

Precautions

- 1) Dormice are fully protected under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981. Intentional capture, handling and disturbance of dormice or their nests is illegal without a licence from English Nature, Scottish Natural Heritage or Countryside Council for Wales.

- 2) Nest tubes can be set up and checked without a licence until the first dormouse is found. After that only a licensed handler can check them.
- 3) Permission must be obtained prior to any work being carried out on privately owned land or Local/National Nature Reserves.
- 3) Dormice are not the only animals that will make use of the nest tubes. You are likely to come across other small mammals such as yellow-necked mice and wood mice, and may also find birds' nests in the tubes. Dormouse nests can be distinguished from other nests by being tightly woven and made from shredded fibrous material (e.g. honeysuckle bark). The nests of wood and yellow-necked mice are commonly made from leaves, moss and grass.

The Mammal Society

The Mammal Society is the voice for British mammals and the only organisation solely dedicated to the study and conservation of all British mammals.

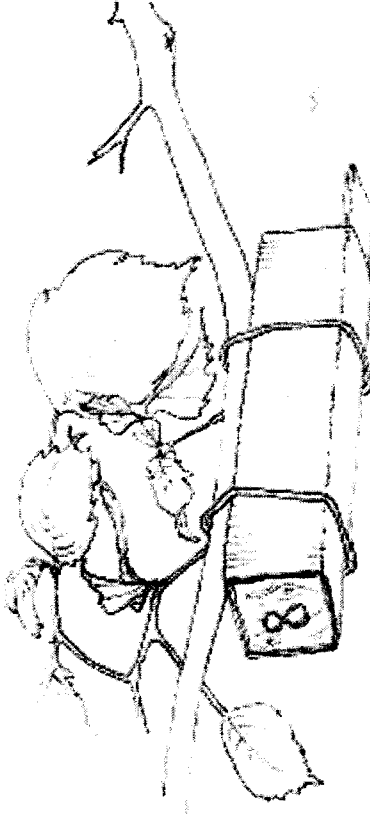
We work to protect British mammals, halt the decline of threatened species and advise on all issues affecting British mammals. We study mammals, identify the problems they face and promote conservation and other policies based on sound science.

- Nest tubes are available from The Mammal Society and cost £2.00 each plus p&p
- The Mammal Society also runs training courses on *Dormouse Ecology & Conservation* and sells a range of books on dormice
- For further details about these or about joining The Mammal Society, please contact:

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DORMOUSE NEST-TUBES



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What are they?

Dormouse nest tubes provide a cheap and easy method of determining the presence of dormice within a habitat. They can be an effective alternative to using a large number of more expensive wooden nest boxes, which are more likely to be vandalised or stolen.

Nest tubes consist of two parts – the wooden 'tray' and the 'nesting tube'. The tray, made from 3-ply, fits securely inside the nesting tube (made from plastic tree guard material), as shown above, with a wooden block sealing the tube at one end. Dormice make nests in these tubes and it is these nests that are used as indicators of their presence in the habitat.

Where should nest tubes be used?

Dormice usually inhabit deciduous woodland or overgrown hedgerows. They feed mostly on fruits, nuts, seeds insects and flowers and generally require a habitat with enough plant diversity to provide food supplies throughout the summer. The structure of the habitat is also important - dormice are predominantly arboreal and use lateral branches and sprawling bushes as runways to move about without descending to the ground.

Nest tubes can be used to determine presence of dormice in unknown habitats, and as they are increasingly being found in habitats which lack the conventional characteristics, it is worth using tubes in a range of locations to see if these animals are around.

When is the best time to start using nest tubes?

For preference, nest tubes should be in place by early April in time to attract dormice when they first come out of hibernation in late April/early May. But, as they may be occupied throughout the summer, the exact time of deployment is not crucial. Hibernation begins again in the autumn, so using the tubes throughout the winter period is unlikely to yield any results.

How many tubes should be used?

Although nest tubes are only used to determine presence of dormice, the likelihood of finding them increases with the number of tubes used. We would recommend using a minimum of 20 tubes at one time, although this would depend on the size of the habitat being surveyed.

Where should the tubes be positioned?

Tubes can be placed randomly but ideally should be sited about 20m apart in hedgerows and in a 20m grid pattern in woodland. They can be placed at a variety of heights within the habitat, but as dormice are predominantly arboreal, tubes should not be placed at ground level.

Each tube should be numbered and its position marked on a map - this is especially important if they are set up in areas where the vegetation changes dramatically over the summer.

How do you use nest tubes?

Nest tubes should be attached to the hedgerow/tree using ties made from garden wire or telephone cable (available from most DIY stores and garden centres). Tubes should be fastened underneath horizontal branches using one or two ties at both ends to secure the tube tightly and prevent it from pivoting or moving. The branches used should be sturdy enough to support the weight of the tube and the animal.

When assembled, the wooden tray extends out of the plastic tube and facilitates access to the nest tube by creating a rough surface that the dormouse can grip onto, unlike the smooth outer surfaces of the plastic nesting tube. The opening of the tube should face into the centre of the hedge or into dense cover in woodlands.

When and how should you check nest tubes?

Tubes should be checked for nests every fortnight. Once you have detected the presence of dormice in the habitat, the tubes can be taken down and replaced with wooden nest boxes or left in place to carry out further survey work such as determining population density.

It is important to be very quiet when approaching a nest tube, as any sudden noises or movement may result in the animal bolting from the nest. Firstly you need to check whether there is anything in the tube. After covering the open end with a bung (which can be a plastic bag, bit of material or handful of green leaves), push the wooden platform through the tube until you have a very small gap at the end, through which you will be able to check for nesting material in the tube. If there is nesting material in the tube, close the hole again by sliding the platform back into the tube.

The tube now needs to be checked properly to see if it is a dormouse nest or one made by another species (see 'Precautions' below). If you do not hold a dormouse licence, you need to apply for one or find a licence holder to check the tube for you.

Keeping the bung in the open end of the tube to prevent the animal escaping or anything falling out, undo the plastic ties and remove the tube from its position.

Place the nest tube in a large polythene bag, with the bag entrance held tightly around it. Slide the wooden tray slowly out of the tube, pushing it through from the platform end, until the nest is revealed. If there is no animal in the tube, the nest can simply be examined and then replaced in the tube. The tube can then be re-attached to the branch.

If there is a dormouse in the tube, it will drop into the polythene bag and, as long as you are licensed, you may proceed to sex, weigh and mark it. The last is especially important if you are studying the population size but check that your licence allows you to do it. Replace the dormouse in the tube, replace the bung and re-attach it to the branch. Pack up any equipment and just before you leave, REMOVE THE BUNG. This is very important as you may trap a dormouse inside the tube if you fail to do so.

Records

All records collected of dormice and other mammals should be sent to the relevant County Mammal Recorder (details available from The Mammal Society).