

Wildlife Past and Present Final Report September 2015

The Wildlife Past and Present project has now concluded with a final check of the dormouse boxes installed in the Abbey Bridge Woods near Barnard Castle.

Unfortunately, no evidence of dormice was found but the boxes had been utilised by other species with 20 of the 25 boxes containing nest material of either blue tits or wood mice and the remaining 5 contained droppings of unknown species but no nest material.

In conclusion, we drew a blank on 4 out of the 5 species that were being surveyed for. No evidence of water voles, dormice or bird's eye primrose was found in Lower Teesdale, although there are known populations of water vole and bird's eye primrose in Upper Teesdale. Several red squirrel sightings in Lower Teesdale in spring and summer of 2014 led to a late inclusion of this species in the project. However, no further sightings have been reported since and no evidence of red squirrel presence was found at either of the sites at which squirrel hair tubes were placed.

The one success story was that of the otter. Positive records of otter spraint or sightings of otters were recorded at several locations along the Tees between Gainford and Romalldkirk, on the Greta and on Deepdale Beck. We can be confident in saying therefore that the otter has returned to Lower Teesdale.

Lessons Learned

This was quite a challenging project with the amount of time and resources allocated to it. In retrospect 3 staff days per year was not sufficient to plan, organise and undertake species surveys or to mobilise volunteer groups to undertake them.

Things to do differently

It might have been better to have targeted fewer species which would have allowed for more comprehensive surveying.