

DORMOUSE



Worcestershire Wildlife Trust

What do they look like?

Dormice are easily recognisable by their small size, bright golden colour, large eyes and bushy tail - they are the only small mammal with a thick bushy tail.

How else might I recognise one?

Dormice are strictly nocturnal (i.e. they are only active at night), and tend to stay in treetops while they are awake, and are therefore quite difficult to see.

One of their favourite foods in the autumn is hazel nuts - they chew through the outer shell to get to the highly nutritious nut inside. Discarded outer shells can be found on the ground, and the tooth marks and way that the shell has been opened can indicate what animal ate the nut - this could be mice, bank voles or dormice.

You might also be lucky enough to find a dormouse nest, which are often only a few feet off the ground. The nests are small balls (about the size of a grapefruit) of woven grass stems or honeysuckle bark, and are rather untidy affairs without any noticeable entrance. Look for nests between autumn and late spring when there is no danger of disturbing any young.

What do they eat?

During the spring dormice eat flowers and pollen, During the summer they move on to fruits, and then in autumn they eat nuts, especially hazel nuts. Insects can also form an important part of the diet. Many of these foods are only available for a few weeks of the year, so dormice have to have a wide range of suitable foods available in a small area.

Classification

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum: Vertebrata

Class: Mammalia

Order: Rodentia

Family: Gliridae

Genus: *Muscardius*

Species: *M. avellanarius*

Where do they live?

Dormice live in woodland. They are generally found in broad-leaved woodland with a thick shrub layer, but they have been recorded in Worcestershire in conifer woodland. During the day they sleep in small nests they have made themselves, or nestboxes provided for them, and they spend the night foraging among the treetops.

They are only active during the summer - as the weather turns colder in October they find somewhere dry at ground level to hibernate until the following April or May.



Phil Rudlin

Why are they special to Worcestershire?

In Worcestershire dormice are mostly found on the more wooded western side of the county - the Wyre Forest is a particular stronghold. Nationally dormice are more common in southern counties; few have been recorded recently north of the midlands, although they are present in parts of the Lake District and Wales.

Did you know?

Dormice are renowned for their sleeping abilities – as made famous by the sleepy dormouse in Alice in Wonderland. In fact the name Dormouse comes from the French - 'dormir' - to sleep!

Problems and solutions?

Loss of woodland has been a problem for the dormouse, particularly if large blocks are broken up into smaller blocks that are too small for the dormice to survive in. The loss of hedgerows is also a problem for them, as they use thick, wide hedges to move around in the countryside.

Although the characteristic holes left in hazel nuts can show that dormice are present, it can be difficult to know exactly how many are present. In Worcestershire the Worcestershire Wildlife Trust and Forest Enterprise try to monitor the populations that are found in the county, but it is difficult to know whether dormice numbers are increasing or not.

What can I do to help?

Learn how to recognise hazel nuts which are chewed by dormice (www.greatnuthunt.org.uk/gnh/gnh2.asp tells you how!), and search for these the next time you are in woods where there is a lot of hazel. Let us know by e mailing us through the Biodiversity Partnership website (address below) if you think you have found some dormice. Why not take part in the next national Great Nut Hunt?

Food Chain

hazel (nut) ➡ dormouse ➡ weasel ➡ hawk

Find out more.

www.worcestershire.gov.uk/biodiversity – click on view the action plans.

www.greatnuthunt.org.uk/ contains information on dormice, and how to contribute to The Great Nut Hunt.

