

NATIONAL DORMOUSE MONITORING SCHEME



Four new sites were added to the sites being monitored in 1994 (Levin Down, Mallydams Wood, Treswell and Wakehurst Place). There are now over 8500 records in the database with 2000 resulting from 1994 records alone. Good stuff!

These new sites were soon occupied by dormice in 1994, again illustrating the fact that nestboxes will be found and used quickly and that they therefore represent an important resource for dormouse conservation. At Mallydams Wood, adult dormice were seen in May with juveniles observed in August/September. Wakehurst Place had a number of litters in July, August and September ranging in size from 4-6 young. Both these sites had some boxes in position already, so the animals already knew about them. Levin Down got off to a slower start with dormice being seen in May but no young being recorded for 1994.

Treswell is in Nottinghamshire, where a trial reintroduction took place in 1994, using captive bred dormice. They were brought there in their nestboxes and acclimatised before release. It is not surprising that they then took to using other boxes in the wood by August. By September, there were four boxes containing young born at the site. At the time of writing (April) we have not yet checked the boxes at Treswell to see how many dormice might have survived the winter. Provided that some have, more will be released there this summer to reinforce the population. Meanwhile, last year's check on Brampton Wood (site of the 1993 reintroduction) revealed rather few dormice all summer. At first it seemed that this may have been due to high mortality, but in fact several animals were found late in the year which had not been encountered earlier. This suggests that the dormice at Brampton were not relying on the nestboxes all the time and that the boxes were undersampling the population on each visit. Again they will be checked this summer, but no further releases are planned for that site. We'll see how the existing animals get on first.

Following the 'rediscovery' of dormice at Staward Gorge in 1993, two litters of 2 and 4 young were recorded in September 1994. This is one of the most northerly outposts of the British dormouse and very much out on a limb. The National Trust is reinstating appropriate habitat management for dormice there (perhaps just in time!) to conserve this precarious population.

The importance of long term monitoring is again shown by the results from Spong Wood in 1994. Spong (and nearby Yocketts Bank) had the highest numbers of dormice per 50 nestboxes in 1992, but were much lower in 1994 than previously recorded. Lower numbers at Spong could be due to the problem with nematodes seen in 1993. There was also an early sharp frost (in both 1993 and 1994), which reduced the food available in the trees, perhaps forcing a greater number of dormice into early hibernation in a poorer condition. Smaller numbers may then have survived the following winters which could explain the lower numbers observed at this site in 1994.

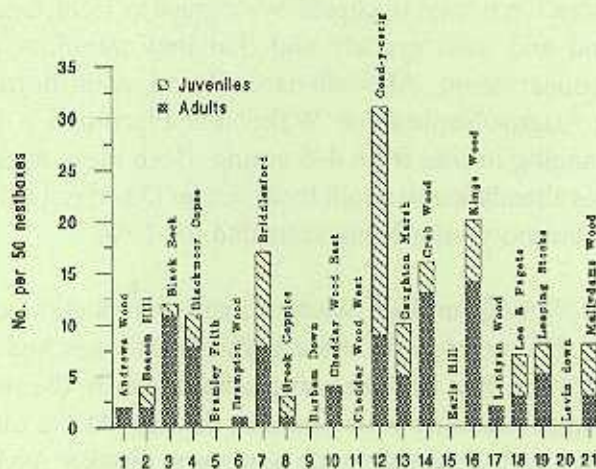
Examination of the 1994 October results showed the highest score in terms of numbers of dormice per 50 nestboxes at Coed-y-Cerrig (31 dormice per 50 nestboxes) with previous high scorers such as Spong having only 7 dormice per 50 nestboxes. Similarly, Yocketts Bank was seen to have a lower incidence of dormice than for previous years. This again highlights the need for long term monitoring; you can't rely too much on data from a single year

In the ninth year of monitoring at Cheddar, the number of dormice was seen to be lower than for 1993, rather similar to the results of 1992. It is likely that trends will reflect changes in habitat (eg as coppice ages or is re-cut) and also the effects of good and bad breeding years, brought about by weather patterns at crucial periods. Thanks to the monitoring scheme, we are beginning to accumulate sufficient data to begin analysis of these issues.

For all sites, very few early young were seen in 1994. One dead young dormouse was seen at Yockletts Bank in June with 1 juvenile being observed at Mallydams Wood in May and another at Vann Lake. These might have been born late the previous year. Births were spread over the months of July to September with the majority being in August.

Most the data submitted in 1994, again came from sites monitored every month rather than just in June and October.

The number of dormice per 50 nestboxes found in October are illustrated in Figure 1.



A few sites are blank because either no information was obtained for this month or no dormice were recorded during this month's check.

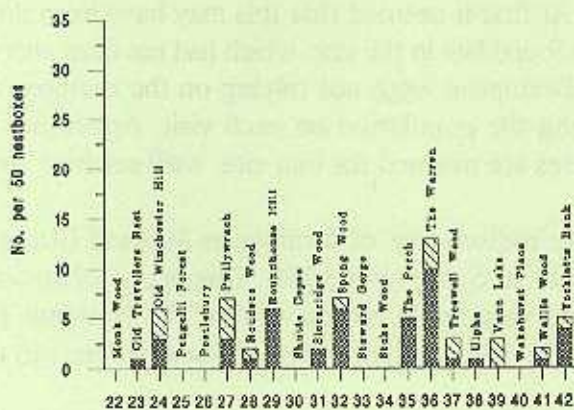


Fig. 1. Dormice in nestboxes, Autumn 1994

We look forward to being able to report in much more detail next year, with the benefit of several sites now having data for more than 3 years. Meanwhile, please keep up the good work and **PLEASE send in this year's data sheets before Christmas** otherwise analysis is delayed and this means we can't get reports and fresh data sheets out in time for early nestbox checks (the main reason for delay this year!). Thanks again for all your efforts.