



# The Shared Forest

## Open your eyes...



The grazing of ponies and cattle has always been central to the pastoral economy of the New Forest. The animals are free to roam over the heath and woodlands, across the unfenced roads and along many of the lanes within the Perambulation. They are one of the most obvious and distinctive features of the New Forest and, for residents and visitors alike, they are undoubtedly a very important part of their experience of the area.

The culture and economy of commoning that underpins the management of the stock - including drifts, colt hunting and pony sales - is either completely invisible to visitors and those who live and work locally, or is seen as a quaint relic of the past. In fact, commoners are members of a living, changing agricultural community that relies on close co-operation to manage the extensive grazing of heath and lawn without which the delicate ecosystems of the New Forest would not exist.

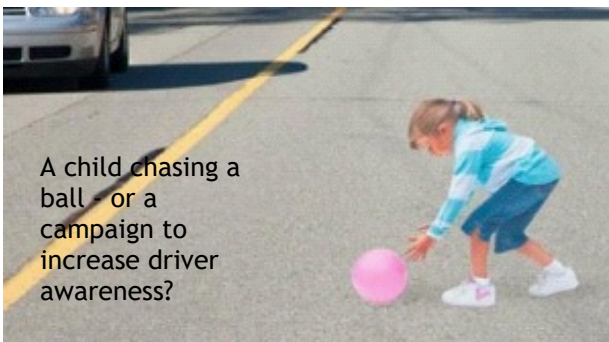
The Shared Forest project is part of the New Forest Landscape Partnership Scheme supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund. The project is aimed at increasing public awareness of commoning - both as a modern farming system and as an important part of the New Forest's cultural heritage - to encourage local residents and visitors to better understand commoning and help safeguard animals grazing on the open Forest.

**The project has two main strands.**

**The first strand is** investigating ways of increasing public awareness of the damage caused to the animals, commoning and other members of the public when lack of understanding leads some people to behave in harmful ways.

Most people who live in the New Forest will be aware that there have been numerous campaigns to inform and warn the public in the past: but things have not changed. So, the project has started by researching public responses to questions such as:

- 'Why do some people feed and pet the ponies or donkeys?'
- 'Why do some motorists drive too fast on roads across the open Forest?'
- 'Why do some dog owners allow their pets to worry and chase depastured stock?'
- 'Why do some people think it's alright to leave rubbish on the Forest?'



A child chasing a ball - or a campaign to increase driver awareness?

Using the responses we collect from our research and insights from Behaviour Change Theory, we are building innovative new campaigns aimed at making a real difference. Last autumn's driving campaign was a first step in the development of a Forestwide campaign this year, engaging local businesses and communities, and aimed at changing driving culture across the New Forest.

We are also working on a spring campaign to raise the awareness of locals and visitors to the negative effects and risks involved in feeding or petting ponies and donkeys.

Other campaigns will follow on as the project progresses.

**The second strand of the project is** the development of an educational toolkit to be made available via the Internet to all teachers - in schools and other educational locations - to help them provide imaginative and engaging projects based on the ecology and natural history of the New Forest. The toolkit will be aimed at children in Key Stages 1 and 2 and it will encourage the children who grow up in and around the Forest to understand it better - and understand the contribution that commoning makes to its ecology and its landscape.



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