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## Dormouse (*Muscardinus avellanarius*) Species Action Plan

Plan Co-ordinator	Woodland Group
Plan Author	Denis Fleming
Plan Lead	National Trust
Latest version	January 2008

### Conservation Status

Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981, Schedule 6  
UK Biodiversity Action Plan Species  
North East Biodiversity Action Plan Species

### Description

The dormouse has characteristic sandy coloured fur, bulging black eyes and a thick bushy tail and rarely exceeds 70mm long with a tail of similar length. Dormice live in and amongst trees and shrubs being mainly active between 2-10 metres off the ground but at times 10-20 metres in tree canopies. Dormice rarely go more than 70 metres from their day nests with most remaining within 50 metres of it which they exploit seasonally according to food availability such as ripe nuts, berries, flowers and invertebrates. Low population density (typically dormice occur at a density of 3-5 per hectare) coupled with low dispersal ability and a low annual reproductive rate renders dormice extremely vulnerable to population decline. Well developed and structurally diverse woodland is considered to be the most suitable habitat for dormice. A shrub layer is critical; as this increases so do numbers of dormice.

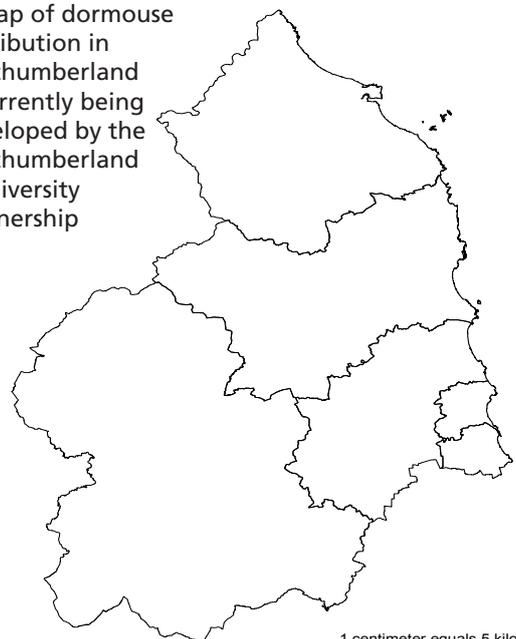
Hibernation takes place between November and March (Northumberland) to save energy when food is unavailable or limited. Dormice hibernate at ground level in woven nests, under moss or leaves, under brushwood as well as among roots of trees and bushes. In early summer dormice will become inactive if food is in short supply or if the weather is wet and windy which prevents foraging. In Britain dormice can spend up to half the year in hibernation and be torpid much of the remaining time.

Dormice often build nests in low shrubs during summer as well as use tree holes for nest sites. They also use a wide variety of places during daylight hours including old bird nests, squirrel dreys and specially designed dormouse boxes. In Britain, day and breeding nests have also been located within the cascade of conifer needles that form on the lower branches of trees. In Northumberland woodrush has often been found woven into nests along with grasses. Leaves have been found to be used as bulk in nest boxes.

### Current Extent in Northumberland

At present, the only recording in Northumberland is at Stawardpeel Wood Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) which is managed by the National Trust. This is an area of ancient-semi natural woodland along with plantation on ancient woodland sites, comprised of non-native conifer species. This is the most northerly known location inhabited by dormice in England.

A map of dormouse distribution in Northumberland is currently being developed by the Northumberland Biodiversity Partnership



1 centimeter equals 5 kilometers

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### Current Factors Causing Loss or Decline

- Loss and fragmentation of habitat
- Woodland management resulting in a poor shrub layer
- Grey squirrels may have a significant effect however there is currently no evidence to substantiate this

### Associated Action Plans

Native Woodland (specifically mature oak wood with hazel and bramble)  
Trees and Hedges

### Further Information

This dormouse action plan links to the dormouse action plan for the UK BAP, whose lead partners are Natural England and Devon Wildlife Trust.

The National Dormouse Survey - <http://www.greatnuthunt.org.uk/>

Bright, P. & Morris, P. (1989) A Practical Guide to Dormouse Conservation. The Mammal Society, London.

Bright, P, W., Morris, P, A. & Mitchell-Jones, A, J. (1996) A new survey of the Dormouse *Muscardinus avellanarius* in Britain, 1993-1994. Mammal Review, Vol 26, No. 4, pgs 189-195.

Roger Trout (Forest Research) PAWS restoration and dormouse conservation

Bright, P. & Morris, P. (2005) The Dormouse. The Mammal Society, London

### Targets

**Maintain the current range of the dormouse in Northumberland of 1 ten kilometre square by 2010.**

Code	Priority Actions	Date
D A01	Continue with monitoring of nest boxes as part of the National Dormouse Monitoring Programme	ongoing
D A02	Maintain nest boxes in woodland within the existing range	ongoing
D A03	Carry out a dormouse survey training event	2009
D A04	Survey known past and present Dormouse sites	ongoing
D A05	Improve knowledge and information of dormouse conservation and subsequently raise public awareness	2010
D A06	Encourage creation and development of interlinking hedges, scrub, bramble patches and woodlands within their existing range	ongoing