Dormice and Conifers in Wyre 2012

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2012 was a peculiar year! After the cold dry winter and warm dry spring it went downhill fast. However, I was optimistic in the early months of inspections as the weather conditions during March and April should have seen Dormice active and feeding well. Unfortunately my optimism was misplaced as the first inspections in May revealed just 4 Dormice. This is the poorest start to the season so far and didn't get much better, peaking at 9 in September. (See Fig. 1)

Last year seemed to be a poor breeding year, with just 5 juveniles found, so at least finding 7 in 2012 was an improvement! (See Fig. 2) 2 more of the juveniles chipped in 2010 were found, which was a bonus as they were not recorded in 2011. This shows they must have been out there somewhere, just not in the boxes when we looked in them. However, this is not a surprise as we only look in the boxes 6 times a year! Only 12 fresh nests were found in boxes that weren't occupied. This suggests that the number of animals using the boxes was low as finding a fresh nest is confirmation that Dormice are using them.

The total number of Dormice found in the research area was also poor, finding 32 half the average of 64.1 over the last 10 years. A further 16 animals were found in the research area that were big enough to microchip - 9 adults and 7 juveniles. (See Fig. 3) This was an improvement on last year, although only one breeding nest with 5 young was found. The other two juveniles were older animals found later in the year, dispersing from their mother's home range.

Although 32 animals were found in the research area and adjacent woodland in 2012, we know from micro-chipping that some of these were found on multiple occasions. From this information we know there were at least 22 different Dormice in the area. This figure is worked out from the individuals chipped during the year or recaptured from previous years. It includes juveniles which were big enough to chip, but not those which were too small to chip, as they may have been found again later in the year and chipped, therefore duplicating results. This again is the equal poorest figure since the start of the project. (See fig. 4)

Just 6 adult animals were recaptured from previous years, which is the worst on record. (See Fig. 5) Of the managed area within the research area, treatment 4 is the only area that seems to have good numbers and has improved from previous years. They have been found in both the 0.3Ha

	2003		2004		2005		2006		2007	
	Dormice	Fresh Nests	Dormice	Fresh Nests	Dormice	Fresh Nests	Dormice	Fresh Nests	Dormice	Fresh 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

	2008		2009		2010		2011		2012	
	Dormice	Fresh Nests	Dormice	Fresh Nests	Dormice	Fresh Nests	Dormice	Fresh Nests	Dormice	Fresh Nests
April										
May	5	2	10	1	7	2	16	0	4	2
June	9	11	9	1	11	6	4	0	6	0
July	11	1	4	5	9	8	5	9	5	3
August	16	8	8	0	28	7	5	1	4	3
September	8	6	8	3	20	8	8	2	9	2
October	18	2	1	1	30	6	4	7	4	2
Totals	67	30	40	11	105	37	42	19	32	12

Fig. 1

Fig. 2

Year	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Juveniles	26	34	11	22	10	34	6	35	5	7

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	No of Dormice chipped in 2008	No of Dormice chipped in 2009	No of Dormice chipped in 2010	No of Dormice chipped in 2011	No of Dormice chipped in 2012
1	4	0	3	1	0	2	8	0	1
2	7	4	12	5	11	2	2	4	0
3	13	3	9	4	2	3	4	2	2
4	8	3	0	0	2	2	4	3	7
Sausage	3	0	0	1	2	0	1	1	2
New plantation	Not surveyed	3	1	0	4	1	19	3	4
Unthinned area	0	0	0	0	3	1	1	0	0
Total	**35**	**13**	**25**	**11**	**24**	**11**	**39**	**13**	**16**

Fig. 3

Treatment No	No of individual Dormice found 2004	No of individual Dormice found 2005	No of individual Dormice found 2006	No of individual Dormice found 2007	No of individual Dormice found 2008	No of individual Dormice found 2009	No of individual Dormice found 2010	No of individual Dormice found 2011	No of individual Dormice found 2012
1	4	1	3	4	3	3	9	4	1
2	9	9	14	11	13	3	5	9	1
3	16	10	13	9	4	11	5	0	3
4	9	4	3	1	4	2	6	3	11
Sausage	3	0	2	1	2	0	2	2	1
New plantation	Not surveyed	3	1	0	4	1	26	7	4
Unthinned area	0	0	1	2	3	2	2	1	1
Total	**41**	**27**	**37**	**28**	**33**	**22**	**55**	**26**	**22**

Fig. 4

coupes of conifer clearfell and in the remaining area of conifer which has not been disturbed. The areas of clearfell are now thick with bramble, heather and broadleaf regeneration and seem to have created the perfect "tangle" habitat for Dormice to live and feed safely. Area 2 has always seen good numbers in but just 1 individual was found in 2012. (See reminder of Treatment methods below) The area known as 'New Plantation', (12 year old Corsican Pine and larch) is again well down on last years figures.

We have now been micro-chipping for 10 years and have therefore followed some individuals for a number of years. As just six animals were recaptured from previous years, it was no surprise that we had few of any age. Four of them were 2 years old, chipped in 2010. (See Fig. 6) The table below shows the variants in finding individual animals as some seem to use the boxes more than others.

Reminder of treatment methods and areas:

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. (This has now be carried out using machinery and combined with Treatment 2)

Treatment 2 - (Harvester operation with forwarder extraction – autumn / winter) method as treatment 1.

Treatment 3 - (Harvester operation with forwarder extraction - autumn / winter). Normal thinning. Operation removing 30-35% according to standard thinning tables.

Treatment 4 - (Harvester operation with forwarder extraction - autumn / winter). 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.

Sausage: Area of failed Corsican Pine which has a good structure, with Oak, Birch, Bramble. So named as it resembles a sausage shape on the map!

Treatment No	Dormice found 2005	Re captures from previous years	Dormice found 2006	Re captures from previous years	Dormice found 2007	Re captures from previous years	Dormice found 2008	Re captures from previous years
1	4	1	4	1	9	2	1	1
2	23	4	28	9	20	7	36	6
3	26	5	28	10	21	12	11	3
4	6	1	2	2	2	1	4	2
Sausage	0	0	0	0	5	0	10	0
New Plantation	4	*	2	1	7	0	5	1
Unthinned area	0	0	1	0	2	0	3	0
Total	**63**	**11**	**65**	**23**	**66**	**22**	**70**	**13**

Treatment No	Dormice found 2009	Re captures from previous years	Dormice found 2010	Re captures from previous years	Dormice found 2011	Re captures from previous years	Dormice found 2012	Re captures from previous years
1	3	0	19	1	7	3	1	0
2	12	3	13	3	14	2	2	0
3	17	7	8	1	0	0	3	2
4	5	1	11	2	3	0	18	3
Sausage	0	0	2	1	6	2	3	0
New Plantation	1	0	50	7	10	5	4	0
Unthinned area	2	1	2	1	2	1	1	1
Total	**40**	**12**	**105**	**16**	**42**	**13**	**32**	**6**

Fig. 5 # Not surveyed prior to 2005.

Micro-Chip number	Date micro-chipped	Age when micro-chipped	Sex	Number of boxes used	Number of recaptures	Approximate age in 2012
337560	Oct-10	Juv	Male	3	2	2
340302	Sep-10	Juv	Female	5	7	2
447000	Oct-10	Juv	Male	1	3	2
518563	Oct-10	Juv	Male	3	3	2

Fig. 6

New Plantation: Area planted with Corsican Pine and European Larch in 2000.

Unthinned area: Area adjacent to research site, on other side of forest track. 15 boxes erected in 1993 and a further 20 in 2005.

Conclusion

I think it is impossible to draw any conclusions from the monitoring of 2012. It was an awful summer and most areas of the country had poor results from box inspections. This is the advantage of long term monitoring as we know each year is different with so many variables we have no control over or, in some cases, knowledge of. If we look at the long term trends, the numbers have always fluctuated, for whatever reasons. The important fact is that the Dormice are still there after all our forest operations, which is our main aim. The habitat, food sources and structure of the woodland is still improving. The rest is up to them!

I would like to thank Roger Trout, for his continued effort and support in monitoring and microchipping.

I have been fortunate again this year to have had plenty of other willing helpers, walking the many rows of boxes. For the last 3 years we have been assisted by Andy Bucklitch, who is so keen he is now looking for Dormice throughout the counties of Worcestershire and Warwickshire! Camille Newton from the Warwickshire Dormouse group came along to all our box checks

again and has successfully gained her Dormouse handling licence. Liz Nether, who has been helping for the last 7 years, continues to help when work and life commitments allow!

I would like to thank all of the above and others who have helped, for their sterling efforts in assisting with such a valuable project – without them it would be extremely difficult to maintain this level of monitoring, which will hopefully continue for the foreseeable future.

Other Ribbesford records

The above figures are for the research area of Ribbesford. However there are a further 215 boxes in the surrounding woodland. These boxes have been in Ribbesford for over 17 years now and I have checked them monthly for most of this period. Due to work constraints and the fact I was recording very few animals in these old boxes outside the research area, I have only checked them in June and October since 2010. Just one nest was found in these boxes in 2012, which was hardly a surprise considering the poor weather and the fact that many of the boxes are in bad condition and require replacing. I have decided not to replace these boxes and will be concentrating on finding Dormice in other areas of the Wyre Forest. I believe that the habitat has changed so much where these old boxes are that the Dormice are no longer using the boxes at chest height, but are hopefully thriving well higher up in the canopy, out of my reach!

Wyre Forest Records

No evidence of Dormice were found in two of the established box schemes in the mainblock of Wyre Forest (Parkhouse and Wimperhill). However, a mature female was found at the site at Button Oak in October, which was a very pleasant surprise. These boxes are in an plantation of 14 year old Corsican Pine where a nest was uncovered in March 2008. 15 boxes were put up later that year and two juveniles were recorded in October 2010. They appear to be in low numbers, but more boxes will be erected in 2013 to widen the search. Dormice continue to be recorded in a garden at Button Oak. A number of animals were observed feeding on the peanuts provided by the house owner.

The only established site in Wyre Forest itself is towards the western end of Dowles Brook, recorded by David and Brenda Rea. 20 Dormice boxes are now in this area. These are checked twice a year in June & October. No Dormice were found in 2012, however 1 nest recently used was found, proving at least they are still there somewhere!

10 boxes were erected in June 2012 on Longdon Orchard after a nest was found in heather, adjacent to 10 year old Scots Pine. No evidence has so far been found, but it is very early days and I remain optimistic for 2013!

Ribbesford Woods, 2 May 2011 Rosemary Winnall