



Action for Wildlife

Update Autumn 2007

Action for Wildlife
The Dartmoor
Biodiversity Project

Dormice in your garden

As part of our work to support Dartmoor's dormice, the *Action for Wildlife* Project (AFW) has been keen to support a local project co-ordinated by Andrew Taylor, a Manaton resident with a passion for dormice. Dormice are known to inhabit the area but it is not known how many there are or the areas they use. As a licensed dormouse worker, Andrew suggested setting up a local dormouse nest-tube scheme, which he would monitor. The tubes would be set up in suitable hedgerows and gardens around the village. As well as providing data about Manaton's dormouse population, residents would learn more about dormice and their habitat requirements, plus, the scheme fits in well with the Parish Plan. AFW was delighted to be able to contribute by supplying the 70 nest-tubes required.

On a sunny August afternoon, Cate Jackson, AFW Assistant Project Officer, visited Manaton with Andrew and Dartmoor National Park Authority (DNPA) Ranger Rob Taylor, to begin the task of setting up the nest-tubes. Fifteen local residents happily agreed for the tubes, made from plywood and recycled tree guards, to be positioned in their gardens. Dormice are typically nocturnal and rarely seen, so installing tubes or nest-boxes is a recommended surveying technique. If dormice are present, it is hoped that they will build summer nests in the tubes to raise their young. They will hibernate lower to the ground during the winter months.



Main circle:
 Dormouse using a
 Manaton Dormouse
 Project nest-tube
 © Andrew Taylor

The hazel dormouse, *Muscardinus avellanarius*, is rapidly declining in the UK, mainly due to habitat fragmentation. The species is nationally rare and is a key species in the *Dartmoor Biodiversity Action Plan*, although Devon is considered to be a stronghold for dormice. Dormouse numbers across Dartmoor are unknown, however some idea of their presence in certain areas has been obtained from people sending in records. Dormice are associated with woodlands, hedgerows and scrub that produce flowers, berries and nuts. They rely on these habitats for shelter, moving between them to feed and breed. It is essential that these natural corridors are available to enable them to migrate

across the countryside which allows for a healthy dormouse population.

All 70 tubes are now in place in various gardens across Manaton. Whilst conducting the first checks, Andrew excitedly reported the first dormouse seen using one of the tubes only a few weeks after it was installed. Andrew plans to continue raising awareness of dormouse ecology; emphasising the need for sensitive hedgerow and woodland management... and to report signs of dormice. See overleaf for more details on the Dartmoor Dormouse Survey.

For more information, please contact:
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Clockwise from top right circle of picture wheel on the front side: High brown fritillary © DNPA, Lichen © DNPA, Tree planting © DNPA, Bluebell © DNPA, Merlin © DNPA, Southern damselfly © DNPA, Bell heather © DNPA, Bonehill © Stephen Whitehorne, Bog hoverfly © DNPA, Working for Wildlife © DNPA

Blanket Bog Restoration

Those of you who have been familiar with the AFW Project over a number of years may have noticed that we have been increasingly undertaking more strategic biodiversity work focusing on areas on a landscape scale. The Greater Horseshoe Bat Project and Dartmoor Natural Networks are two examples. A new project aims to take a similar approach with Blanket Bog.



Ditch blocking on blanket bog, Amicombe Hill © AFW

After the works: The blocked ditch is successfully holding water © AFW

Dartmoor has 12,000 ha of this globally important habitat. All of it is damaged to a greater or lesser degree meaning that water is not held in the peat as it should but drains away rapidly. This means a loss of characteristic bog plants and related species, increased periods of spate in rivers downstream, and oxidisation of peat - reducing the huge carbon store. Some pilot work has begun this autumn to trial techniques to restore blanket bog.

Our pilot site is on Amicombe Hill which has been a substantial peat working in the past. Amongst the cuttings, the blanket bog is riddled with narrow ditches either cut or eroded (and eroding) into the peat.

As a trial, three small dams have been built to block ditches, using timber sealed with peat - a technique which has been successfully used elsewhere in the UK.

The work was undertaken by the DNPA Conservation Works Team, and the timber sourced from Dartmoor. Early indications are that the dams are holding water. Dipwells - enabling the water-table to be monitored - were installed at each site in the spring and will help inform us of changes in water levels. The vegetation will also be monitored over time to identify increases in bog plants. The effects at each site are only likely to be noticed within a few metres. To significantly re-wet the bog, a great deal of ditch-blocking would be necessary - and as we assess the pilot, we will also be looking into options to undertake bog restoration on a much greater scale over the next few years.

A new team member

Cate Jackson started as the new Assistant Project Officer for AFW in June and looks forward to meeting you in the near future. Cate joined us from a local ecological consultancy after Angie Squires left to go travelling.



Cate Jackson, new Assistant Project Officer © AFW

Action for Wildlife website

Our plans for a shiny new website were thwarted when the company who were designing it ceased trading earlier this year, prior to completion. Plan B is going to take a little while to sort out. We are sorry that the existing website is rather out of date. We are doing what we can to update it in the meantime, so please do continue to visit us at www.actionforwildlife.org.uk



Volunteer on a 'dormouse hunt' © AFW

Dormouse-nibbled nuts © R. Knott, DWT

Dartmoor Dormouse Survey

Autumn is a wonderful time of year to be a dormouse detective. The best method is to examine opened hazelnuts left on the ground, as dormice leave a distinctive neat inner rim to the hole and toothmarks at an angle to the hole on the nut surface.

The leaflet, *Dartmoor Dormouse Survey... in a nutshell*, contains pictures showing what to look for. Please report any signs of dormice to us, so we can update our records of this protected species. If you would like us to confirm that they are indeed dormouse-nibbled hazelnuts, please feel free to send them into us (well protected) along with a six-figure grid reference/or detailed sketch map of where you found them, your name, address and telephone number.

The leaflet *Dartmoor Dormouse Survey... in a nutshell* can be downloaded from the publications page of our website, or requested by contacting us at the address overleaf.



This project achieves practical benefits for wildlife on Dartmoor. It is funded and co-ordinated by the Dartmoor National Park Authority, the Duchy of Cornwall, Environment Agency and Natural England.



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