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## Recording 2000

Included with this newsletter are the recording forms for the year 2000. The most obvious change is that there are two forms - one for summarising all the checks/visits that you have made during the year and the other for details of dormice and nests recorded on individual visits. The former is new, the latter is essentially the same as in previous years but note that there are some small but important modifications. Please, therefore read the guidelines even if you have been in the recording business for several years.

The most important change is that you are asked to record the **time when you open each box which contains dormice**. This, in conjunction with the temperature recorded at the start will be of interest as part of a study of torpor (see the last two issues of the Dormouse Monitor).

During the Dormouse Gathering (see below) one of the workshop sessions concerned "Filling in the Forms". We aim to get as much standardisation as possible in the way the forms are completed so please note:

- there is no need to record empty boxes
- use one of the five sections on each page for each box which contains either dormice or a dormouse nest.

- put something in each column, for each individual dormouse if at all possible  
e.g NB for non-breeding if no other category is obvious; A for active if it is clearly not torpid.

Thank you to all the recorders who have sent in their records for 1999 and thank you for your willingness to continue recording. Welcome to new recorders who are collecting data for the first time in 2000.

## The Millenium Gathering of Dormouse Recorders

The Gathering was held in Cheddar, Somerset (where dormouse recording started) on Saturday 25 March 2000. By then it had grown into a much larger event than originally envisaged and was attended by nearly 100 people. We met at the Bath Arms for lunch before moving to The Kings of Wessex Leisure Centre for the afternoon programme of talks and discussions. In the evening we returned to the Bath Arms for dinner. The cost of the event was subsidised by English Nature, for which we are most grateful, and the local arrangements were made by Doug and Olive Woods, with whom work on Somerset dormice began.

### A little history

The first major breakthrough was Elaine Hurrell's observation that dormice open nuts in a distinctive way. This led to the Mammal Society survey and Elaine's ground breaking paper on the distribution of dormice (see list on page 3). At about that time, during a casual conversation at the Mammal Society Conference, Doug Woods said to Pat and Mary Morris "Oh! I can show you dormice. They nest in boxes that I put up for them." And so it all began. A few weeks later the Morrisces drove to

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© April 2000 Paul Bright & Pat Morris,  
School of Biological Sciences, Royal Holloway,  
University of London, Egham, Surrey, TW20 0EX.  
The National Dormouse Monitoring Programme is  
supported by English Nature and PTES  
and is based at Royal Holloway, University of London.  
The 'Dormouse Monitor' is compiled by Mary Morris



Somerset and accompanied Doug to Cheddar Gorge. Near the top they climbed a few feet up the hill to where a small box hung on the trunk of a coppiced hazel. Doug took it down, lifted the lid and there was a beautiful golden dormouse curled up and asleep.

Pat had already recently solved the problem of how to catch dormice in wire mesh traps as they walk along tree branches at night, and tested it out on the Isle of Wight, but you don't catch very many that way. To really learn about the life style and ecology of these relatively rare little animals you have to have a reliable way of catching a reasonable number and Doug's boxes were clearly the answer.

Subsequently Pat obtained a grant from the Nature Conservancy Council and Paul Bright was employed to do research on dormice at Cheddar and, incidentally, gain his PhD in doing so. Paul lived in a caravan behind the barn on a farm at the top of the hill, and radio tracked and trapped dormice night and day for three years on the steep slopes of Cheddar Gorge.

### The Gathering

Pat told that story during his introductory talk at the Dormouse Gathering. He reminded everybody of how little was known about dormice twenty years ago (not even the average body weight) and how much more we know now as a result of Paul's work. He also reminded those present of the various



Above: Pat Morris with (left) Valerie Keeble of PTES, at the Dormouse Gathering.

publications that are available from the Mammal Society and English Nature which explain the ecology of dormice and how habitat can be managed to encourage them.

Paul Bright then explained the aims of the National Dormouse Monitoring Programme (see back page) and what we hope to learn from analysis of the data which is being collected by Dormouse Recorders all over the country. Already many

Below: Paul Bright (front left) and part of the audience at the Dormouse Gathering.



### A Torpidity of Dormouse Recorders

During the Dormouse Gathering we took a vote on what should be the most suitable collective noun for dormouse recorders.

The suggestions were:

An interference - Sue Walker

A snore - Pat Morris

A nut-cluster - Sue & Bob Ward

A tea-pot - Audrey Moss-Bradnam

and Gordon Vaughan looked in the dictionary to find

A torpidity

A conglomeration

A murmuration

On a show of hands at the end of dinner **TORPIDITY** won, although everyone was very lively at the time!



important principles are becoming clear which help us understand these unexpectedly complex creatures.

Following these talks the audience then divided into four workshop/ discussion groups, spending about fifteen minutes talking about each topic in turn:

- Disturbance - Pat
- Handling Dormice - best practice - Doug
- Nest box design and maintenance - Paul
- Filling in the forms - Mary

The animated discussions continued over tea.

Two of the recorders who had volunteered to talk then had their turn: Gordon Vaughan, for whom dormice are a pest, eating the eggs of his pied flycatchers and filling his enormous nestboxes, entertained us with his personal perspectives on dormice, showing pictures of his woods. Under a high canopy of oak there is almost nothing but holly and bare ground on very steep slopes. Robin Cottrill, then described his area of Essex in which a number of small woods contain dormice but he believes more could do so if the existing hedges were linked together and to the woods. He is encouraging a group of interested local farmers to use the dormouse in applying for grants to help them restore the former mosaic of hedges and copses.

After a question and answer session, the afternoon was rounded off by Tony Mitchell-Jones of English Nature who, besides overseeing the funding for the Monitoring Programme (and our Gathering) is a recorder himself in Cambridgeshire.

## Dormouse People

You may notice that only Paul Bright's name appears at the bottom of the recording form for 2000. This is because Pat Morris has taken early retirement (this is not a joke!) from the University and although he is still teaching part-time at the moment, he is gradually trying to disengage from some of his more time-consuming commitments in order to pursue other interests. For now on Paul will be the principal coordinator of the National Dormouse Monitoring Programme and is appointing a research student who will undertake a full analysis of the data. Once the 1999 data is all entered she will take over from Mary Morris.

## Dormouse Publications

*This is a chronological list. Bear in mind that some of the information in the earlier publications has been superseded by more recent work.*

1. **Dormice** by Elaine Hurrell 1962. *Animals of Britain* No 10 edited by L. Harrison Matthews. Sunday Times Publications.
2. **The Common Dormouse** by Elaine Hurrell 1980. Mammal Society Series, Blandford Press.

(Both these are out of print but sometimes to be found in secondhand bookshops.)

3. Hurrell, E. and McIntosh G. (1984). Mammal Society Dormouse Survey, January 1975-April 1979. *Mammal Review* 14(1):1-18.
4. Richards, C.G.J., White A.C., Hurrell, E. and Price, F.E.F. (1984). The food of the Common dormouse, *Muscardinus avellanarius*, in South Devon. *Mammal Review* 14(1): 19-28.

(If you do not have this issue of *Mammal Review* either go to a university library which holds the journal or write to the Mammal Society office - address below - who will photocopy the article(s) for you. A charge of about £2.00 each will be made to cover the cost and postage.)

5. **A Practical Guide to Dormouse Conservation** by Paul Bright and Pat Morris (1989). Occasional Publication of the Mammal Society No. 11.
6. **Dormice** by Paul Bright and Pat Morris (1992). Published by the Mammal Society.

(These two are still available from The Mammal Society, 15 Cloisters House, 8 Battersea Park Road, London SW8 4BG. No 5 costs £3.00 and No 6 £3.50 including p&p.)

7. **Dormouse Conservation Handbook** by Paul Bright, Pat Morris and Tony Mitchell-Jones. Published by English Nature, Peterborough 1996.

(Available from Telelink Ltd., P.O.Box 100, Farcham, Hants. PO14 2SX price £4.50.)



# 1999

We had hoped to have all the 1999 data entered before the Gathering but partly owing to problems in the Morris household, this has not been possible.

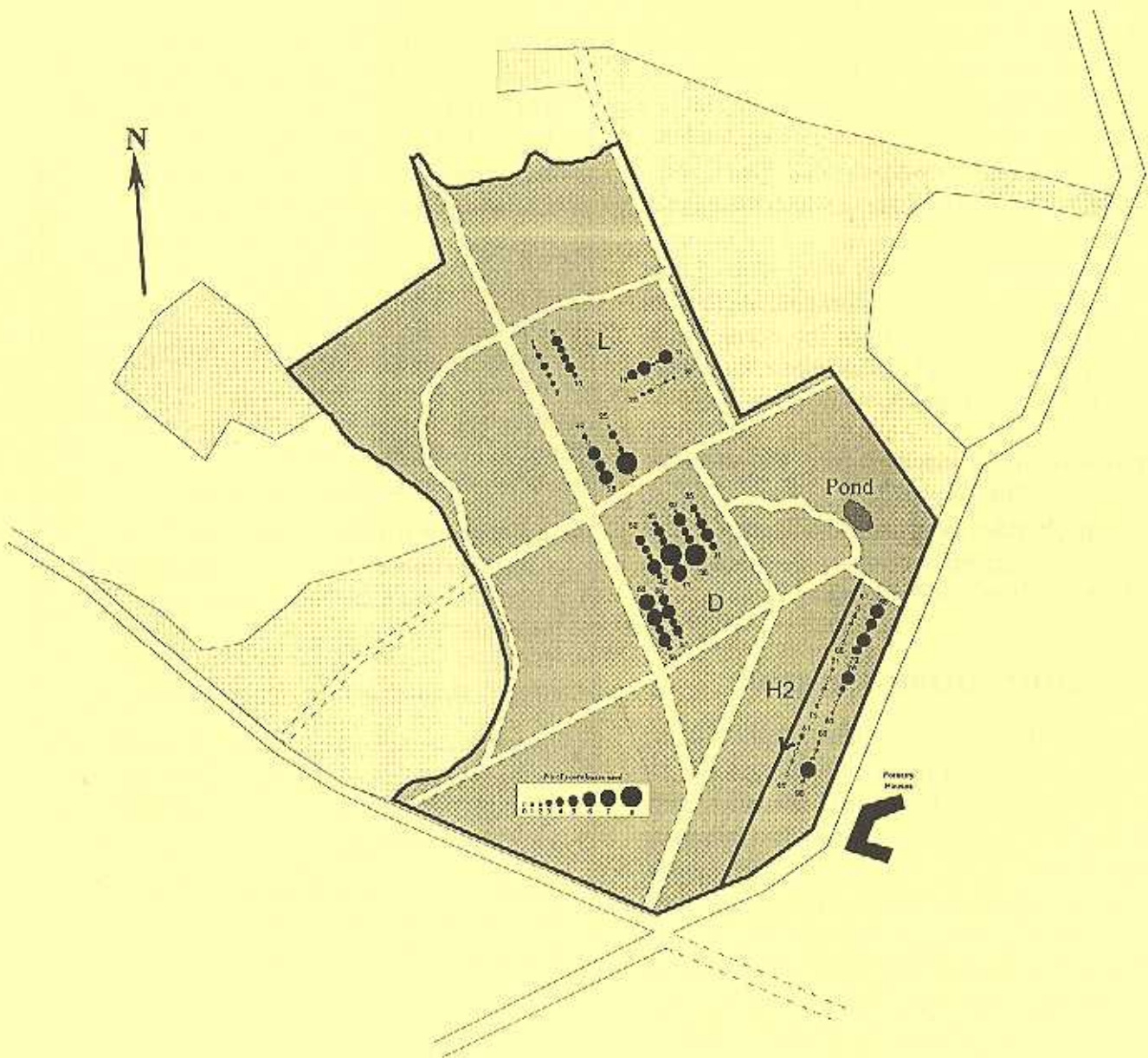
However, a number of recorders make their own analyses of their records and send in copies with

their recording forms. A good example is the interesting map sent by Sue Walker who monitors Blackmoor Copse in Wiltshire.

The map below shows clearly the value of collecting the information on where you find dormouse nests. This indicates dormouse activity and shows which areas of the wood are most

## Blackmoor Copse: Boxes used by dormice – 1990 - 1999

NB DEFINITION:- Box used by dormice = box with one or more dormice and/or dormouse nest at least once that year.





frequently used by dormice. It may then be possible to investigate the effect of habitat details on dormouse occurrence.

This sort of analysis might go part of the way to enlightening Ron Evenden who wrote in his letter "I have wondered if there is a loyalty to a particular box from one year to the next. So often there seems no reason why one box is used consistently while another close to is ignored." but we would need to know the identity of the individual occupants to answer that in full. Nevertheless, as Sue's map shows, some boxes are used a lot more than others.

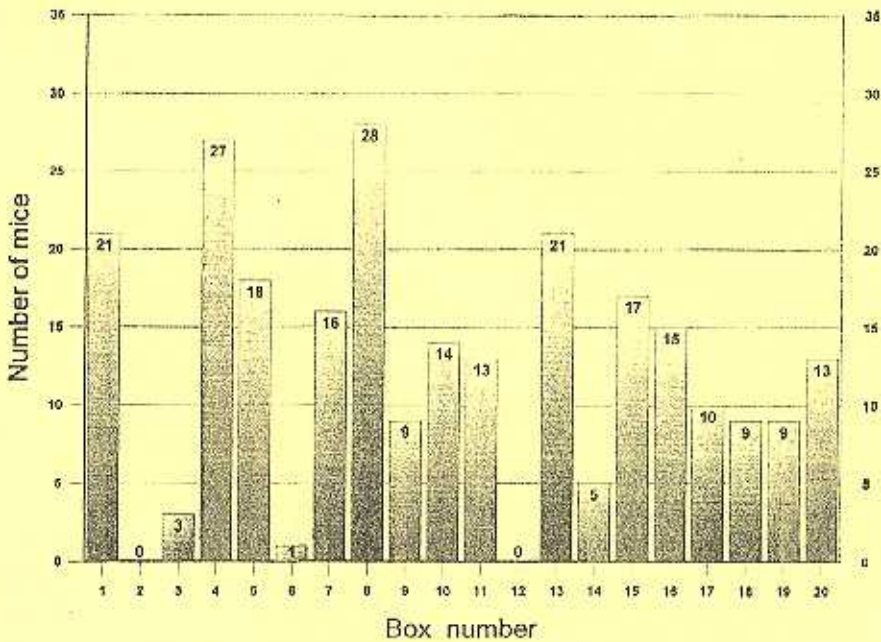
Paul Lazarus has made a bar charts (below) to show how many dormice were found in each box at

**Good News  
from the North**

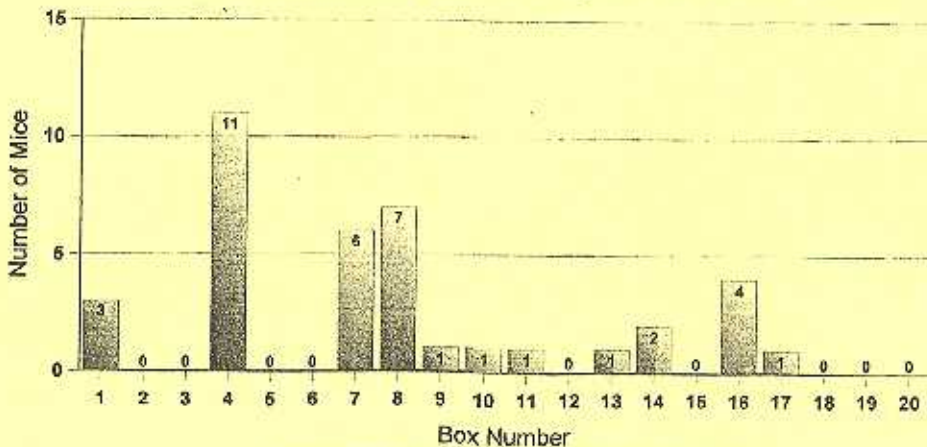
It is good to report that dormice are still hanging on in the far north. There were three records from Staward Gorge in Northumberland, the most northerly British site, during 1999, one record from Old Travellers Rest and sixteen from Ulpha in the southern Lake District.

Burham Down (Kent) this year and in total so far. These also show clearly which boxes are the most popular with dormice.

**Total number of Dormice found in boxes to date at Burham Down**



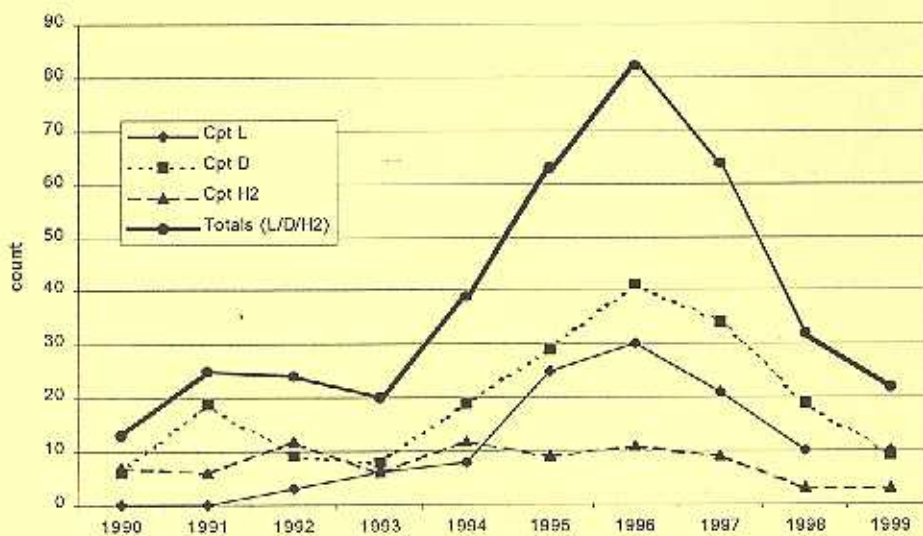
**Number of Dormice found this year at Burham Down**



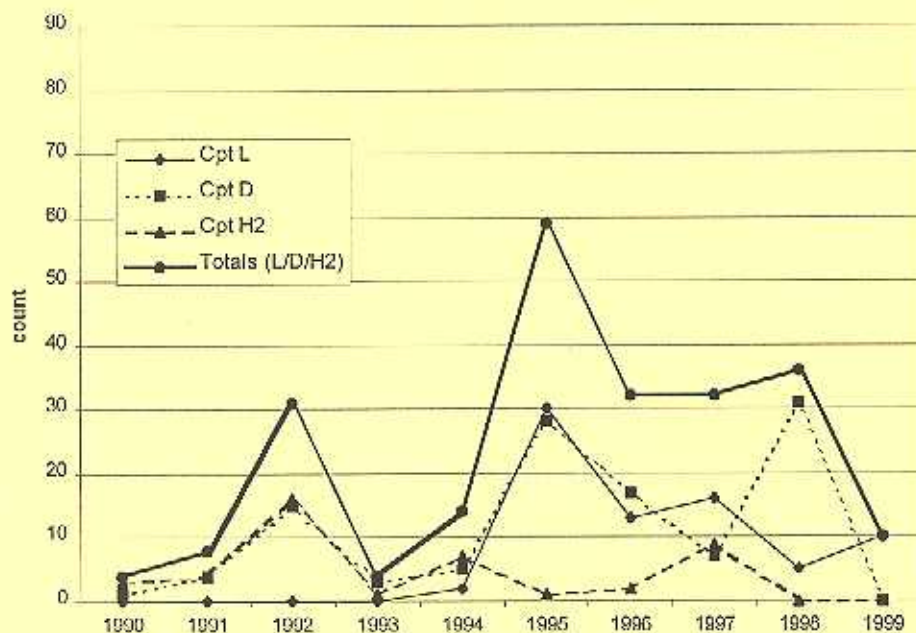
Total number of Dormice found in 1999 = 38



Blackmoor Copse - numbers of dormice of 12.0 g or greater (adults/independent young)



Blackmoor Copse - numbers of dormice of less than 12.0 g (dependent young)



Sue Walker's graphs (left), also from Blackmoor Copse, show how numbers of adult and juvenile dormice have varied from year to year both in the various compartments and in total. Notice that on the whole the trends are quite similar but it is this sort of plot which can stimulate questions eg. The peak of juveniles in 1995 is followed, as you might expect, by a peak of adults in 1996, but this was not so in 1992 (a sharp peak of juveniles) and 1993.

**The Aims of future analysis of the Dormouse Recording Data**

1. To test the power of the current dormouse monitoring protocol to detect population change.
2. To determine how habitat management and quality affect dormouse abundance at monitoring sites.
3. To evaluate the success of dormouse reintroductions in relation to contemporary dynamics of dormouse populations elsewhere in Britain.
4. To determine how weather and summer torpor affect breeding performance.
5. To assess how changes to woodland management and climate have and will affect dormouse populations.

**Reintroductions Continue**

There was a further reintroduction in 1999 - to a wood in north Yorkshire. The dormice did breed after their introduction and we wait with interest to see how many are found this year.

All the other reintroductions - to Cambridgeshire, Cheshire, Warwickshire and Buckinghamshire - seem to be doing well except the one to Nottinghamshire.