

## Case Study

# Binsted SNCI

## & its Dormouse Monitoring Program

### Background

Binsted Site of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI) covers 217 hectares, part of which is the largest block of ancient semi-natural woodland on the West Sussex coastal plain. The woodland's mix of habitats and geology gives rise to a very rich and diverse flora, including at least 11 species of sedges, carpets of Bluebell and the rare Adder's-tongue Fern.

Dormouse monitoring in Binsted SNCI was started in the 1990's by John Knight of West Sussex County Council. Since then it has been undertaken by a local volunteer expert, Ian Powell, with ecological analysis of the data carried out by University of Brighton. This long-term monitoring highlighted the woodland's important role in supporting Dormouse populations, which is a nationally declining and priority species.

In 2012, following more than 100 years of private ownership, a portion of Binsted SNCI was divided and sold to 12 different owners. The future management of the wood and continuation of a Dormouse monitoring program was uncertain.



Hazel Dormouse, *Muscardinus avellarius*. Matt Binstead - British Wildlife Centre

### The project

Subsequent to the subdivision of the wood, the SDNPA has three objectives:

1. Foster joint working between the new woodland owners in order to develop a collective approach to management, 'The whole is greater than the sum of its parts'.
2. Facilitate the continued management of the woodland. If left unmanaged it would become dominated by tall trees with little understorey. This loss of a species-rich plant community, for which the site was designated, would be detrimental to the Dormouse population and potentially its long-term viability.
3. Ensure the continuation of the existing Dormouse monitoring program, with the aspiration to extend it to all areas of the wood.

“We welcome and value the support and advice given by the Rangers of the SDNPA; Nina, Simon and Sam. Their involvement has been beneficial in allowing us to accelerate our plans for improving the diversity and health of our wood. We look forward to a long term mutually beneficial relationship. We are particularly excited and grateful to be involved with the dormouse monitoring project and appreciate having the expertise of Ian Powell on hand.”

*Julie and Tony Upson (Noor Wood)*

## The outcome

1. The South Downs Forestry and Woodland Development Officer, Nina Williams, contacted the new woodland owners to establish a dialogue and develop relationships. Nina’s initial site visits discussed the owners’ aspirations, objectives and management options for their woodland lot which provided the foundations for management plans. The woodland owners are very interested and enthusiastic about the care and management of their woods.
2. Each lot’s management plan outlined its special qualities, required management and signposted sources of further information. All owners were offered ongoing advice and guidance by Nina and the SDNPA. Building on these relationships, the SDNPA Central Downs Area team and Ian Powell were able to secure the long-term future of the Dormouse monitoring program within Binsted SNCI.
3. The monitoring program expanded from 150 original boxes in 2014 to 200 boxes in 2015, an increase of 33%. The SDNPA has contributed £70 worth of wood to make new and replacement boxes, which were constructed by Ian Powell. These would have cost £900 if they had been purchased ready made. The area being monitored within Binsted SNCI has also increased. Data collected by the monitoring program at Binsted SNCI informs its ongoing management, the National Dormouse Monitoring Program and University of Brighton research.



A few of the Dormouse boxes that were constructed, expanding the existing monitoring program in the Binsted SNCI.

## The future

1. The woodland owners will continue to share best practice through their informal owners group, whilst exploring opportunities for joint delivery of works using contractors, thereby delivering the economies of scale.
2. Nina and the SDNPA Central Downs Area team will continue to provide advice and support to the owners of Binsted SNCI.
3. The SDNPA Central Downs Area team will continue to support the monitoring program and its volunteers, and where resources allow, assist with expanding the area being monitored.

The success of the project illustrates the SDNPA’s role as an enabling organisation which is ensuring the future sustainability of Binsted SNCI and its Dormouse population.

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April 2015