

## Goblin Combe Dormouse Project Cleeve, North Somerset

Kier

*BIG Challenge 2015 submission category: Community engagement*

### Project overview

Goblin Combe is situated in a valley in North Somerset which stretches from Redhill, near Bristol International Airport.

The combe is a 128 acre Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), with 80 acres being managed by Goblin Combe Environment Centre (a registered charity), four acres being managed as a nature reserve by the Avon Wildlife Trust.

After obtaining a government grant to improve the woodland for dormice, the environment centre was looking for support to help manage their woodland and completed surveys.

Kier, a large local service provider with water and power maintenance contracts, as well as waste and civil engineering contracts in the local area were contacted to see if they were able and willing to support in the project.

Kier's local environment manager, held a Natural England licence for dormice and was delighted to get



*Photo: Happy builders*

involved in a new and exciting project.

### What were the biodiversity conditions on site, prior to the enhancement?

The woodland was known to have a population of dormice at the eastern side due to survey work completed by Avon Wildlife Trust.

The rest of the woodland was a mixture of optimal and sub-optimal habitat for dormice but there were no records of them being present.

### Were there any specific conditions that led to you carrying out this work?

None. Kier's involvement in the project is purely voluntary, with both company time and employees personal time being donated.

### What were the biodiversity measures taken?

The project was initially set up in 2010, with targets of setting up 75 dormouse nest boxes, joining the National Dormouse Monitoring Program and linking the survey sites of the environment centre and Avon Wildlife Trust.

Between September 2010 and September 2013, 75 dormouse boxes were built

and placed in the trees around the combe, achieving the first target and allowing the centre to join the National Dormouse Monitoring Programme run by the People's Trust for Endangered Species.

Unwanted plywood was saved from Kier sites for the dormouse project so that it could be used to make the boxes; projects from all over the Somerset and Bristol area donated wood, allowing many boxes to be made and saving money.

The boxes have been made by a variety of people and groups including a large number from the centre's Woodwise Recovery Programme.

The programme supports mental health service users or people engaged in alcohol and drug rehabilitation programs, allowing them to learn new skills, thus increasing their confidence and improving self-esteem.

Other boxes were made by conservation volunteers, young mums groups who were able to bring their children along and help make boxes in the woods and Kier Services staff in their spare time.

Dormouse surveys are carried out monthly during the dormouse active season



*Photo: Building boxes*



*Photo: Dormouse survey*

and have been opened up to those who show an interest in the species and has allowed both students and graduates of local universities as well as ecologists and other professionals to gain the opportunity to observe, handle and learn more about an otherwise elusive species.

The project has been a great success and now regularly records dormice. In 2015 the environmental centre's survey area was linked with Avon Wildlife Trust's and now share data and are working together to improve the habitat for this protected species.



**How would you best describe the project?**

An enhancement.

**Further information**

Whilst Goblin Combe Environment Centre owns the woodland and now supports the project, it is run by Kier staff on their behalf.

As and when boxes are required the environment centre organises box building with relevant groups. Survey teams place the nest boxes on suitable trees, which are then numbered and mapped.

All dormouse records are given to the People's Trust for Endangered Species, Natural England and the local environmental records centre.

Data is also shared with Avon Wildlife Trust. Volunteers join from many different places and are able to join in as many surveys as they wish, many attend to help them gain experience to obtain their own dormouse licence or to set up their own survey site.

Whilst the project has now achieved its main goals, it will continue and hopefully with further survey work and habitat improvements numbers of dormice in will increase.



*Photo: Dormouse*

Working with specialist groups such as the Woodwise Recovery Program and the People's Trust for Endangered Species is becoming equally as important and it is hoped that the project can continue to support such groups as well as offering opportunities for members of the public and ecology professionals the chance to enjoy and learn about a species that is rarely seen and whose numbers have diminished rapidly.

Whilst the project is unusual, with the right habitat and a population of dormice it is entirely possible for it to be replicated. It has been a very positive experience for all involved in the project.

**What was your personal motivation for carrying out the enhancement?**

A love of wildlife, particularly dormice was the initial motivation to get involved but it quickly grew past that with the involvement of so many people.

Their enthusiasm for helping the project and love of the animals has been infectious. Every survey is looked forward to by all involved.