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Wildlife Trust

Dormice – awakening from the brink of extinction

Warwickshire Wildlife Trust



warwickshirewildlifetrust.org.uk

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Bringing wildlife back



More space for nature



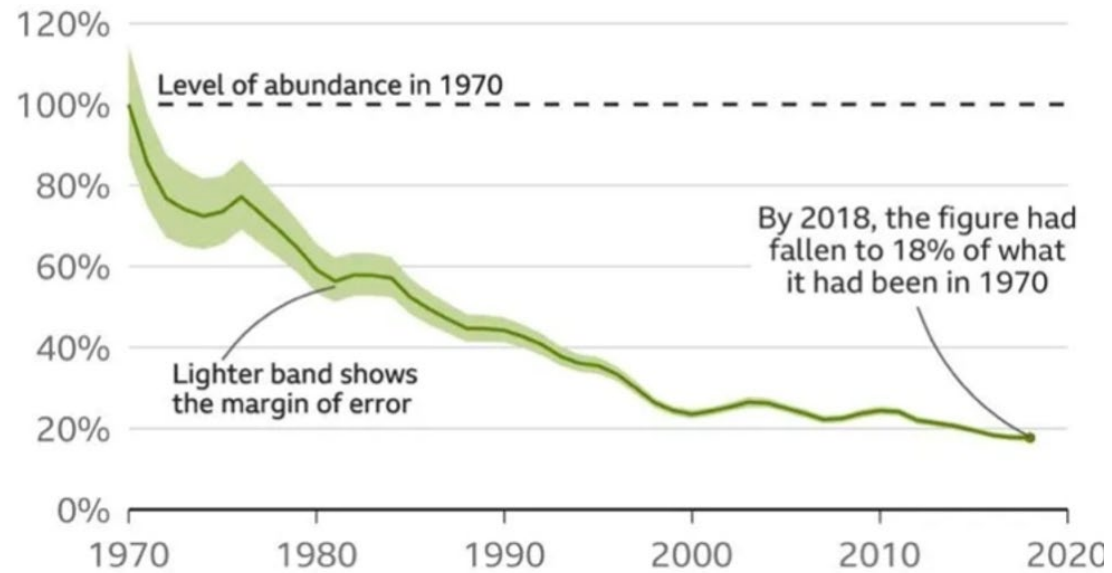
More people on nature's side



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England's species have been in decline

Change in abundance of 149 priority species compared to 1970



Source: Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs

B B C



Copyright: WWT



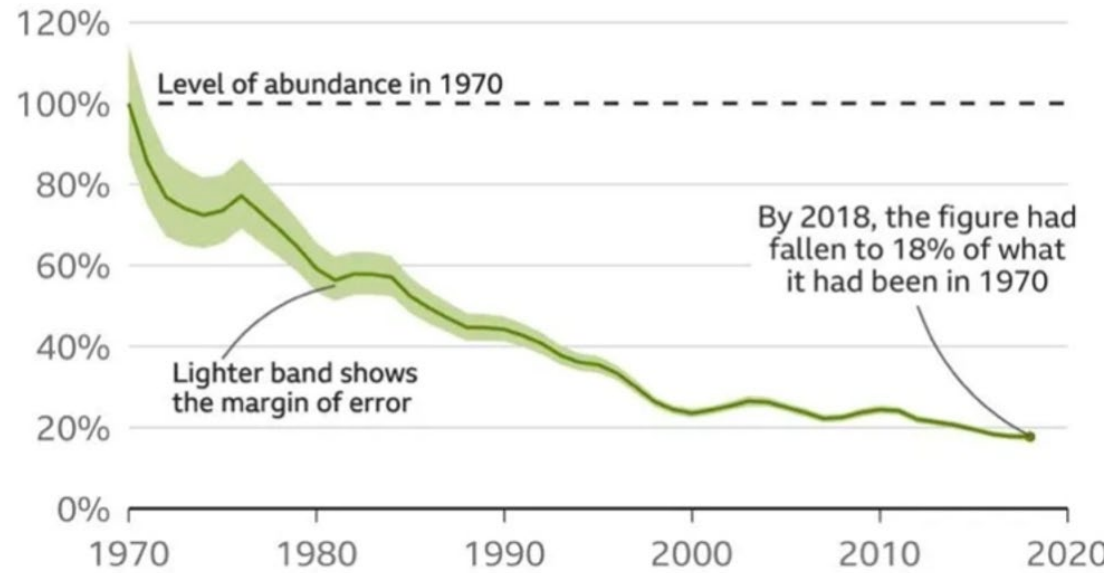
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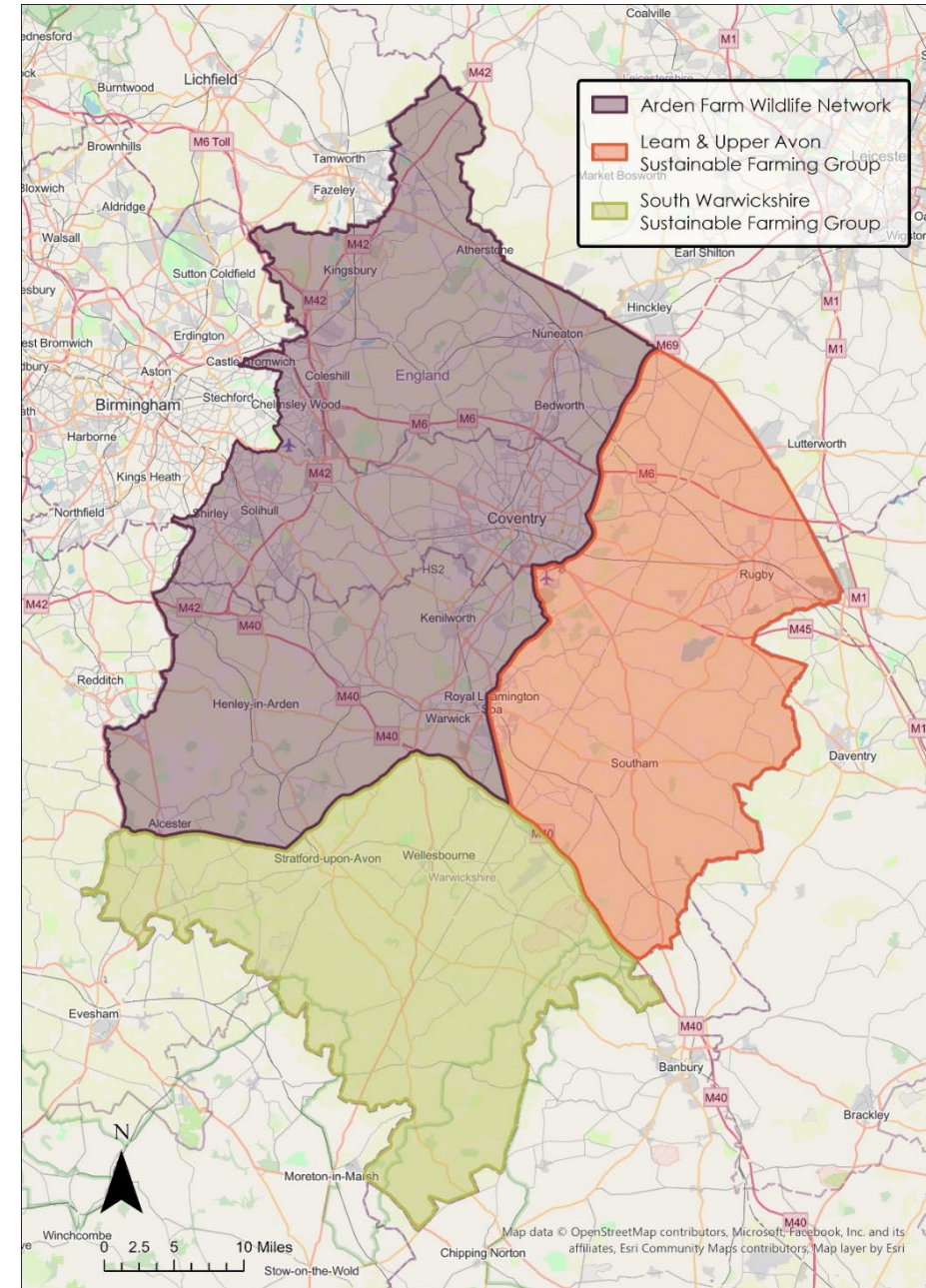
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BBC

#TEAM
WILDER

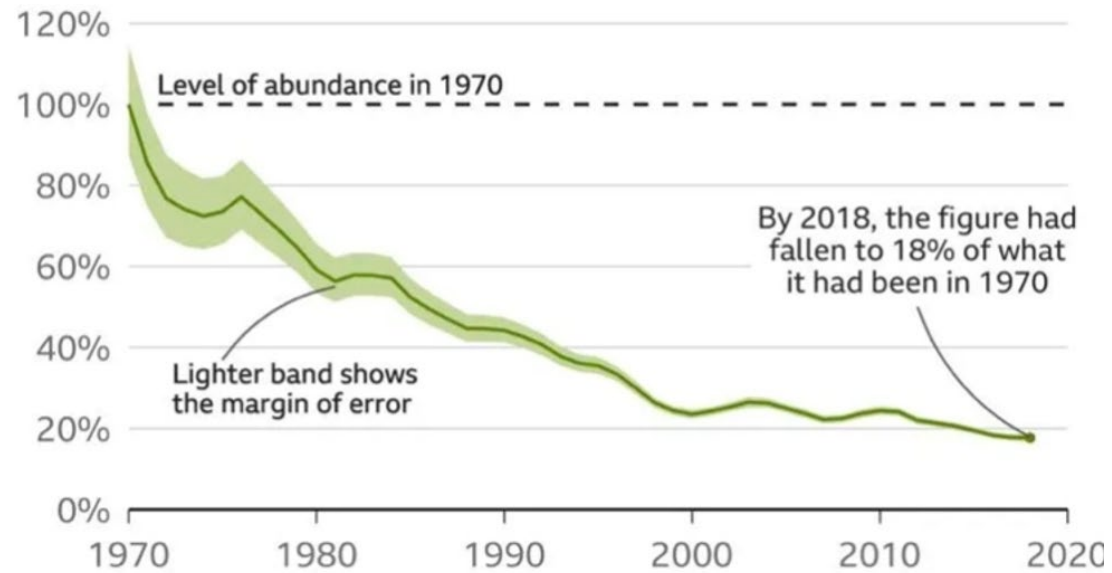




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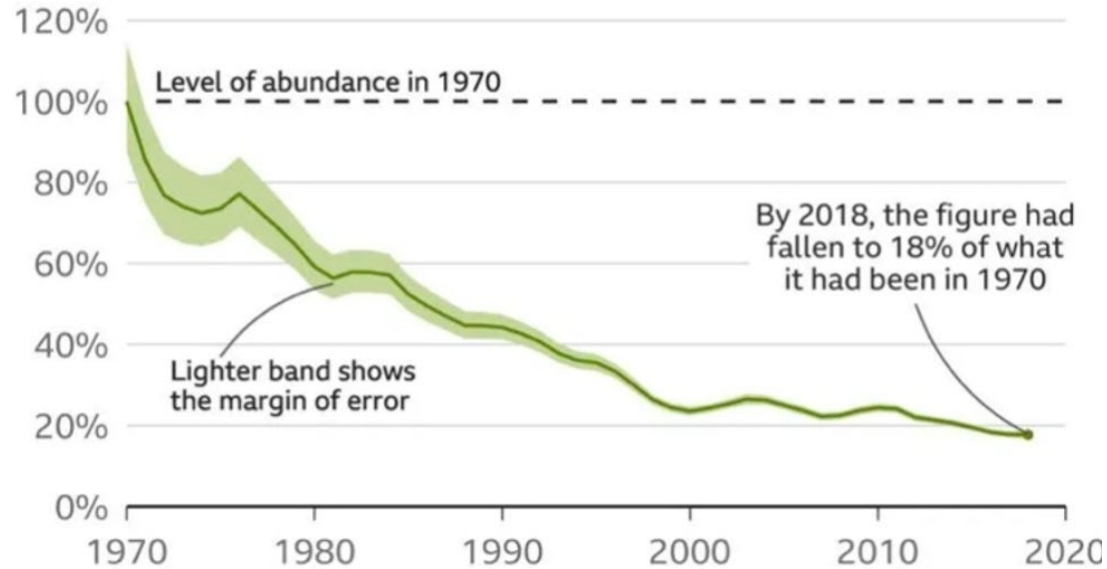
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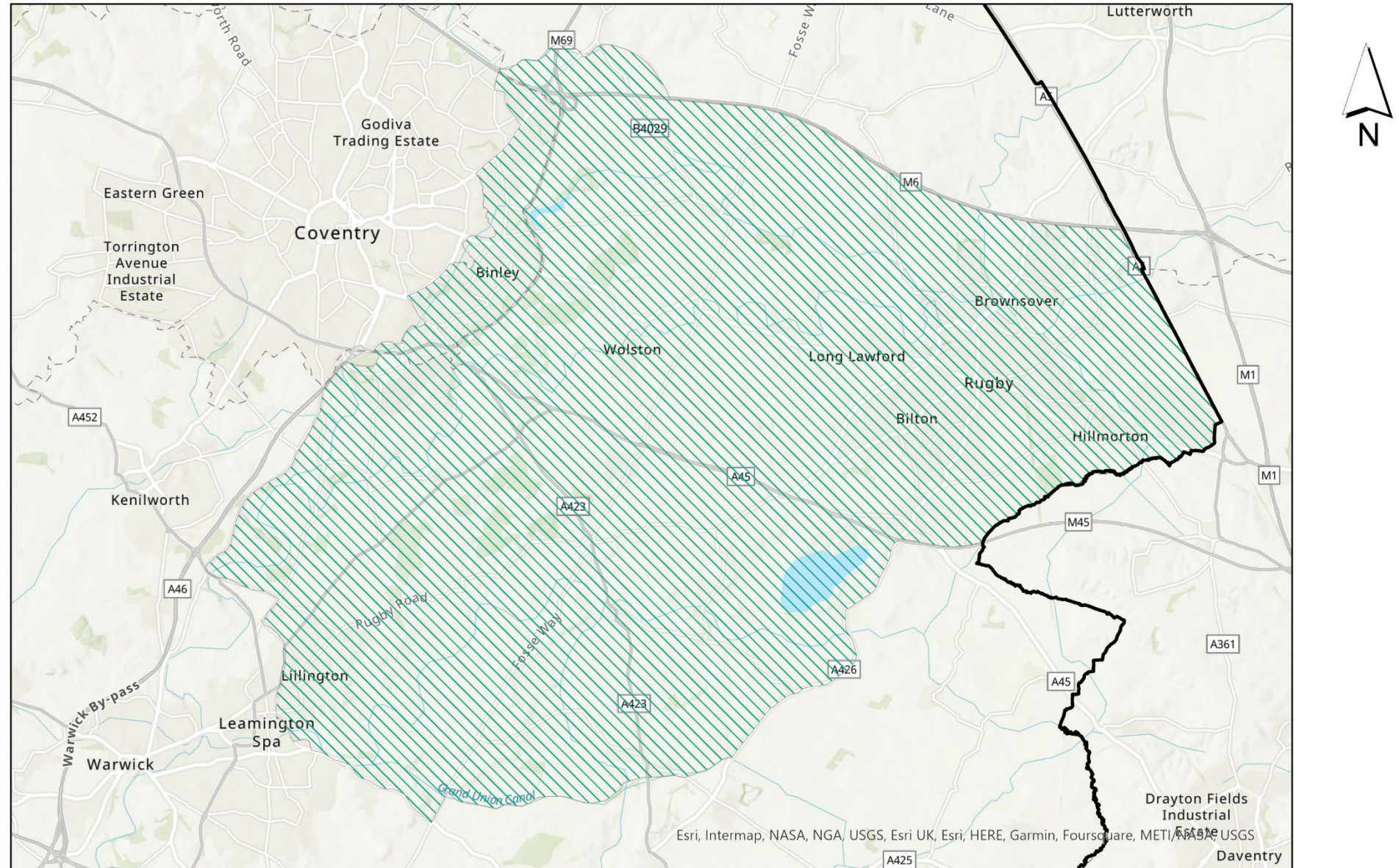
The right
solution in the
right place

Dunsmore Living Landscapes boundary

5
km

Legend

-  WWT boundary
-  DLL boundary





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Dormouse distribution



The dormouse is nocturnal, largely 'arboreal' and solitary, except when breeding.

0.62 ha to 0.82 hectares



Dormice are a low density species, with only 3 - 5 (but sometimes up to 10) adults per hectare in early summer. Typically they move within an area of 0.3-0.9ha.



Studies show dormouse density increases to 7 -8 per hectare in woodlands that have coppiced areas.

Dormouse ecology



Dormice are dependent on more nutritious foods than other rodents. They are unable to survive on grass and seeds like voles and mice.



In spring they eat nectar and fresh flower stamens from hawthorn, honeysuckle and bramble. They supplement this diet with insects, most frequently moth caterpillars.



Later in the year as plants begin to fruit dormice consume berries of bramble and yew, and nuts of hazel and beech.

Dormouse nests



Three types of nests are built; for breeding, shelter and hibernation.

The breeding nest is typically of shredded honeysuckle bark, tightly woven to form a ball, surrounded with a layer of fresh leaves.

The nest can be up to 15cm in diameter and is usually approximately a metre off the ground. They regularly use nest boxes if they are provided.

Managing for dormice



Best practice woodland management for dormice is a mosaic of small areas of woodland cleared to enable the trees to regrow and woodland flowers to re-establish.



Rotating the management of these areas over a 10-20 year period helps to create more variety and new areas for the dormice to move into, which is vital for their survival.



The best hedges for dormice are those with high biodiversity, a feature of ancient hedgerows. Management through hedge laying helps to thicken the hedges and promotes flowering and berry production.



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Threats to dormice



Hazel dormice are sensitive to weather and climate, both directly and indirectly.



Winter mortality rates are really high, with 60-80% of dormice lost in some years.



Warwickshire's hedges have declined by 36% of hedges between 1950 and 2000.



Predation is not a major pressure on dormice.



Copyright: Ian Pratt



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Bringing dormice back



38 dormice reintroduced in 2017 and a further 39 were reintroduced into a second woodland in 2018.



The project was delivered in partnership with Warwickshire Mammal Group, the People's Trust for Endangered Species (PTES) and the Zoological Society of London (ZSL).



It followed over a decade of woodland restoration management in Wappenbury Wood and Ryton Woods.

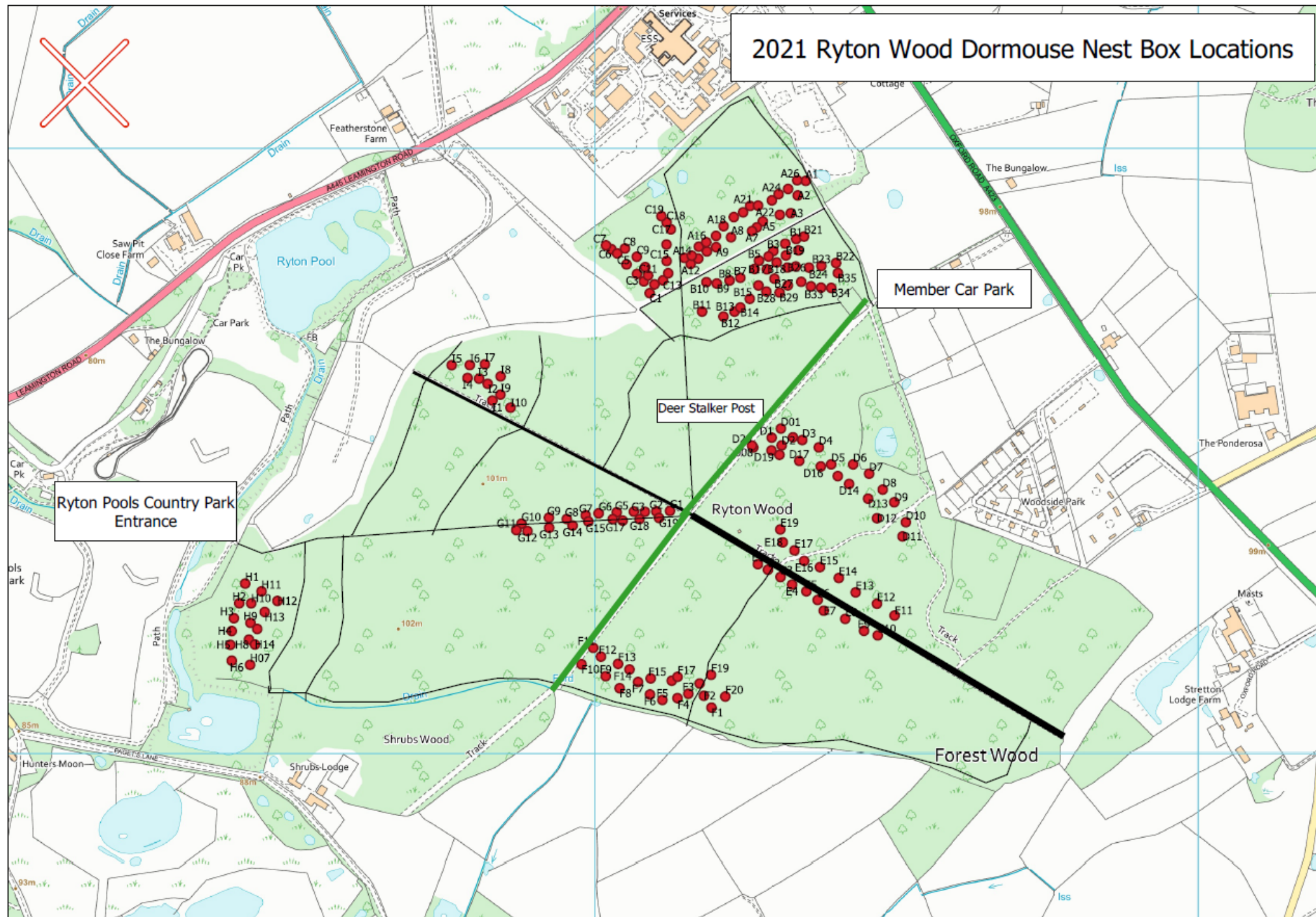


The dormice were microchipped to help with monitoring of their breeding and dispersal.



411 nest boxes installed across both woods, in locations covering a range of habitats.

Boxes have been added or moved since their installation to cover different parts of the sites.





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Monitoring



All the nest boxes were numbered and GPS located. They were attached to trees (mainly hazel) or fence posts to ensure dormice were off the ground.



The dormice nest box is a similar design to a blue tit bird box. However the entrance hole is on the back of the box, where it attaches to the post. This allows the dormouse to crawl up the tree or post and enter the box on the secluded side.



Nest boxes are sometimes removed during the winter if woodland works are occurring and then reinstalled before hibernation ends.



Copyright: Tom Watkins



Monitoring

- Monitoring occurs between May and October on a monthly basis. Any dormice found without microchips (and large enough) are chipped. All data is submitted to the National Dormouse Monitoring Database.
- Surveys have shown that the dormice are breeding and gradually dispersing. Numbers have varied over the years.
- Dormice were found in one area early on in the monitoring in a location which suggested that they had either travelled very quickly or a small pre-existing population had been discovered.
- There has been some tampering of the boxes in some of the locations requiring replacements, but these appear to be one offs and are not repeated after replacements are installed.





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Whilst the dormice are the stars of the show, the project would not have been the success it is without collaboration and huge effort from volunteers and experts alike.