Disused Railway Footpath, Worthy Down Hazel Dormouse Survey Report Summer/Autumn 2019

Worthys Conservation Volunteers

Introduction

This report details the methodology and findings of a hazel dormouse (Muscardinus avellanarius) survey carried out along a section of the disused railway footpath at Worthy Down. This is the first such survey of hazel dormouse undertaken by Worthys Conservation Volunteers (WCV).

The objective of the survey is to record and map evidence of dormouse activity within the designated site. This would highlight any potential constraints for ongoing nature conservation in the area.

Dormouse is a fully protected species under UK and European law, information for which is available online. Dormouse surveys using footprint tubes or tunnels are permitted under PTES guidelines, although appropriate caution should be taken. One of WCV's members is training for a Dormouse Licence.

The ambition is that any evidence of dormouse be recorded on Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre (HBIC) records; evidence or otherwise may also be notified to various bodies and interest groups, notably Hampshire County Council (HCC), Kings Worthy Parish Council, Hampshire Dormouse Group (www.hampshiredormousegroup.co.uk) and The Watercress Way, through this report.

Survey Summary and Conclusion

The hazel dormouse survey was carried out by WCV from late July to September, 2019, along a 1/2 mile section of the disused railway footpath, to the north of Kings Worthy, the old station platform at Worthy Down being at approximately the mid-way point. 44 dormouse footprint survey tubes, specially fabricated by WCV, were installed on low hanging branches in the vegetation either side of the footpath, at regular gaps. Tubes were inspected for evidence of dormouse footprints at regular time intervals (two weeks).

The key finding from the survey is **no** evidence of dormouse was found in the designated area, however this does not assume dormouse is not present but rather unlikely.

Dormouse is known to exist further along the old railway line towards Kings Worthy Junction, in the vegetation around what is known as Top Field. As dormouse can travel some distance, especially given the suitable vegetation, any conclusion drawn by the lack of positive evidence of dormouse from this survey must be taken with caution - dormouse may not be considered to be present today but there is every opportunity for dormouse in the future, especially through considerate habitat management.

It is the intention of WCV to repeat the exercise further down the line towards Kings Worthy Junction in the summer of 2020.

Survey Description

- Dates: 21 July - 21 September 2019;
- Transect Start-point: SU 47880 35509;
- Transect Endpoint: SU 48039 34510;
- Footprint Survey Tubes: 44, labelled "1" to "44";
- Tube Positioning: tied to tree branches at leg to head-height;
- Interval: 20 large paces;
- Ink: mix of pink pastel paint and cooking oil;

- Participants Involved (making, installation and inspection): 17;
- Survey Methodology:

Footprint tubes were installed along either side of the footpath generally within easy access, however some were installed along the top of the embankment where vegetation was a little more difficult to negotiate. Each tube was clipped with a white piece of paper, labelled accordingly; fresh ink was applied on each visit.

Although several tubes were clearly visible to the public, there was no apparent disturbance to the tubes during the survey. A notice was pinned to the information board near the bridge informing that a dormice survey was in operation. Some inquisitive passers-by did enquire.

- Footprint Tube/Tunnels:

See link below for guidance on making and using footprint tunnels

https://ptes.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Interim-Footprint-Tunnel-Guidance_-SB_AL.pdf

Survey Results

1. Survey tube inspection on 18 August:

- No evidence of dormouse;
- Some evidence of wood mouse, small bird, slug;

2. Survey tube inspection on 31 August:

- No evidence of dormouse;
- Some evidence of wood mouse, small bird, slug;

3. Survey tube inspection on 21 September:

- No evidence of dormouse;
- Some evidence of wood mouse, small bird, slug;

Report compiled by: Bruce Graham, January 2020