

Information Sheet 2D: Special species at Meldon

Dormouse

Dormice live in most of the woodlands in the area and have been recorded in Meldon Woods as well as in two copses in Meldon Quarry. The dormouse is a priority species in the *Action for Wildlife: Dartmoor Biodiversity Action Plan* and also in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan. It is protected by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and the European Habitats Directive.

Nationally, the dormouse has experienced a marked contraction in range in recent decades, and has become extinct in up to seven counties where it occurred in the last century which represents about half of its former range.



Dormouse © DNPA

In Devon the dormouse appears to be holding its own, however, and the County is now a major stronghold for the species. Nevertheless, no detailed quantification of population change has been possible due to a lack of comparable data over time. Indirect evidence however, from losses of hedgerow length and decline in the quality of woodlands over the past few decades, indicates that dormice probably have declined in a similar fashion in the County.

Dormouse is widespread on Dartmoor, appearing in a range of habitats such as hedgebanks, oakwoods, wet woodlands, Rhôs pastures and plantation fringes. There are fewer records of dormice

from the western fringes of the moor, perhaps due to a more Atlantic climate that may be less favourable for dormouse survival.

In Meldon Woods there is an important Dormouse population and in 2000, when 300 bird nesting boxes in the wood were monitored, 137 dormice were recorded! Now 50 dormouse boxes have been installed and are regularly monitored under the National Dormouse Monitoring Scheme.

More information on Dormice:

UKBAP - <http://www.ukbap.org.uk/UKPlans.aspx?ID=462>

Devon BAP - <http://www.devon.gov.uk/dbap-mammals-dormouse.pdf>

Dartmoor BAP - <http://www.dartmoor-npa.gov.uk/au-bap26.pdf>

The Mammal Society factsheet - <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/mammal/dormouse.shtml>

Greater Horseshoe Bat

The greater horseshoe bat is listed in the Devon and UK Biodiversity Action Plans as a species of conservation concern. It is a key species for conservation in *Action for Wildlife: Dartmoor Biodiversity Action Plan*.

During this century, the greater horseshoe bat has declined significantly throughout northern Europe. In the UK, this species is restricted to south-west England and south Wales although vagrants may be recorded elsewhere. There are currently 35 recognised maternity and all-year roosts and 369 hibernation sites. Current estimates range between 4,000 and 6,600 individuals. The largest breeding colony of greater horseshoe bats in the UK supporting over a 1,000 breeding females and 500 youngsters, is located just outside the National Park boundary. Bats from this colony regularly feed within the National Park and *Action for Wildlife: The Dartmoor Biodiversity Project* runs a special project to encourage farmers to manage their land sympathetically within this bat's foraging range.

In Devon greater horseshoe bat breeds in disused farm buildings and caves. The feeding habitat requirements of the greater horseshoe bat are permanent pasture (unimproved and semi-improved, preferably grazed by cattle), tall hedgerows with mature trees, mixed deciduous woodland, wetland and scrub.

The greater horseshoe bat is under threat from the loss, destruction and disturbance of roosting and hibernation sites and the loss of insect-rich feeding habitats and flyways. The loss of feeding areas is often due to the loss of wetlands and hedgerows and the conversion of permanent pasture to arable. It is protected by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and the European Habitats Directive. This species has been found roosting in Meldon Quarry in a tunnel and probably forages over the woodland and farmland in the surrounding area.



Greater Horseshoe Bats © DNPA

More information on Greater Horseshoe Bats:

UKBAP - <http://www.ukbap.org.uk/UKPlans.aspx?ID=550>

Devon BAP - <http://www.devon.gov.uk/dbap-mammals-bat.pdf>

Dartmoor BAP - <http://www.dartmoor-npa.gov.uk/au-bap25.pdf>

English Nature Species Recovery Programme - http://www.english-nature.org.uk/science/srp/greater_horseshoe_bat.htm

Otter

This species has been recorded at Meldon Reservoir, Meldon Quarry and several rivers in the area.

Formerly widespread throughout the UK, the otter underwent a rapid decline in numbers from the 1950s to 1970s and was effectively lost from midland and south-eastern counties of England by the 1980s. Populations remain in Wales, south-west England and much of Scotland, where sea loch and coastal colonies comprise one of the largest populations in Europe. There is also a significant population of otters in Northern Ireland. The decline now appears to have been halted and sightings are being reported in former habitats. Devon has an internationally important otter population and otters are now found on most watercourses and wetlands throughout the County. Otters are now re-colonising areas where they were thought to have been lost during the 1960's and 1970's. All suitable watercourses on Dartmoor now support healthy otter populations. Otter is a key species for conservation in *Action for Wildlife: Dartmoor Biodiversity Action Plan*.

The main serious threat to otters today is from road kills with many animals reported dead each year. The otter is listed on the UK and Devon Biodiversity Action Plans as a species of conservation concern. It is protected by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and the European Habitats Directive.

More information on Otters:

UKBAP - <http://www.ukbap.org.uk/UKPlans.aspx?ID=428>

Devon BAP – <http://www.devon.gov.uk/dbap-mammals-otter.pdf>

The Mammal Society factsheet - <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/mammal/otter.shtml>

Ring Ouzel

Although still quite abundant in the north of England and in Scotland, the ring ouzel has suffered dramatic declines in recent years and is now on a Red List of conservation concern. Similar to a blackbird but with a distinctive white bib, these typical moorland birds are summer visitors to Dartmoor. With up to around 35 pairs recorded, Dartmoor is the main breeding area for the species in southern England.

More information on Ring Ouzels:

Dartmoor BAP - <http://www.dartmoor-npa.gov.uk/au-bap24.pdf>

Peregrine Falcon

Peregrine falcons breed in Meldon Quarry, nesting on high quarry faces. Such sites are typical of the species which is often found nesting on cliffs, in quarries or on churches. They feed on other birds, mainly pigeons, by flying high above them and then suddenly dropping onto them and killing them on the wing. The speed they reach whilst diving or 'stooping' through the air is said to reach around 200 km/ph, making them the fastest living thing on earth. Peregrine is specially protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

More information on Peregrine Falcons:

BBC website - <http://www.bbc.co.uk/nature/wildfacts/factfiles/245.shtml>

Hawk Conservancy - <http://www.hawk-conservancy.org/priors/peregrin.shtml>

RSPB - <http://www.rspb.org.uk/birds/guide/p/peregrine/index.asp>

Other wildlife you can expect to see:

As the Meldon area contains a great range of habitats, many other species are also recorded and it is always possible that new records can be made. Important groups to look out for include:

- Dragonflies
- Reptiles such as common lizard and adder
- Rare flowering and aquatic plants
- Lichens, mosses, liverworts and ferns
- Butterflies
- Birds
- Land snails (a large variety are known from the area)

More information:

Dartmoor BAP for mosses, lichens and ferns –
<http://www.dartmoor-npa.gov.uk/au-bap14.pdf>

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