Wyre Forest Study Group

Dormice and Conifers in Wyre Forest – 2025 UPDATE

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Dormouse. Phil Rudlin

It has now been 31 years since Dormice were confirmed to be present in Ribbesford Wood, 26 years of researching the best method of reverting conifer plantations back to native broadleaves and 22 years of comparable data, monitoring 380 nestboxes between May and October since 2004.

After a poor breeding season in 2024 it was hoped that Dormouse numbers in Ribbesford would bounce back or at least show some signs of recovery. During our first inspections of the boxes in May 2025 only four animals were found, which was disappointing. It was not the worst start to the season as just two animals were recorded in 2021 but, unlike 2021 the remaining months were not much better, peaking in August with seven, but only due to one box with a mother and six very young babies (Table 1). Usually, numbers peak in late Summer and Autumn when young Dormice are active and dispersing. Unfortunately, this did not occur this year although one other litter was found with three young in a box and a further three juveniles recorded which would have breed in a natural nest rather than in a box. This was certainly better than last year, when only four juveniles were found, but still well below the average of 26.7 (Table 2).

Over the six inspections, 25 animals were found which is the same number as last year and the equal lowest over the past 22 years and again well below the average of 78.5.

Eighteen fresh nests were found in boxes that were not occupied during the survey season. It is not unusual to find empty nests as they have up to five different nests within their home range and we only check them six times a times year. However, it is always interesting to know they are present. Thirteen animals were big enough to micro-chip - seven adults and six juveniles (Table 3). The adults were either yearlings, born the year before, or possibly older. However, it is impossible to age without permanent marking, such as micro-chipping.

Although 25 animals were found, we know from micro-chipping that some of these were found on multiple occasions. By identifying individuals, we know there were at least 14 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 might be found again later in the year and chipped, therefore duplicating results. This is the lowest number since 2004 and well below the average of 36.5 (Table 4).

Just one animal was recaptured from the previous year (Table 5). It has been interesting to see the trend over the last 22 years. Figure 1 shows the number of captures each year and some significant variations, whereas the actual individuals confirmed is generally more constant. This is more accurate and therefore useful information. It shows the importance of micro-chipping, which is the only way of following animals with any degree of certainty over a long period of time.

We have now been micro-chipping for 24 years (first animal chipped in July 2002) and have therefore followed some individuals for several years. Unfortunately, this year just one animal was recaptured, which had been microchipped in October 2024 as a juvenile. Interestingly though

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Table 1. Number of Dormice and Fresh Nests recorded in Ribbesford Woods Research Area, 2004 - 2025.

	2004		2005		2006		2007		2008		2009	
	Dormice	Fresh Nests	Dormice	Fresh Nests	Dormice	Fresh Nests	Dormice	Fresh Nests	Dormice	Fresh Nests	Dormice	Fresh Nests
April							3	0				
May	6	2	12	2	15	3	20	3	5	2	10	1
June	11	0	14	2	11	8	16	0	9	11	9	1
July	19	0	17	5	6	4	8	2	11	1	4	5
August	13	1	8	0	4	1	7	4	16	8	8	0
September	19	0	8	4	10	3	8	0	8	6	8	3
October	28	9	4	16	18	8	2	0	18	2	1	1
November	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Totals	96	12	63	29	64	27	64	9	67	30	40	11

	2010		2011		2012		2013		2014		2015	
	Dormice	Fresh Nests	Dormice	Fresh Nests	Dormice	Fresh Nests	Dormice	Fresh Nests	Dormice	Fresh Nests	Dormice	Fresh Nests
April												
May	7	2	16	0	4	2	5	4	5	1	17	1
June	11	6	4	0	6	0	7	1	10	5	21	3
July	9	8	5	9	5	3	2	3	12	2	17	6
August	28	7	5	1	4	3	5	7	14	2	8	0
September	20	8	8	2	9	2	*	*	26	2	26	7
October	30	6	4	7	4	2	19	3	18	4	26	5
November	*	*	*	*	*	*	1	0	*	*	*	*
Totals	105	37	42	19	32	12	39	18	85	16	115	22

	2016		2017		2018		2019		2020		2021	
	Dormice	Fresh Nests	Dormice	Fresh Nests	Dormice	Fresh Nests	Dormice	Fresh Nests	Dormice	Fresh Nests	Dormice	Fresh Nests
April												
May	12	11	9	10	12	4	11	3	19	10	2	1
June	13	3	16	2	9	5	18	6	14	8	9	0
July	34	0	24	3	12	9	22	8	16	7	8	6
August	19	2	35	9	17	1	28	8	35	3	19	3
September	14	2	26	5	18	1	21	8	25	4	13	4
October	7	3	23	9	6	11	19	0	16	5	2	0
November	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Totals	99	21	133	38	74	31	119	33	125	37	53	14

	2022		2023		2024		2025	
	Dormice	Fresh Nests	Dormice	Fresh Nests	Dormice	Fresh Nests	Dormice	Fresh Nests
April								
May	14	3	14	8	11	8	4	6
June	14	2	13	9	5	5	2	3
July	15	4	17	4	1	5	4	2
August	14	0	10	6	5	0	7	2
September	18	1	20	8	1	2	3	1
October	24	0	10	2	2	2	5	4
November	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Totals	99	10	84	37	25	22	25	18

* Not Surveyed

Table 2. Number of Juvenile Dormice recorded in Ribbesford Wood Research Area 2004 - 2025.

Year	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Juveniles	34	11	22	10	34	6	35	5	7	17	26

Year	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Juveniles	32	47	65	31	53	51	21	38	26	4	12

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Table 3. Number of Dormice micro-chipped in Ribbesford Woods Research Area 2004 - 2025.

Treatment No	No of Dormice micro-chipped:										
	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
1	4	0	3	1	0	2	8	0	1	1	5
2	7	4	12	5	11	2	2	4	0	5	3
3	13	3	9	4	2	3	4	2	2	1	1
4	8	3	0	0	2	2	4	3	7	5	3
Sausage	3	0	0	1	2	0	1	1	2	6	3
New plantation	*	3	1	0	4	1	19	3	4	4	15
Unthinned area	0	0	0	0	3	1	1	0	0	0	0
Total	**35**	**13**	**25**	**11**	**24**	**11**	**39**	**13**	**16**	**22**	**30**

Treatment No	No of Dormice micro-chipped:									
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
1	0	1	6	1	3	5	7	2	5	2	2
2	6	12	11	7	3	7	0	9	6	3	7
3	0	1	0	1	2	1	0	0	0	0	0
4	9	1	12	2	15	9	2	7	4	0	2
Sausage	5	3	4	0	3	0	1	3	0	0	0
New plantation	4	12	15	13	13	12	4	5	5	3	2
Unthinned area	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	**24**	**30**	**48**	**24**	**39**	**34**	**14**	**26**	**20**	**8**	**13**
* - Not surveyed											

Table 4. Number of individual Dormice recorded in Ribbesford Woods by Treatment Area 2004 - 2025.

Treatment No	No of individual Dormice found										
	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
1	4	1	3	4	3	3	9	4	1	1	6
2	9	9	14	11	13	3	5	9	1	7	4
3	16	10	13	9	4	11	5	0	3	1	1
4	9	4	3	1	4	2	6	3	11	11	6
Sausage	3	0	2	1	2	0	2	2	1	6	6
New plantation	*	3	1	0	4	1	26	7	4	6	19
Unthinned area	0	0	1	2	3	2	2	1	1	0	0
Total	**41**	**27**	**37**	**28**	**33**	**22**	**55**	**26**	**22**	**32**	**42**

Treatment No	No of individual Dormice found										
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
1	2	1	7	1	4	5	2	4	7	4	2
2	9	15	14	8	6	10	6	11	11	3	7
3	4	2	1	2	3	2	0	0	0	0	0
4	13	3	14	9	22	16	4	7	3	1	2
Sausage	6	8	4	4	4	2	3	7	1	0	0
New plantation	14	19	21	18	17	19	10	11	12	9	3
Unthinned area	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	**48**	**48**	**61**	**42**	**56**	**54**	**25**	**40**	**34**	**17**	**14**
* - Not surveyed											

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Table 5. Number of Dormice recorded and recaptured in Ribbesford Wood Research Area 2004 - 2025.

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	Dormice found 2009	Re captures from previous years	Dormice found 2010	Re captures from previous years	Dormice found 2011	Re captures from previous years
1	4	1	4	1	9	2	1	1	3	0	19	1	7	3
2	23	4	28	9	20	7	36	6	12	3	13	3	14	2
3	26	5	28	10	21	12	11	3	17	7	8	1	0	0
4	6	1	2	2	2	1	4	2	5	1	11	2	3	0
Sausage	0	0	0	0	5	0	10	0	0	0	2	1	6	2
New Plantation	4	*	2	1	7	0	5	1	1	0	50	7	10	5
Unthinned area	0	0	1	0	2	0	3	0	2	1	2	1	2	1
Total	**63**	**11**	**65**	**23**	**66**	**22**	**70**	**13**	**40**	**12**	**105**	**16**	**42**	**13**

Treatment No	Dormice found 2012	Re captures from previous years	Dormice found 2013	Re captures from previous years	Dormice found 2014	Re captures from previous years	Dormice found 2015	Re captures from previous years	Dormice found 2016	Re captures from previous years	Dormice found 2017	Re captures from previous years	Dormice found 2018	Re captures from previous years
1	1	0	1	0	15	1	4	2	1	0	14	1	1	0
2	2	0	8	3	4	1	26	3	38	3	25	3	12	1
3	3	2	1	0	1	0	6	4	2	1	2	1	2	1
4	18	3	14	5	19	1	35	4	14	3	41	2	15	8
Sausage	3	0	7	0	15	4	1	1	13	4	13	0	5	2
New Plantation	4	0	8	1	31	3	43	9	31	7	38	6	39	4
Unthinned area	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	**32**	**6**	**39**	**9**	**85**	**10**	**115**	**23**	**99**	**18**	**133**	**13**	**74**	**16**

Treatment No	Dormice found 2019	Re captures from previous years	Dormice found 2020	Re captures from previous years	Dormice found 2021	Re captures from previous years	Dormice found 2022	Re captures from previous years	Dormice found 2023	Re captures from previous years	Dormice found 2024	Re captures from previous years	Dormice found 2025	Re captures from previous years
1	14	1	7	1	3	0	7	2	10	3	5	2	2	0
2	9	3	17	3	8	1	24	2	15	5	3	0	10	0
3	11	0	5	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
4	32	4	33	5	11	1	13	0	21	1	1	1	2	0
Sausage	10	2	18	2	7	3	10	4	16	0	0	0	0	0
New Plantation	43	5	45	8	24	6	45	6	22	5	16	6	11	1
Unthinned area	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	**119**	**15**	**125**	**20**	**53**	**11**	**99**	**14**	**84**	**14**	**25**	**9**	**25**	**1**

* Not surveyed prior to 2005

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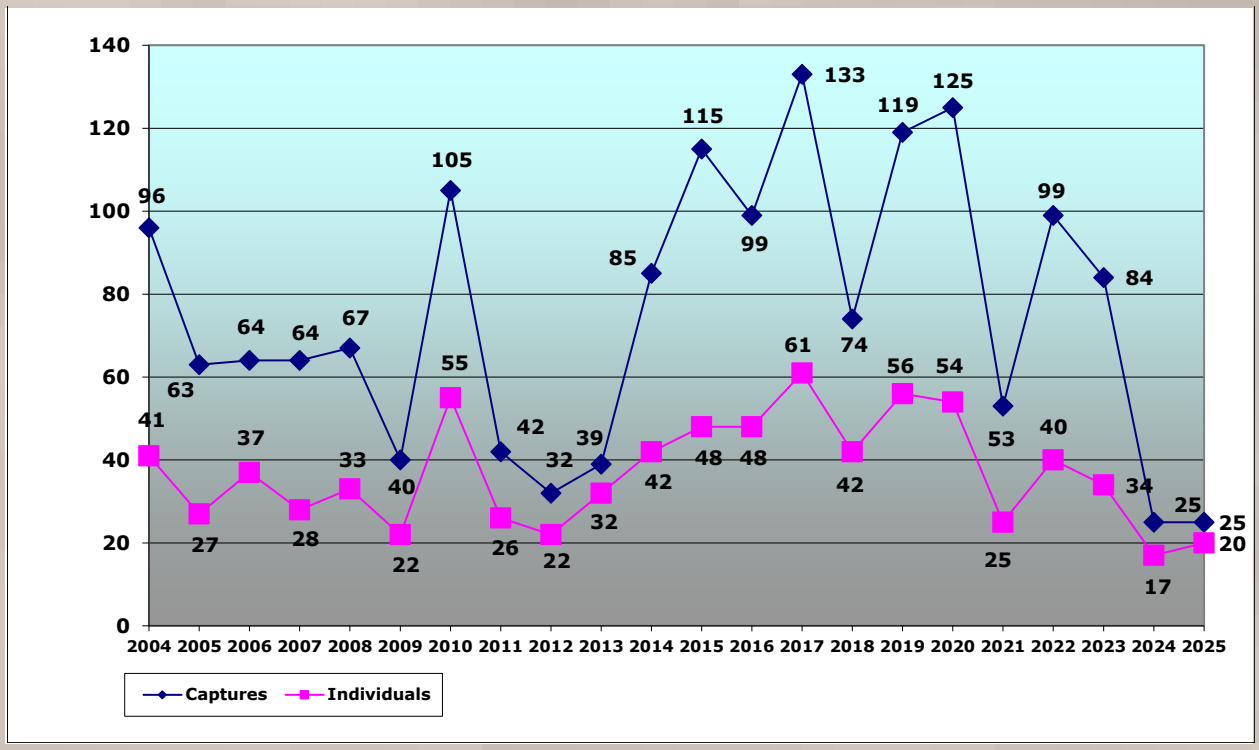


Figure 1. The number of Dormice found in Ribbesford Woods Research Area 2004 - 2025.

seven adult Dormice were found unchipped during the inspections which means that they would have been alive in 2024, just not found in the boxes.

Research aim, treatment methods and areas:

The aim of the research project, which began in 2000 in a 17ha area of Ribbesford, was to find the best method of reverting coniferous plantations back to native broadleaves, whilst maintaining Dormice populations. Four treatment types were used and compared:

Treatment 1: Hand cut with chainsaws and forwarder extraction in autumn / winter. Small areas of conifers were felled (approx 20m x 20m) 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 five years. Work was carried out during autumn and winter of 2003/04. (This area was combined with Treatment 2 in 2009/10 as finding chainsaw operators to fell trees proved impossible.) Half this area was clear-felled in 2015/16 with the remaining conifers removed in October 2020.

Treatment 2: Harvester operation with forwarder extraction – autumn / winter method as Treatment 1. Work was carried out during autumn winter of 2003/04, 2009/10 and half of this area clear-felled in 2015/16 with the remaining conifers removed in October 2020.

Treatment 3: Harvester operation with forwarder extraction in autumn / winter. Normal thinning operation removing 30-35% according to standard thinning tables. Work was carried out during autumn / winter of 2003/04, 2009/10, 2015/16 and remaining conifers removed in October 2020.

Treatment 4: Harvester operation with forwarder extraction in autumn / winter. Two larger areas of conifers were felled during each operation (approx. 0.3ha). This replicates the normal coppice size in broadleaf 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. Work was carried out during autumn / winter of 2003/04, 2009/10, 2015/16 and remaining conifers removed in October 2020.

Sausage: Area of failed Corsican Pine which has good structure, with Oak, Birch and Bramble. So named as it resembles a sausage shape on the map. Twenty boxes erected in 2002.

New Plantation: Area planted with Corsican Pine and European Larch in 2000, 40 boxes erected in 2004.

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

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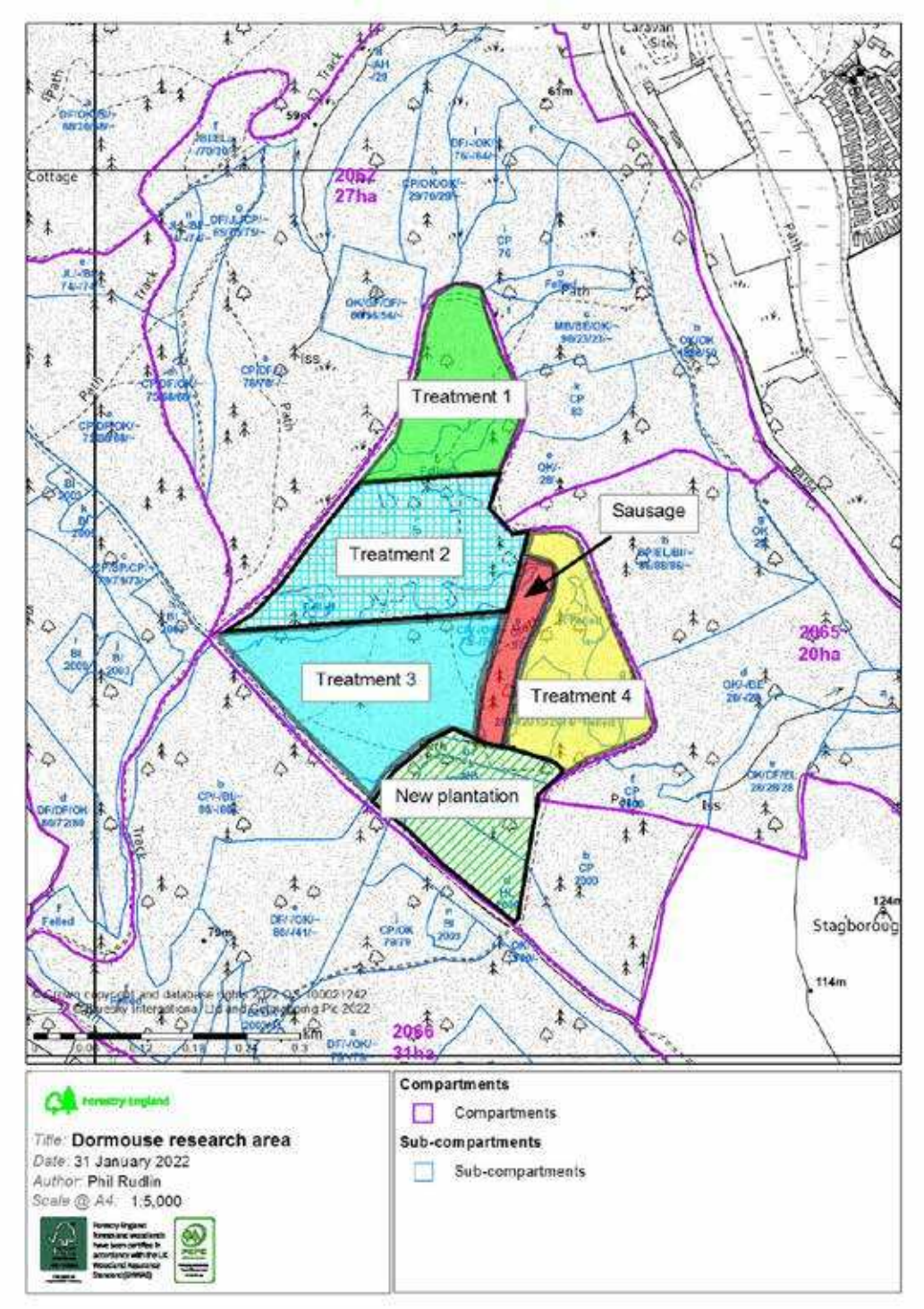


Figure 2. Map showing Treatment Areas in Ribbesford Woods.

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Conclusion:

2025 was a frustrating year for Dormouse recording in Ribbesford. It was hoped after a poor year in 2024 there would be signs of recovery. This did not materialise although the reasons remain elusive. 2024 records suggested it was a poor breeding year so numbers going into hibernation were likely to be low. However, given the exceptionally good spring and summer there should have the optimum conditions to thrive. Other areas of the country appeared to have an exceptional breeding year but maybe there just were not enough animals in Ribbesford to bounce back. It was encouraging to find the seven mature Dormice during the season who would have been alive in 2024, but just two breeding nests were found in the boxes.

The "New Plantation", which is the only remaining area of conifers planted in 2000, was partially thinned during the winter of 2024/25 and the remaining plantation has now gone over the optimum stage for Dormice. The canopy has closed in, the ground vegetation is sparse and connections are reduced. This area has consistently had the highest density of animals in recent years but, in 2025, just three were found, which is 21.4% of the total found, compared to nine in 2024 and 53%.

I would like to thank Roger Trout and volunteers, Andy Bucklitch, Charline Hue, Samantha Faggetter and Catharine Jarvis for their continued effort and support in monitoring and micro chipping, over the last 25, 14, 11, 6 and 3 years respectively. Without them it would be extremely difficult to maintain this level of monitoring.

Wyre Forest Records:

The five sites monitored in the main block of Wyre Forest fared little better than Ribbesford although three sites showed evidence of Dormice in 2025 (Table 7).

Both Button Oak and Longdon Orchard are conifer plantations, which have now also passed the optimum stage for Dormice. The encouraging site is on Wimperhill which has recorded Dormice for the first time since 2019. At least two individuals found, two animals found in different boxes in July, and individuals found in June, August and September in one of these boxes (which is likely to be the same animal). There was also one animal found in the Parkhouse area, which is the first since 2020.

A survey of Betts Reserve was not carried out in 2025.

Table 7. Records of Dormice in Wyre Forest Main Block 2013 - 2025.

	Button Oak		Longdon Orchard		Wimperhill		Parkhouse		Betts Reserve	
Year	Dormice	Fresh Nests	Dormice	Fresh Nests	Dormice	Fresh Nests	Dormice	Fresh Nests	Dormice	Fresh Nests
2013	10	1	3	3	0	0	1	0	0	0
2014	11	4	3	2	0	0	0	1	4	0
2015	10	2	9	3	0	0	1	1	0	1
2016	18	1	2	1	2	2	2	0	1	0
2017	11	2	10	3	1	1	2	1	2	2
2018	27	2	18	2	6	0	3	2	8	3
2019	17	1	8	5	1	1	4	2	0	3
2020	8	1	6	4	0	0	3	0	0	2
2021	10	3	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2022	6	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2023	11	0	6	0	0	0	0	0	*	*
2024	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	*	*
2025	**0**	**1**	**0**	**0**	**5**	**0**	**1**	**0**	*	*
*Not surveyed in 2025										