



Wyre Forest Study Group

Dormice and Conifers in Wyre Forest 2007 Update

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Last year I wrote of the strange weather of 2006 and how it may have affected the Dormice. It was a cold, wet spring and a long hot summer. What a contrast 2007 was, a hot dry spring and a cool VERY wet summer. So how did the Dormice fare in such diverse weather conditions?

Well, it was a great start. For the first time ever we surveyed the research boxes in April, due to the favourable weather conditions and sure enough found 3 Dormice. In May we found 20 Dormice, including a box with 5 newborn young in. This is extremely early for Dormice and they were found without the mother in attendance. As this was the earliest I had ever seen youngsters I decided to record it with photo. As luck would have it, I did not have the camera with me. I therefore left the box undisturbed and returned about 30 minutes later. To my amazement when I opened the lid of the box, just 1 baby remained in the small, open nest! The mother must have been close by and realised that her young were in "peril" and returned to move them to safety. I have since found out that quite a few Dormice recorders across the country found litters of young in May this year, which reflects the early, hot weather. The problem is – how many survived the following deluge? Finding 20 animals in May was also encouraging, the best since 1998. June wasn't bad either, the trend continuing with the best since 2002. However it was downhill from then onwards. (Fig 1) The heavens opened in June and July and the Dormice seemed to disappear with the rain. After last years encouraging signs with more juveniles found it was disappointing to find just 10 – especially as 5 of them were early born!

- 2003 - 26 Juveniles
- 2004 - 34 Juveniles
- 2005 - 11 Juveniles
- 2006 - 22 Juveniles
- 2007 - 10 Juveniles

The total numbers of Dormice found in the research area has been very similar over the last 5 years which in itself is encouraging. However there seems to be a trend appearing that animals disappear towards the end of the season, when we would normally expect to find the most animals, especially juveniles moving within their home range. Is this

Fig 2

Treatment No	No of Dormice chipped in 2004	No of Dormice chipped in 2005	No of Dormice chipped in 2006	No of Dormice chipped in 2007
1	4	0	3	1
2	7	4	12	5
3	13	3	9	4
4	8	3	0	0
Sausage	3	0	0	1
New plantation	Not surveyed	3	1	0
Total	32	13	25	11

just coincidence, or are the animals finding somewhere more cosy and less disturbed to rest during the day?

A further 11 animals were found in the research area that were big enough to microchip. (Fig. 2)

17 new boxes were erected within the research area in July 2007. These were wired to posts in the small "mini" clearfells within treatments 1 & 2. It was felt that some of these areas were now "ready" for Dormice. They were then inspected monthly with the others. It should not have been a surprise but Liz Nether (formally Appleton) checked one of these in October and got the shock of her life when a cute little Dormouse bit her finger and did a bunk! (Photo 1)

A total of 64 animals were found in the research area in 2007, which is the same number as last year. (Fig. 3) However due to micro-chipping we know that there were at least 25 individual adult Dormice in this area and 10 young. Dormice live in very low densities, with a home range of about 1Ha. The research area is 17Ha, therefore allowing for overlaps of these ranges the numbers seem to be okay. All four treatment methods have had animals survive the operations or they have moved back in. It therefore seems that we have been successful in maintaining the population in the important first few years after large scale forestry operations.

6 animals have now been followed for a number of years. (Fig. 4) We seem to have lost our 2 oldest animals that were chipped in 2003 and last seen in May and June 2006. However, having micro-chipped for 6 years

Fig 1

	2003		2004		2005		2006		2007	
	Dormice	Nests	Dormice	Nests	Dormice	Nests	Dormice	Nests	Dormice	Nests
April									3	0
May	5	1	6	2	12	2	15	3	20	3
June	14	0	11	0	14	2	11	8	16	0
July	5	0	19	0	17	5	6	4	8	2
August	9	1	13	1	8	0	4	1	7	4
September	19	4	19	0	8	4	10	3	8	0
October	16	0	28	9	4	16	18	8	2	0
Totals	68	6	96	12	63	29	64	27	64	9



some interesting facts are starting to appear. After chipping, high proportions are not found again (43%). It is not known what happens to these animals. Some will disperse to other areas, but you would expect many of them to remain in the same vicinity at least. One animal in particular has perhaps given some clues. Chip No. 297974 was first found in October 2004 as an adult. He was seen the following year in May and July but was not found again until September 2007. He therefore disappeared off the radar for over 18 months. He has been found just 4 times in 3 years. Where has he been in these missing months? I like to think that now we have opened up the canopy there is a lot more vegetation and available habitat, not just to feed in, but also to find natural, secure nesting sites. Maybe they just don't need the boxes as much as they did when it was a solid conifer plantation.

Reminder of treatment methods:

Treatment 1

Hand cut with chainsaws and forwarder extraction - autumn) Small areas of conifers were felled (approx 20mx20m) to create small glades within the crop. The idea being that these would regenerate naturally in years to come and would provide viable habitat for Dormice by the time of the next operations in 5 years.

Treatment 2

(Harvester operation with forwarder extraction – winter) method as treatment 1.

Treatment 3

(Harvester operation with forwarder extraction - winter) Normal thinning operation removing 30-35% according to standard thinning tables.

Treatment 4

(Harvester operation with forwarder extraction - autumn). Two larger areas of conifers were felled (approx 0.3 Ha). This replicates the normal coppice size in the broadleaf scrub habitat, which Dormice favour. Again this should regenerate naturally in years to come and would provide viable habitat for Dormice by the time of the next operations in 5 years.

These treatments will be repeated in the autumn / winter of 2009/10.

Other Ribbesford 2007 records:

The above figures are for the research area of Ribbesford. However this does not tell the whole story. There are now 557 boxes in the whole woodland: 342 in the research area and a further 215 in the surrounding woodland. 300 of these boxes have been in Ribbesford for over 11 years now. If we just look at these old boxes it gives a better idea of the population trends. 2007 seemed to be an "okay" year! Charts 1 and 2 show the number of Dormice found in October and throughout the year respectively. 2007 has been the second worst year yet. In fact the last three years have been the worst over the last 11 years of recording. It was again the October numbers which were the most disappointing and only 5 juveniles were found in all boxes. There were 7 nests found in boxes which animals were not present. This at least means there are other Dormice in the area! The biggest surprise of the year was finding a Dormouse nest in a box adjacent to the down hill mountain bike course in Ribbesford! (Photo 2) The area used to have Dormice, however once the course

Fig 3

Treatment No	Dormice found 2005	Recaptures	Dormice found 2006	Recaptures	Dormice found 2007	Recaptures
1	4	1	4	1	9	2
2	23	4	28	9	20	7
3	26	5	28	10	21	12
4	6	1	2	2	2	1
Sausage	0	0	0	0	5	0
New Plantation	4	*	2	1	7	0
Total	63	11	64	23	64	22

Fig 4

Date micro-chipped	Age when micro-chipped	Number of boxes used	Number of recaptures	Approximate age in 2007
Sep-04	Mat	5	5	4
Oct-04	Mat	3	3	4
Sep-04	Juv	5	9	3
Oct-04	Juv	4	7	3
May-06	Mat	5	5	2
Oct-06	Mat	1	3	2

was “built” they “seemed” to disappear. The box would have been disturbed often – especially at weekends!

Wyre Forest Records:

Although there are still about 60 Dormice boxes on Forestry Commission land in the mainblock of the Wyre Forest, they are no longer inspected each month. The reason is simple – no signs of Dormice have been found since 2002! The boxes are inspected twice a year, in late spring to ensure they are clean and free of used bird nests and in the autumn to see if any Dormice nests have been built during the year. Alas, no signs have been found.

However, it is not all doom and gloom. On inspecting Pied Flycatcher nest boxes between the railwayline and Dowles Brook Andy Spencer found a torpid Dormouse in May. It had made a tight, cosy nest, but unfortunately it was never at home when I checked the box! Fortunately though one of our rangers from Ludlow, Alan Reid, was

with him at the time and he happens to hold a Dormouse licence and could confirm the sitting.

Also, on the 30th April 2007, during a search for plants along the railwayline east of Lodge Hill, Paul Reade came across an empty Dormouse nest in the bramble.

Looking through records of Dormice for the Wyre Forest, most of them tend to be along the railwayline / Dowles valley. There doesn't seem to be a time when they were common, just odd references to animals or nests found. The only population that is recorded regularly is towards the western end of Dowles Brook, by David and Brenda Rea. They have been finding them in Pied Flycatcher nest boxes since 2001 and in purpose-built Dormice boxes since 2005. Dormice have been recorded at this site since 1987 (Helen Mackaness personal notes). It is encouraging to know that although they may never be found throughout Wyre, they manage to survive in small numbers along this important corridor.



Photo 2

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CHART 1 - OCTOBER OCCUPANCY BY DORMICE 1996 - 2007

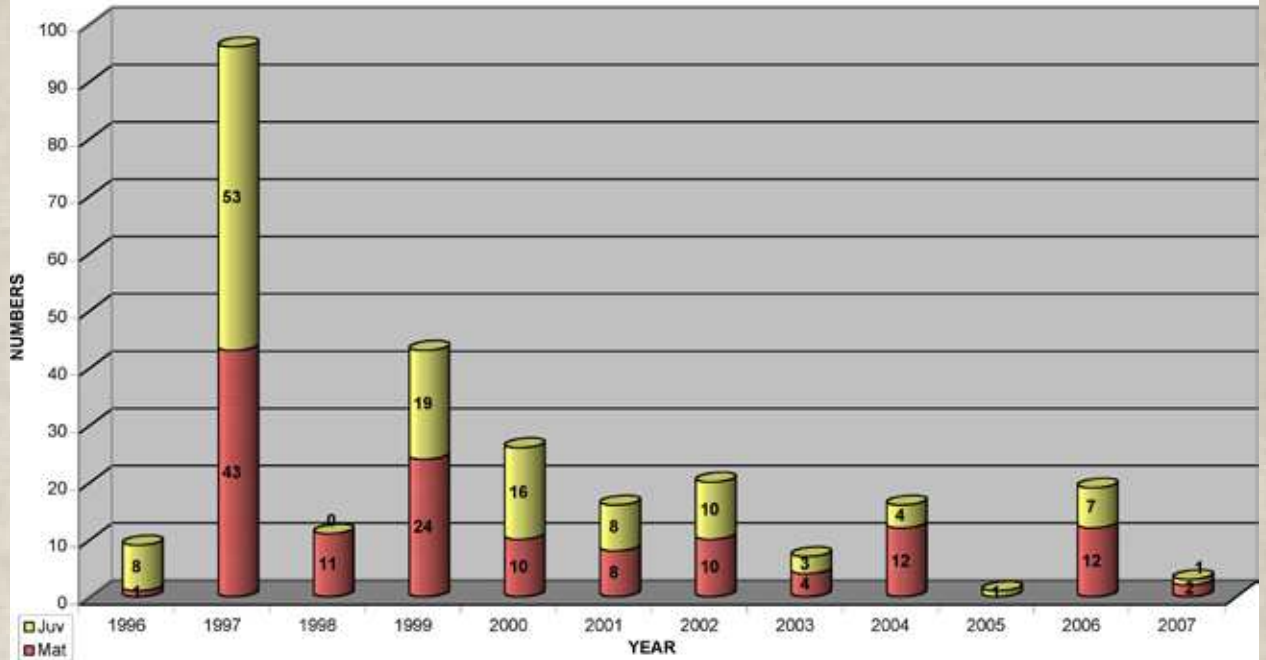


CHART 2 - TOTAL NUMBER OF DORMICE FOUND IN BOXES 1996 - 2007

