caused this steep decline? Was it the damage after the gales of 2013? Was it changes of land use nearby? Was it due to the increase in canopy cover?

In 2015 Phil Truluck, from GBC, looked at the decline and put the site forward for some sensitive habitat management.

A nut hunt in November 2015 revealed that the existing box check area appeared to be the only part of the site favoured by dormice, so it seemed logical to start here to try and make a difference.

From visits to the site over the years it was clear that the canopy was beginning to close and overshadow the box check area. There also seemed to be two distinct areas of established dormouse habitat separated by an area that had few hazel stools, little ground flora and dense holly.

Phil produced a contract for habitat management, with the following objectives: to combine the separated areas to make a greater whole, to promote existing hazels that were being suppressed by other vegetation, and to increase light levels to improve the understorey and ground flora.

The contractor selected had experience of delivering tree works on ecologically sensitive sites. The contract manager attended dormouse ecology training before starting the work, therefore he understood the need to make delicate changes to the habitat.

Areas of dense holly were pruned back from the suppressed hazels (a process known as 'haloing'), and some of these hazels were re-coppiced. Cut holly branches were used to make 'dead hedges' to protect the newly exposed hazels from deer, and to add to the diversity of ground cover. Selective trees were pruned or felled and the logs stacked as habitat piles.



Dead hedge to protect young hazel (photo by Rob Grist)

With this work complete, hazel now appears to be a more dominant component of the area and light levels have increased. The change is noticeable, but relatively subtle, which was the aim of this stage of a long-term project.

This summer Phil is using the site to show others the work, and we will develop a plan for annual habitat maintenance to continue coppicing and keeping the holly in check. And we'll watch the annual dormice numbers with interest!



The team and their handiwork (photo by Julie Mottishaw)

SDG at the British Wildlife Centre

Jo Balch and Kathryn Killner report on our first group meeting and visit to the BWC

On the 23rd Jan 2016 SDG held its first ever group meeting at the British Wildlife Centre (BWC) in Lingfield. There were over 30 attendees on the day which was a great turn out for our first official group meeting.

The BWC was chosen as the venue, not only because it plays a vital role in the UK's captive dormouse breeding programme, but also because with over 40 different native species we thought it would be an ideal day out for group members.

The day was a mixture of formal and informal activities. We started by listening to the keeper talk on the rather cheeky and inquisitive red squirrels that were not at all shy in getting up close and personal, before heading off to start the meeting itself.

The formal meeting was opened by our Chairman, Dave Williams, with an update of the group's activities over the past year, our various sites and the results from these, as well as news of new sites being set up for this year. Julie then followed this with an overview of our finances and where membership numbers currently stood. We now have over 90 paid subscribers plus an additional 40+ members on Facebook!

We were then treated to an interesting talk by the head keeper, Matt Binstead, about the dormouse captive breeding programme, in which the centre plays a key role in ensuring genetic diversity in both captive and released populations. We learnt how an incredible amount of work goes into this programme, not just at the BWC but at similar establishments around the country. It's very reassuring to know there are such dedicated people out there doing their bit to ensure the survival of the hazel dormouse!

Following a Q&A session which allowed members to voice their views, ideas and opinions on the group, we had a leisurely afternoon to wander at our own pace around the centre, listening to the wonderful keeper talks on the many different species kept there. Despite the cold, a thoroughly enjoyable day was had by all.

Thanks very much to the BWC for having us!



Red squirrel (photo by Marilyn Holmested)



Eagle owl (photo by Marilyn Holmested)



Otter (photo by Marilyn Holmested)

Pat Morris visits SDG

Dave Williams reports on Pat's talk



Pat Morris with his SDG bag (photo by Jo Balch)

We had a special treat in March when we were lucky enough to have a talk from none other than Dr Pat Morris, considered one of the foremost authorities on dormice in Britain. Pat told us about how he visited his friend Doug Woods in Somerset, where Doug had found dormice in bird boxes. This led to the famous dormouse box with the hole in the back against the tree, to give easier access for dormice and make it more difficult for birds. Pat worked at Royal Holloway College with Dr Paul Bright, studying and monitoring dormice in boxes, and discovered so much about the ecology of dormice. This work led to today's National Dormouse Monitoring Programme. Despite all of the research that has taken place on dormice Pat explained that we still had a lot to learn. Pat is also an expert on Glis Glis or Edible dormouse; he told of the history of their arrival into England from France. Pat is involved in the monitoring of the colony in Buckinghamshire. Pat had bought copies of his excellent book on dormice, and sold and signed them all. We gave Pat one of our shopping bags with a thank you present inside. It was a privilege to hear Pat and also very interesting, we all learnt so much that evening.

The stats from 2015

Annabelle South looks at last year's numbers

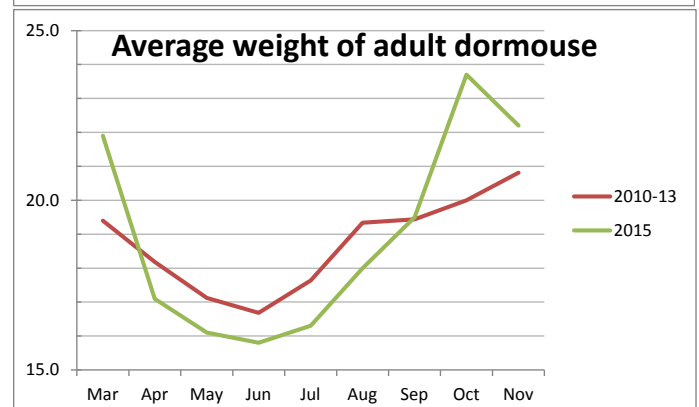
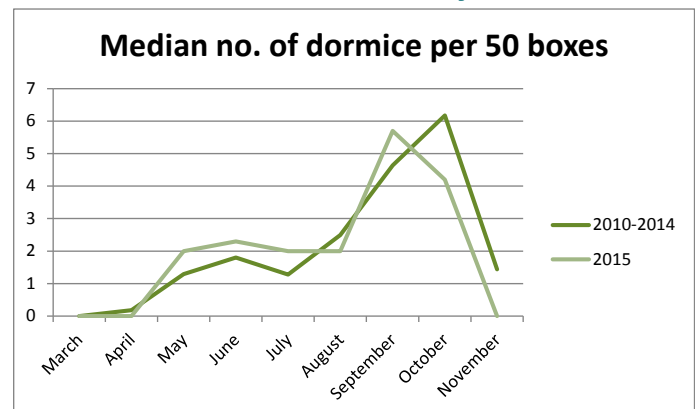
7631 boxes checked

>500 dormice found

45 visits without any dormice

2 median number of dormice per 50 boxes

32 highest number of dormice per 50 boxes



News from PTES

National Dormouse Conference

Tickets for the National Dormouse Conference in September are now available online. Information about the event will continue to be updated on this page www.ptes.org/NDC and there is a button there that will take you to the booking page.

Dormouse reintroduction

The 27th dormouse reintroduction will take place in June at a site in North Yorkshire. PTES are hoping to undertake a landscape project in the area to link this new site to an earlier reintroduction site in the county.

Dormouse ecology training

We are holding a one day SDG Dormouse Ecology course on Saturday 20 August 2016. Attendance at a Dormouse Ecology course is required by Natural England for anyone applying for a dormouse handling licence. The charge to SDG members is £45, for non-members it is £50. It's a full day with classroom work (in Guildford) in the morning, followed by a box check in the afternoon, please bring your own lunch. It does not include hands-on dormouse handling, but hopefully should include seeing dormice during the box check. If you wish to join us please email:

info@surreydormousegroup.org.uk

SDG events

We've got a busy year ahead of us, with SDG planning stands at several events to raise awareness of dormice and their conservation. If you're going to be at any of them, do say hello. And if you'd like to get involved with helping at any of these events, please email:

info@surreydormousegroup.org.uk

Event	Date	Times	Location
Wildlife Aid Open Day	19 June	TBC	Leatherhead
Roar and Explore	25 June	5pm-dusk	Chessington World of Adventures
Gatton Country Fair	3 July	12-5pm	Gatton Park, Reigate
Rustic Sunday	31 July	TBC	Tilford Rural Life Centre
Woking Canal Festival	6 Aug	TBC	Woking
Winkworth Community Day	4 Sept	11am-4pm	Winkworth Arboretum
Wey River Festival	24 Sept	TBC	Dapdune Wharf, Guildford

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



Torpid dormouse (photo by Annabelle South)

Any old scrap?

If you have any scrap 2.5mm twin & earth power cable that you could donate to the group, it would be gratefully received - we can take the wire out and use it to hold up the dormouse boxes. Just drop a line to info@surreydormousegroup.org.uk And if you're having any electrical work done on your house, ask the electrician if they have any they'd like to donate (maybe show them a picture of a dormouse - who can resist!)

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 photos for the next issue, 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. And sorry for keeping you waiting until the last page before the first picture of a dormouse - we promise we'll put more in the next issue!