



# JOIN THE CARMARTHENSHIRE NUT HUNT



## Introduction

The Hazel Dormouse is one of Carmarthenshire’s most elusive mammals. Here, they seem to like small woodlands with a varied understorey (including hazel), dense hedgerows and brambly scrub. When these habitats are connected the dormice can move through the landscape.

The National Dormouse Monitoring Programme has estimated a decline in the *population* of dormice of 50% in England and Wales since 2000. In the UK their *range* has shrunk significantly and they’re now confined predominantly to southern England and Wales. (In Carmarthenshire, however, survey effort has shown that dormice are more widely distributed than previously thought.)

The cause of the decline is not completely understood but declining *habitat quality* (i.e. it’s harder to find food and places to breed) and *increased fragmentation* (i.e. it’s harder to move around and find new sites and other dormice) may be important.

Dormice are therefore classified as ‘Vulnerable’ in Wales, i.e. at high risk of extinction. Because they are vulnerable, helping to find out where they live is important to conserve them.

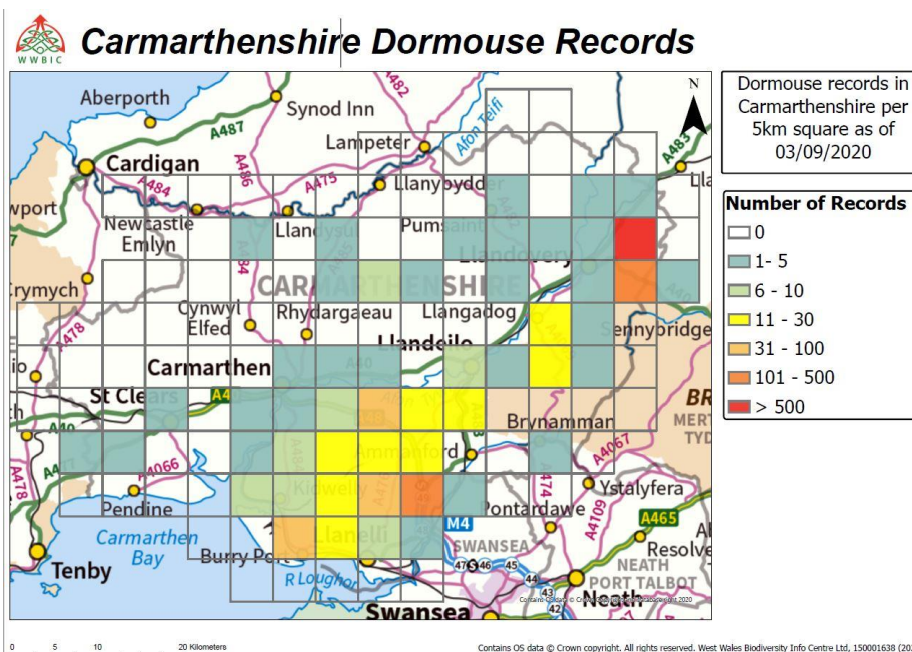
## Dormice

The chances of spotting a dormouse are rare. They are nocturnal, rarely come to the ground and can spend as much as 7 months of the year asleep.

Luckily, dormice leave very tell-tale signs when they eat hazel nuts – one of their favourite foods. Dormice open these nuts whilst they are still green, on the tree and relatively soft to nibble, but the shells turn brown quite quickly after they are discarded and fall to the ground. By searching for these shells it is possible to find out where dormice live.

Find out more: <https://bit.ly/2QLTU77>

The Carmarthenshire Nature Partnership would like your help to find out where dormice are in the county.



Absence of a species record does not necessarily mean absence of that species - simply that no records are held.

We need your help to fill the gaps and also update existing records.

# What you need to do

So how can you tell if dormice live near you? If you have hazel-rich hedges or access to woods with hazel near you then why not go on a nut hunt?

The best time to carry out the survey is during the autumn and winter when the discarded nut shells are easiest to find on the woodland floor.

- 1. Find hazel trees** – you need to identify hazel trees or shrubs to start searching under. Locally, there is a lot of hazel in hedgerows and woodlands. But please make sure that access is allowed and safe.
- 2. Start searching** – look underneath the trees for gnawed hazel nuts and collect these for sorting out later.
- 3. Check the nuts** – once you've finished searching, use our guide to help sort the nuts according to each different species that might have gnawed them.

It helps if you use a magnifying glass, camera lens or binoculars back to front to get a really close-up view of the toothmarks.

Photograph your nuts close up and send the images, with the location details (grid reference or postcode) to: [Biodiversity@carmarthenshire.gov.uk](mailto:Biodiversity@carmarthenshire.gov.uk)

We will produce a map of all the dormouse nuts that are identified as part of this survey.

**If you are concerned about whether to do this activity during the COVID-19 outbreak, please check the current government guidelines to help you decide if it is appropriate and safe for you to do so.**

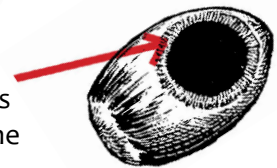
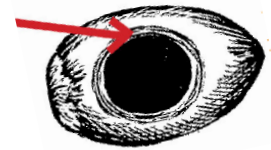
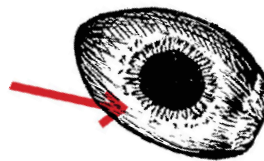
## Identifying the chewed nuts



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.

