

# HEDGEROWS FOR DORMICE

## improving wildlife corridors

Spring 2011 newsletter

Hello all,

The past two and a half years have flown by, and in March 2011 the *Hedgerows for Dormice* initiative came to the end of its Countdown 2010 grant from Natural England.

Please read on to find out what we've been up to and some highlights of our successes - we have been working with a lot of organisations and landowners in our target areas and have certainly gone a good way down the road to providing a model that can be built on and developed locally to continue to improve hedgerows for dormice as well as a host of other species.

We couldn't have achieved anything without the help of all our volunteers and participating landowners though, so to everyone who has taken part we would like to say a huge thank you for all your hard work!

We hope you have enjoyed the experience too!

Best wishes,



Jim and Lauren



The *Hedgerows for Dormice* team

[hedgerows@ptes.org](mailto:hedgerows@ptes.org)



## mapping and surveying hedgerow highways

*Hedgerows for Dormice* (HfD) was set up in order to restore hedgerows around dormouse sites and thus help to fulfil Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) targets for both the hazel dormouse and hedgerows.

In order to do this we first had to select which counties to work in (sadly we didn't have the time to cover everywhere!), find out where dormice had already been found and then pick out key dormouse 'record hotspots' within which to focus on improving hedgerow connections. We then used aerial photographs to identify the best routes between the dormouse woodlands, connecting up as many woodland parcels as possible using existing hedgerows as corridors.

The HfD Mapping Officer Lauren Alexander has been hard at work, ably assisted by a small team of mapping volunteers, and has digitally mapped 2105km of priority hedgerows in 32 such 'record hotspots' throughout 11 counties. It wasn't an easy task by any means, since what appears to be a hedgerow from an aerial photograph may in fact just be a ditch or a fenceline with some tall vegetation!

To assess the condition of the selected hedgerows we trained 260 survey volunteers at 12 regional workshops. 174 of these volunteers (67%) were

### HfD counties

Surrey  
Dorset  
Essex  
Shropshire  
Kent  
Cumbria  
Berkshire  
Oxfordshire  
Bedfordshire  
Buckinghamshire  
Hertfordshire

then allocated hedgerows to survey and an amazing 70 people (27% of those trained) undertook surveys and returned the data back to us.

Whilst the drop in numbers of volunteers who completed surveys was disappointing,

it was not totally unexpected - we understand how hard it can be to find the time to volunteer and that life can get in the way! We recognise also that some volunteers were put off by the survey methodology and the amount of information we needed to collect in order to assess the hedgerows fully and in line with the Defra standards.

A massive thank you to everyone who did return survey forms, but even if you didn't we are grateful that you took time to come along to our workshop. We hope everyone that attended now finds themselves looking at hedges in a new light.

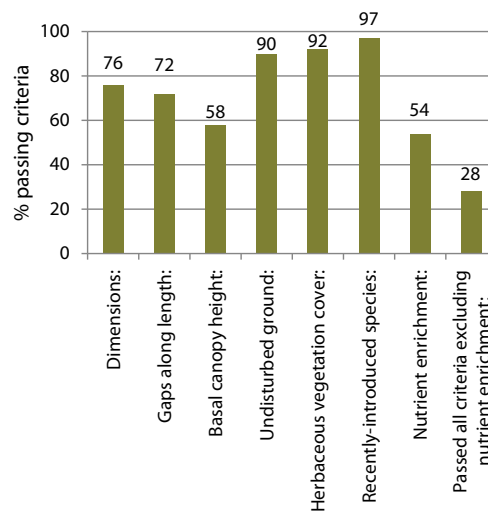


## what did the surveys show us?

The priority hedgerows that we focused on only comprise a small proportion of the hedges in a particular county or region, but some useful information can be obtained from this snapshot survey.

The majority of hedgerows in all survey areas were classic shrubby hedges in poor condition. Dorset had the highest proportion (74%) of species rich hedgerows, consisting of five or more woody native species, and Surrey the smallest (34%). The highest proportion of hedgerows in favourable condition, according to the Defra condition assessment, was in the cluster of counties we loosely termed 'Chilterns' (Berkshire, Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire - 24.8%) and the lowest in Surrey (6.6%). This figure rises if you exclude nutrient enrichment as a factor in the assessment, which some surveys choose to do as the thresholds are far

less clear for this criterion. Also, our survey period extended over a time of year when the nutrient enrichment



The proportion of HfD hedges passing each favourable condition attribute

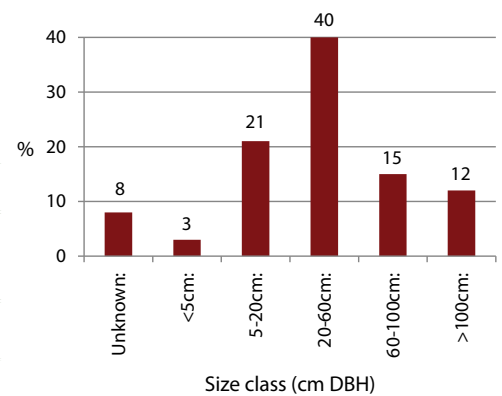
determining species (nettles, cleavers and docks) would not always have been present anyway.

	Surrey	Essex	Shropshire	Dorset	Cumbria	'Chilterns'	Kent	Total
No. of hedges surveyed	137	88	68	27	80	113	74	587
% shrubby	50.4	51.1	70.6	88.9	88.8	69.0	71.6	66.1
% line of trees	23.4	9.1	11.8	0.0	7.5	1.8	1.4	9.7
% shrubby with line of trees	25.5	39.8	17.6	11.1	3.8	29.2	27.0	24.0
% species rich	34.3	51.1	55.9	74.1	60.0	62.8	51.4	52.3
% favourable condition	6.6	15.9	22.1	14.8	10.0	24.8	8.1	14.3
% favourable condition if nutrient enrichment excluded	13.9	28.4	42.6	25.9	11.3	47.8	32.4	28.4

Results for the whole survey indicate that only 14.3% of hedgerows were in favourable condition, rising to 28.4% if nutrient enrichment is excluded as a factor. Hedgerows most commonly failed on excessive gappiness - 42% failed because the base of the canopy was too high off the ground and 28% failed because they had more than 10% gaps or any gaps over 5m wide. Considering that the majority of hedges are shrubby (66%) rather than lines of trees (10%) our results suggest that the biggest problems for hedgerows are intensive management and neglect, leading to them becoming gappy and/or leggy. Hedgerows in such condition need to be rejuvenated by coppicing or laying to encourage new growth from the base, along with having larger gaps filled by new planting.

Our results are in keeping with those of the Countryside Survey 2007 and the Local Hedgerow Survey Review 2006-2008, which respectively reported that 31% and 41.7% of hedgerows were in favourable condition. Hedgerows in the Survey Review were also failing because of excessive gappiness but our survey suggests that perhaps the problem is even more serious.

Isolated hedgerow trees also provide important breeding and foraging habitat for wildlife, including moths



Isolated hedgerow trees by size class

and bats. Modelling undertaken by Forest Research indicates that at least 45% should be below 20cm in diameter at breast height (DBH) for the hedgerow tree population to remain stable. In the HfD survey only 24% of isolated hedgerow trees were smaller than 20cm, indicating a need for planting or better recruitment of young trees into hedgerows.



## management workshops and feedback to landowners

The information gained from the hedgerow surveys also enabled us to contact landowners and land managers, invite them to attend a Hedgerow Management Workshop in their county, and provide them with lots of information regarding the condition of their hedges and best practice advice on future management.

Sixteen workshops took place across the HfD project range, attended by 180 landowners and land managers who were interested in learning about hedgerow management, dormice and hedgerow wildlife in general. Nigel Adams from the National Hedgelaying Society gave a fascinating overview of the 'Hedgerow Management Cycle' at all of the workshops, which advises on the best management for each stage of a hedgerow's development to ensure its longevity and healthy condition. We also discussed hedgerow options under Environmental Stewardship, with

advice provided by our local partners in Natural England, Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG), the RSPB, Kent Wildlife Trust and The West Weald Landscape Partnership. Environmental Stewardship is the scheme administered by the government which provides payments for farmers and landowners who manage agricultural land in an environmentally friendly way. We are delighted that several of our workshop attendees have already been successful in entering new stewardship agreements.

All landowners who we obtained contact details for and who had hedgerows surveyed were provided with feedback whether or not they were able to attend a workshop. We sent bespoke maps of their area highlighting which hedgerows were in our priority 'dormouse highway,' whether they have been surveyed by

## spotlight on a hedgerow surveyor

**name:** Robin Cottrill

**county:** Essex

**number of hedges surveyed:** 43

**total length of hedges surveyed:** 7.5km!

### how did you find the surveys?

The training was really good but I found a lot of my hedges didn't fit easily into a simple category so in these cases I had to draw a diagram. The four-page forms were a little difficult to handle in wet or windy conditions, but apart from that it was a great project with a hugely worthwhile aim.

### what were your high points?

Sunny autumn days with lots of unusual bird sightings. Also, being privileged to walk around farms I couldn't otherwise have accessed.

### and any low points?

We did most of our surveying in the autumn/early winter so have memories of lashing rain and high wind, sheltering under spindly trees and even sub-zero temperatures and snow!

HfD and whether or not they are in favourable condition. We also sent out Hedgelink packs along with our own advice leaflets so that they are armed with lots of useful information!



## the importance of teamwork

The HfD project was made possible by good partnership working, which is the keystone of successful conservation practice: landowners and land managers who allowed us access to survey hedgerows, attended workshops to learn new ways of management and took to

their fields to restore the nation's green veins; conservation agencies and groups who worked with us, especially Natural England, The National Hedgelaying Society, FWAG, The Wildlife Trusts (especially Surrey, Kent, BBOWT and Cumbria), Surrey Dormouse Group, Essex Biodiversity

Partnership, the RSPB and all other Hedgelink partners; and of course all the dedicated volunteers too numerous to name but who were involved in surveying, landowner liaison, hedge planting and management, GIS mapping and data entry. We owe thanks to you all.

# practical work, grants and the 'hedgerow quality award'

With the help of landowners and managers, along with local volunteers, we have rejuvenated hedges in poor condition through hedgelaying and coppicing and planted 12km of new hedgerows - that's the length of 122 football pitches!

Through our main funders Natural England, and with additional money from the Stella Artois and Tree Council Real Hedge Fund, PTES provided plants, canes and guards via our Capital Costs Scheme (CCS). In addition a small amount of the CCS was used for chestnut stakes and binders for hedgelaying and spades for local conservation groups to help plant trees.

Each of the landowners who planted or managed hedgerows was awarded a PTES Hedgerow Quality Award and provided with a beautiful sustainably sourced (from our Isle of Wight reserve) oak or sycamore plaque to put up by their hedgerows or farm gate. These plaques give recognition to their efforts and are a way of encouraging long-term management to maintain the hedgerows in favourable condition. Since we encourage hedgerows to be left to grow for a number of years



Just some of the people and hedges we have worked with, clockwise from top left: The Essex Biodiversity Partnership and Essex and Suffolk Water worked with a local school to plant 1400m of hedgerow at Hanningfield Reservoir; Bredhurst Woodland Action Group (Kent) with their Hedgerow Quality Award beside their newly planted hedge; 900m planted at Doddington in Kent; Ranger Shaun Waddell helps a volunteer put the finishing touches to a laid hedge on Ashtead Common in Surrey.

without being cut, or have different sides cut in alternate years, we hope that once displayed these plaques will be a way of showing that such 'messy'

hedgerows do not reflect badly on a landowner but exemplify his or her commitment to the stewardship of the natural world.

## what's at the end of the hedgerow...?

HfD has been an important learning experience for PTES in developing strategies for improving habitat for the hazel dormouse in England and Wales, supporting the conservation of hedgerows and focussing on the practicalities of improving

hedgerow connectivity between woodland sites.

The HfD team are currently finalising a full report and webpages to allow the processes we have developed through HfD to be used as a template for successful working which can be copied at the local level. We will be sending our data on priority hedgerows to local record centres so that they are

fully available for conservation and development planning.

PTES is also currently looking at developing a more focussed landscape-level conservation project which could become a case study for the improvement of connectivity for dormice.

Watch this space: [www.ptes.org/hedgerows](http://www.ptes.org/hedgerows)

