



Sussex Dormouse Nut Survey 2008-2009

Dormice are hard to find because they are small and nocturnal, so very few people are lucky enough to see them in the wild. The best way of finding out if dormice are using a wood or hedgerow is to look for hazel nut shells that they have opened to get at the nut inside.

Dormice open these nuts while they are still green and on the tree, but the shells turn brown once they are discarded and fall to the ground. Other animals like hazel nuts too, but even so it's often possible to tell which animal has opened the nut. Birds and squirrels usually split the shells completely in half or smash them to pieces, but small rodents (mice, voles and dormice) gnaw a neat round hole and leave characteristic toothmarks around the edge. By searching for, collecting and examining nuts we can get an idea if dormice are present at a site.

The main aim of this is to re-visit sites which have had previous records of dormice. This is an important way of monitoring how well dormouse populations are doing and see if they are still present to help with future monitoring and site management. However please feel free to visit any site which is either convenient to you or you feel may be suitable for dormice.

Methods:

Best time of year to survey is autumn and winter.

You will be supplied details of the grid references and names of woods that need surveying, this will be provided as a list from which you can choose as many sites as you have time to do. Please inform us of which sites you will be doing so that we don't replicate sites. Please ensure land owner permission is sought before the survey if the site is privately owned.

The method is based on searching a set area. This is a 10 x 10m quadrat. You need to select at least five 10 x 10m square quadrats using a 'stratified random selection'. As nuts are bound to be found closer to hazel tree then you will need to base your selection around hazel trees. You can randomize your sampling by just walking and then selecting every 5th hazel tree you find and placing the 10 x 10m area around it. You will search each quadrat with a standard effort of 20 minutes per quadrat. Collect all hazel nuts found and count them into opened and unopened. If you wish you can try to identify the culprit using the notes below and fill in the form. If you are unsure of the identification or want verification please send nuts and your survey form to:

Dawn Scott, Biology Division, Cockcroft Building, Moulsecoomb, Brighton, BN2 4GJ.

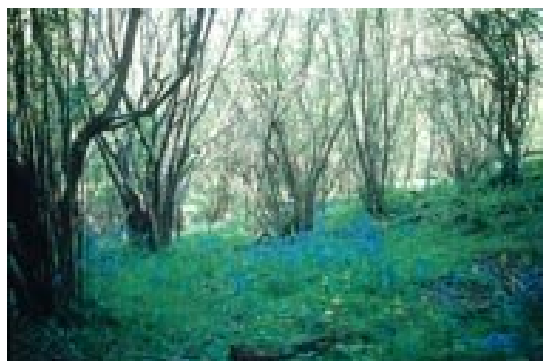
Even if you don't find any nuts please send us your survey form as this will also help us to confirm absence at a site.

Please do a minimum of 5 quadrats per site. If the site is large you can do more or section the woodland into different areas and do 5 in each area. Please give us a brief description of what you actually do on the survey form.

ALWAYS TELL SOMEONE WHERE YOU ARE GOING OR TAKE SOMEONE WITH YOU.

Identifying Hazel Bushes:

Hazel is a small tree or shrub found throughout the British Isles. The nuts on wild hazel are usually smaller than the hazel nuts you buy at Christmas, but otherwise they look the same.



Identifying Nibbled Nuts

Small rodents (dormice, wood mice and bank voles) all open hazel nuts by nibbling a neat round hole in the shell. Other animals, such as squirrels and jays also open hazel nuts, but they either split the shell completely in half or make a jagged hole in it. Some insects make holes in the nuts, but these are less than 2 mm across.

If you find nuts with neat round holes in the shell about 8-10 mm (3/10 inch) across then they've probably been opened by small rodents. You can tell which species opened the nut by looking carefully at the edge of the hole using a magnifying glass (reversed binoculars or some camera lenses also work).



The dormouse carves a virtually smooth inner rim and the toothmarks are at an angle to the hole on the nut surface.



The wood mouse leaves parallel toothmarks on the inner rim and rough marks on the nut surface.



The bank vole leaves neat parallel grooves on the inner rim, but no toothmarks on the nut surface.



Squirrels and birds simply crack the shells open leaving jagged edges or half-shells.



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Recorders name: _____

Contact details: Tel no., e-mail or address: _____

Date of survey: _____

Name of site: _____

Grid reference: _____

No. of 10 x 10 quadrats completed: _____

Approximate time searching at each quadrat: _____

How many people searched: _____

How many nuts did you find?

Unopened: _____ Opened: _____

Opened by:

Dormouse: _____ Woodmouse: _____

Bank vole: _____ Bird/squirrel: _____

Unknown: _____

Sketch of site and description of what you did: