

Surrey Wildlife Trust launches fundraising drive to save the adorable Dormouse

One of Surrey's most-loved but rarely-seen residents – the Hazel Dormouse – is the focus of a major new conservation and habitat creation campaign led by Surrey Wildlife Trust. The fundraising effort is part of a wider push to halt and reverse the decline of nature in our county.

The campaign aims to raise £25,000 to enable the Trust to improve and protect the hedgerows and woodlands that Dormice and many other species rely on. This will create healthy and connected corridors of habitat across the county, enabling Dormice to shelter, breed, feed and sleep safely.

These nocturnal and once-common rodents, characterised by large black eyes, golden-brown fur and long black whiskers, have been present in Surrey since at least the last Ice Age but have suffered big population declines due to the destruction and fragmentation of their woodland and hedgerow homes. Dormice numbers have fallen by 75% in Surrey over the last 25 years alone, with research* suggesting they are now in chronic decline nationally and should be reclassified as endangered.

Weighing a maximum of 30 grams and living for up to five years, Dormice are the only small British mammal with a furry prehensile tail, which they use to wrap around their body during lengthy winter hibernations as well as to assist with climbing. As their name suggests, they spend up to seven months of the year asleep in tightly-woven, low-level leafy nests approximately the size of a tennis ball.

Rarely seen on the ground when awake, these agile climbers

favour the branches of native trees such as hazel, hawthorn and oak, where they live in small family groups and feed on flowers, pollen, fruits, insects and nuts. They need a healthy and diverse ecosystem to survive, and have been chosen as the focus of SWT's new appeal because protecting Dormice and their homes will have positive effects on a myriad of species from Peacock and Red Admiral butterflies to other mammals including Hedgehogs to birds like Yellowhammers and Corn Buntings.

Surrey Wildlife Trust CEO Jane Chimbwandira says: *"It's easy to love Dormice, but their decline isn't just a tragedy for people who care about cuteness – it is symptomatic of the decline of the wild places that we all depend on. The hedgerows and woodlands that Dormice need to survive and thrive also support hundreds of other species, help to protect us from flooding and soil erosion, block out traffic noise, keep the air clean and store thousands of tons of CO2.*

"By supporting our campaign to save Dormice, you can help secure the future of Surrey as a great place to live not just for wildlife but for people too."

Katy Fielding, project manager of Surrey Wildlife Trust's Hedgerow Heritage programme says: *"Hedgerows are the forgotten heroes of Surrey's landscape. With a properly-managed hedgerow supporting up to a dozen types of native tree, not to mention a huge variety of plant life at the margins and base, they are superhighways of biodiversity, offering shelter and safe passage to countless species.*

"With something in fruit or in flower all year round, mature hedgerows also offer a permanently-stocked buffet for bees, bats, birds and butterflies as well as Dormice and other mammals. But with many in poor condition due to the decline of traditional management skills, our hedgerows are in urgent need of help.

"Even if you can only give a little, there's no better way to

assist nature's recovery than by backing our campaign to install and restore miles of these priceless habitats across the county."

Surrey Wildlife Trust has a positive vision for nature in Surrey. By working with landowners, local people and public bodies to create connected corridors of habitat – including wildflower meadows, hedgerows, and woodlands – right across the county, it believes that wildlife can not just be protected, but also become more abundant, enriching the lives of people from all our communities.

Where they live

Shy and nocturnal, Dormice are elusive during daylight hours. They are present across Surrey, but recent records suggest they are largely confined to small pockets of habitat, with only a few known strongholds. Discarded hazelnuts with a neat round hole nibbled in their shells are the best giveaway to their presence in local woodland and hedgerows.

What your money could do

£10 – plants a new hazel with the guards needed to allow it to flourish into a future nesting place.

£30 – delivers one metre of maintenance or restoration work (such as [hedgelaying](#)) on an existing hedgerow, which is vital for the long-term survival of hedgerows.

£50 – funds [coppicing](#) work in woodland habitats to create 'natural nesting places' for Dormice.

£2,000 – enables SWT to manage coppice rotation of 1 hectare of woodland reserve over four years.

Find out more about the campaign and how to contribute at www.surreylifetrust.org

* Shifting baselines for species in chronic decline and assessment of conservation

status: are Hazel Dormice *Muscardinus avellanarius* endangered? Eleanor R. Scopes, Cecily E. D. Goodwin, Nida Al-Fulaij, Ian White, Steve Langton, Katherine Walsh, Alice Broome, Robbie A. McDonald – first published: 07 February 2023

Hazel Dormice, their breeding sites and resting places are protected by law. A government license is required to handle them.