

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

AUTHORITY MEETING – 28 FEBRUARY 2008

NEW FOREST ANIMAL ACCIDENT REDUCTION STRATEGY

1 Purpose

- 1.1 This Strategy aims to reduce the number of road traffic accidents involving commoners' animals in the New Forest.
- 1.2 The first Animal Accident Reduction Strategy was written by Hampshire County Council and the Commoners Defence Association. Fresh impetus from the New Forest National Park Authority has seen the formation of the Animal Accident Reduction Group and a desire to update the Strategy and associated actions.
- 1.3 The Strategy summarises the background to the accidents and provides a framework for organisations to work together on the many aspects of the issue, especially through the Animal Accident Reduction Group.
- 1.4 Specific actions are included in the Animal Accident Reduction Action Plan which is updated regularly by the Group.
- 1.5 Although wild animals are also killed and injured in road traffic accidents (and deer can cause serious injury or death to drivers and passengers), this Strategy focuses on commoners' animals.

2 Background

- 2.1 The landscape of the New Forest has been formed over many years by the grazing and browsing of animals, especially commoners' stock: ponies, cattle, donkeys and sheep. In the autumn pannage season, pigs are released onto the Forest to eat acorns, bringing the total number of stock to over 7,000. Without these animals the Open Forest lawns and trees would not look as they do today; the Forest would soon become overgrown with brambles, gorse and other coarse vegetation. The system of commoning is therefore one of the key 'special qualities' of the National Park.
- 2.2 The commoners' animals roam freely over the Open Forest and have little or no road sense. They regularly feed adjacent to the roadside, use narrow lanes as routes to and from feeding areas and at times even congregate on roads, seemingly oblivious to traffic trying to pass. Some ponies which have been hand fed stay close to car parks and roads in the hope of further food, and foals will walk across the road to reach their mother.

- 2.3 With so many stock on the Forest, day and night, it is inevitable that road traffic accidents involving the animals will occur. In 1991, before the 40mph zone was fully implemented, 182 animals were killed. Since then the number of accidents has reduced (77-125 animal deaths per year) but this level is widely thought to be excessive.
- 2.4 Many accidents are avoidable and every one causes both suffering to the animal and anguish on the part of the owner. Animal accidents receive a lot of coverage in local newspapers, often as a result of letters written by concerned local people. Given the many other pressures on commoning, it is important that all possible avenues to reduce the number of accidents are explored.
- 2.5 In 2007, representative officers from several organisations met to form the Animal Accident Reduction Group. This has proved a useful forum for sharing information, developing ideas and prioritising action.

3 Pattern of accidents

- 3.1 A range of data has been collected over many years and although further detailed analysis is needed, those dealing with the aftermath of accidents have a good understanding of the pattern of occurrence.
- 3.2 Even with the blanket 40mph speed limit many people drive much faster. Whilst speed does not, in itself, kill animals, drivers have less time to react to the animals and the likelihood of serious injury is increased.
- 3.3 Statistics show that the majority of drivers involved in collisions with animals are local. Perhaps surprisingly, their awareness of the dangers seems to be reduced by the familiarity of driving through the Forest on a regular basis.
- 3.4 Conversely, visitors to the area take more time to enjoy their surroundings; they do not know the roads and tend to drive with more care when passing the animals.
- 3.5 Several relatively busy cross-Forest routes have particularly high numbers of accidents including the B3054, B3055, B3078, B3079 and C11. This is despite the fact that warning signs, speed detection and enforcement activities are concentrated on these routes.
- 3.6 There is some seasonal variation and many accidents take place during the hours of darkness. Some of the animals wear reflective collars but they are still hard to see especially against the headlights of approaching vehicles.

4 Animal Accident Reduction Group

- 4.1 No single organisation has the remit or resources to take sole responsibility for animal accidents. Indeed, the wide range of related issues requires an equally wide-ranging approach to prevention. The Animal Accident Reduction Group has taken on the role of coordinating actions.

4.2 Organisations represented on the Group include:

- The Verderers and Agisters
- Hampshire County Council (Road Safety and Traffic and Transportation Departments)
- New Forest District Council
- New Forest National Park Authority
- Commoners Defence Association
- Hampshire Police
- Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service
- Forestry Commission
- New Forest Road Safety Council
- New Forest Safer Roads Group

4.3 Three officers share the lead in coordinating, chairing and monitoring the work of the group: the Clerk to the Verderers, Hampshire County Council's New Forest Transport Strategy Officer and the New Forest National Park Authority's Head of Visitor Services.

5 Ways of reducing animal accidents

5.1 Members of the Animal Accident Reduction Group have collated a list of the ways in which people have attempted to reduce animal accidents in the past, together with ideas yet to be tried. These fall into the following categories.

5.1.1 **Data collection, analysis and dissemination** – to facilitate targeted application of all actions. The aim is to ensure that reliable data are collected and that causes and effects, trends and the seriousness of the issue are available, preferably on a website. Hampshire County Council has a Road Safety section on its website, as does the Verderers, but the Authority's website is likely to become the best one for regularly updated information.

5.1.2 **Road signs and road markings** – some statutory and advisory reminders are essential; even visitors to the area should not be able to say 'I wasn't warned'. However, signs are obtrusive in the landscape and care should be taken to avoid a multiplication of increasingly ineffective messages.

5.1.3 **Speed limits, detection, training and enforcement** – excessive speeds are a causal factor in some accidents. Local drivers should have animal accident awareness included in their initial training and speed limits should be enforced where these are regularly exceeded.

5.1.4 **Road surfaces and width restrictions** – together with other road characteristics, these have a significant impact on the speed at which people drive. They do, of course have to be weighed against the need for safe, quiet and 'comfortable' journeys.

- 5.1.5 **Increasing the visibility of animals** – to increase the time drivers have to react to the presence of an animal on the road. Reflective pony collars are an obvious example in this category and clearance of tall vegetation from the verges makes it easier to see animals approaching a road.
- 5.1.6 **Influencing animal behaviour** – mostly through the use of barriers such as cattle grids and fences. The commoners' animals have little or no fear of traffic and no effective hi-tech solutions (such as audio signals) have been discovered. Widespread use of fences to reduce animal accidents is restricted to the perambulation (the perimeter of the Open Forest) and the main 'fenced roads' from which the animals were excluded, starting with the A31 in 1964 and finishing with the A337 in 1975.
- 5.1.7 **Publicity, publications and articles** – a wide range of awareness-raising initiatives that ensure the risk of animal accidents is high in the mind of New Forest drivers. The challenge is to change the behaviour of drivers who are currently disregarding all the current messages, before they cause an accident.
- 5.1.8 **Schools and families** – well-informed and enthused children can be a powerful advocate of careful driving, influencing their parents and other chaperones. Many will also, one day, be drivers themselves who will hopefully remember what they learnt when they were young.
- 5.1.9 **Coordination** – since no one action or organisation is ever likely to find a miracle cure. Information needs to be shared, key messages agreed, ideas tested and limited resources targeted where the greatest effect is most probable.
- 5.2 Actions are prioritised using the following criteria:
- likelihood of benefit;
 - in keeping with National Park designation;
 - majority support;
 - cost of implementation;
 - not tried before.
- 5.3 Each action that is deemed worth trying is assigned a lead organisation, and a lead officer who endeavours to find backing and resources to take it forward.
- 5.4 The New Forest Transport Strategy Officer, Hampshire County Council, holds the 'master' copy of the current Action Plan, based on information received from lead officers.

6 Monitoring and review

- 6.1 The number and pattern of animal accidents is monitored to see if there are changes in response to Forest-wide or locally specific preventative actions. Some items in the Action Plan aim to improve the quantity and quality of information available about the accidents to increase the likelihood of trends and relationships becoming apparent.
- 6.2 The Action Plan is reviewed regularly through the Animal Accident Reduction Group, taking into account information about both accidents and resources available from stakeholders.
- 6.3 The Strategy will be reviewed at an appropriate stage.

