



Commoning for wildlife

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Park Life

News from the New Forest National Park Authority

Spring/Summer 2019



NEW FOREST
NATIONAL PARK

FREE!

A window into the world of New Forest wildlife

Fallow deer at Fritham Credit Helen Pettitt



National Parks 70

The New Forest is a world capital for wildlife. Over half the National Park is designated for its international importance for nature – a higher proportion than any other UK national park.

Throughout 2019 we're marking the 70th anniversary of the Act which created UK national parks by celebrating the spectacular wildlife found in the New Forest thanks to its unique mosaic of habitats. This combination of natural environments – heathland, ancient woodland, bogs and mires, coast, farmland and grassland – is hard to find anywhere else in western Europe.

The National Park is home to an incredible variety of plants and animals, including:

- over 15,000 species of insect (two-thirds of the UK total)
- 44 species of mammal (including 13 of the 18 UK bat species)

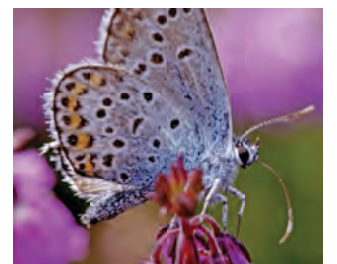
- at least 12 species of reptile and amphibian
- a third of British wildflower species
- over 70% of British dragonfly species breed here
- 46 nationally and internationally rare plant species (and for many it is their most important remaining British locality)
- the UK hotspot for rare breeding birds such as honey buzzard, nightjar and Dartford warbler.

Many of these species are as rare and magnificent as animals you might go to see on safari – just in miniature. They're often hard to see so most of us won't encounter them or appreciate what's beneath our feet.

New Forest National Park Authority Chairman Oliver

Crosthwaite-Eyre said: 'This largely hidden world of wildlife means that there are still huge gaps in our knowledge about the New Forest and we're still making amazing discoveries about the animals, birds, plants and bugs which call it home.'

'Join us in this bumper edition of Park Life on a journey of discovery with some of the experts who help care for this incredibly special place.'



Silver Studded Blue
Credit Big Wave Productions Ltd

Celebrating the UK's National Parks

Throughout 2019 we're celebrating the 70th anniversary of national parks.

It's 70 years since the 1949 Act of Parliament that established the family of national parks in England and Wales.

Known as Britain's breathing spaces, national parks are areas of spectacular landscape which are given the highest level of protection so that everyone can enjoy them and learn more about their habitats, heritage and history.

To celebrate the anniversary there is a nationwide Year of Green Action – a year-long drive to get more people from all backgrounds involved in projects to improve the natural world.

(see page 2 for details)



People of all ages are pledging to make a difference in the Year of Green Action

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Top views from the top deck



The New Forest Tour returns from 6 July to 8 September – the best way to explore the National Park. You can buy a Tour ticket and receive free bus travel on all adjoining routes for the duration of your ticket.

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Buy tickets via the morebus app morebus.co.uk/app or for more details visit newforesttour.info

National park facts

- There are 15 UK national parks, 10 in England, three in Wales and two in Scotland
- The first national park to be designated was the Peak District in 1951
- The New Forest National Park was designated in 2005
- The most recent national park to be designated was the South Downs, in 2010
- A BBC Four documentary A Year in the Wild Wood exploring the Forest's wildlife and commoning tradition
- A record 750 people attending the New Forest Volunteer Fair in January, exploring opportunities from 50 volunteer organisations
- A new award for the National Park's best green building
- Over 60 applications to a small grants scheme for schools and groups to bid for financial support for their green action ideas
- The nationwide Discover National Parks fortnight at Easter with activities in the New Forest including a Wild Play Day at the beach and Dig Burley community archaeology weekend with 35 gardens revealing their Time Team secrets
- A new Young Environmental Champion Award to be presented at the New Forest Show

Celebrating the UK's National Parks

Continued from front page



Over 750 people attended the New Forest Volunteer Fair with 50 organisations as part of the Year of Green Action

- Opportunities for hundreds of youngsters to take part in John Muir and National Citizenship Service schemes.

New Forest National Park Authority Chairman Oliver Crosthwaite-Eyre said: 'Our 15 UK National Parks are our most treasured landscapes – sanctuaries for wildlife, a place to reconnect with the outdoors, and where there is a distinct sense of history and tradition.'

'The National Park movement was born out of a desire for people to preserve and enhance the natural beauty of Britain's best landscapes and provide "breathing spaces" for people to enjoy.'

'In the New Forest, the Year of Green Action to mark the 70th anniversary is particularly focused on getting young people involved and encouraging future generations to continue to

appreciate and care for these special places.'

Find out more about Year of Green Action events and activities throughout the year at newforestnpa.gov.uk/YoGA



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What can we do to help wildlife?

It is widely acknowledged that wildlife globally and across the UK is in decline and sadly National Parks are not excluded from this trend.

Here Paul Walton, Head of Environment and Rural Economy at the New Forest National Park Authority, tells us about the issues in the New Forest and what is being done to tackle them.

The State of Nature Report 2016 (produced by a partnership of over 50 conservation organisations) identified two key factors as being responsible for much of the decline in UK wildlife: agriculture and climate change.

Intensive agricultural practice squeezes out wildlife while climate change will mean there are winners and losers, with key species struggling to adapt to the change in conditions and nowhere to go as habitats change.

While not immune to the impacts of climate change, the Crown Lands at the heart of the National Park have benefitted from the continuity of the commoning system and forest management. This relatively stable system of land management has meant that the area remains one of the most important and extensive sites for nature conservation in Europe. The key challenges here are maintaining the long-term viability of commoning, finding ways to restore fragmented habitats that once covered a much greater area and managing the people pressure the location of the New Forest brings.

Beyond the Crown Lands, in the other 50% of the 200 square miles of our National Park, mainstream farming practices have largely followed national trends with similar consequences for wildlife and loss of semi-natural habitats. Add in the need to manage the effects of recreation and pressures of



Restored stream at Fletchers Water Credit: Big Wave Productions Ltd

development and population growth beyond the National Park boundary and the need to address these challenges with a range of measures becomes apparent.

So how are we tackling these challenges in the New Forest?

We're working hard to ensure our spaces for wildlife are bigger, better and more joined up. We can only do this through a combined effort of organisations and landowners working together for wildlife.

Considerable investment has already gone in to enhancing key habitats through two multi-million schemes which the National Park Authority is part of.

On the Crown Lands and Open Forest, one aspect of the Verderers Higher Level Stewardship Scheme (worth £19m over 10 years) has restored miles of internationally-important wetlands for wildlife.

Elsewhere in the National Park, the £4.4 million National Lottery

Heritage Fund scheme called Our Past Our Future is improving woodlands, ponds, rivers and hedgerows and removing invasive species, which crowd out native plants, from our woodlands and waterways.

The New Forest National Park Authority also supports conservation efforts through:

- working with our partners (such as helping the RSPB to buy a new nature reserve in the north of the National Park - Franchises Lodge)
- using financial contributions from developers to fund a package of measures which off-set the impacts of new housebuilding on wildlife
- the work of the New Forest Land Advice Service, which helps landowners manage their land for wildlife through advice, practical work and access to grants



Paul Walton, Head of Environment and Rural Economy, NFNPA

The 25 Year Environment Plan, forthcoming Agriculture Bill and changes to farm subsidies is driving the investment of public money into environmental enhancement. In the coming year we'll be pushing ourselves and our partners to reflect these changes in national policy and do more for wildlife, gaining the active commitment of those who are best placed to make the changes necessary to enhance the National Park – developers, landowners, farmers and land managers.

This approach will need the support of the key charities such as RSPB, National Trust and Wildlife Trust – both in the way they manage their land but also the influence they can have in forming public opinion.

We also need to look beyond the New Forest's boundaries, as what happens outside the National Park often has more impact on wildlife than what happens within the boundaries. We'll be building on our work with neighbouring planning authorities to offset the effects of new populations surrounding our landscape and with the newly-launched Green Halo Partnership, which encourages businesses and communities across the region to work in harmony with the environment.

We will be working with them to acknowledge the value of national parks for both wildlife and people and to work with us in constructive ways to manage the pressures that the New Forest is under to ensure the National Park delivers more for wildlife in the future.

- our involvement with the New Forest Catchment Partnership, protecting and improving the special freshwater habitats
- education work by our rangers
- developing ways to manage recreation impacts
- supporting conservation projects through the National Park Sustainable Communities Fund
- working with partners to develop a management scheme for the Crown Lands when the Higher Level Stewardship Scheme ends next year.
- supporting volunteers to take part in practical conservation work
- promoting 2019 as the Year of Green Action with financial support from our Sustainable Communities Fund.



Southern Damsfly Credit: Martin Fowler



Nail Fungus Credit: Keith Talbot

Committed to Commoning and wildlife

If you've ever wondered just why the New Forest looks so different to other important natural places the answer's simple: commoning.

Commoners are local people who exercise ancient rights attached to their land or property – they are ordinary people with an extraordinary commitment to the Forest. The one most used is the right to turn out their ponies, pigs and cattle onto the Forest's heathlands and woods to graze.

This seemingly ordinary act, which has taken place long before written history could record it, where many people use the same piece of land in common, has literally created the landscape we see today.

Commoning is the reason the New Forest's grass is so short and why the bases of the tree canopies are pleasingly flat. It's also the reason the National Park is home to swathes of plants, fungi and insects, which are found almost nowhere else in the UK. The presence of the commoners' animals, and the practises used to maintain and enhance the conditions they need to survive, have created a unique habitat where everything, even the dung left by ponies, has a vital role in the ecosystem.

Naturalist Clive Chatters, who is a former chairman of the New Forest National Park Authority and Head of Conservation at Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, says: 'It's not for nothing that large herbivores, such as ponies or cattle, are known as the architects of the landscape in the New Forest. They give immense structural diversity, whether it's eating the lower foliage of an ancient tree, to creating the muddy tracks which some plants need to survive in. Large herbivores are absolutely elemental in having healthy ecosystems and they've been around for tens of millions of years.'

Evidence of commoning in the New Forest has been argued for going back to the Bronze Age.

'If you went to Totton around 3,500 years ago you would have seen farmers with their small, domestic cattle, sharing the landscape with wild cattle which could be up to two metres high at the shoulder and must have been terrifying,' he says. 'There's



Pony in bog, Shatterford Bottom Credit: Nigel Matthews



Clive Chatters

good evidence from the Testwood Lakes area that the two creatures were living together in the late Bronze Age and so, after the wild cattle died out, the domesticated animals provided the ecological continuity.'

An excellent example of an organism that only exists because of commoning tradition is the nail fungus. Resembling a white nail head with tiny black spots, the fungus lives on the fresh dung of equines that have consumed a high fibre, low nutrition diet, like the ponies and donkeys of the New Forest, which is why the National Park is the main place in the UK where it is now found.

It's more or less the same with the cruet collar moss which, says Clive, grows in equine dung and tricks flies into moving its spores around.

The ponies and cattle are equally important for the survival of the southern damselfly, whose UK stronghold is in the New Forest and only then south of the A31 in the streams between Burley and Brockenhurst, and between Lymington and Beaulieu.

According to Clive, southern damsels need: 'Those little, shimmering streams that we have here, where the edges are lightly poached (trodden) by the cattle's hooves' for their life-cycle.'

Hoof action is a vital part of the process required in the creation and maintenance of the habitat required by the small fleabane, one of the UK's most threatened flower species. The New Forest is believed to host around 99 per cent of the UK's population of this little plant.

'It looks a bit like a daisy with mildew and occurs in areas where cattle or ponies have churned up the mud in the winter and spring, which then goes bone dry in the summer,' says Clive. Ibsley is a good place to spot this flower, which, he says, grows in 'wild abundance'. It also thrives on the National Trust-owned Cadnam

and Penn commons. Rare pennyroyal, another plant which relies on hoof action, grows in these areas too.

The actions taken by humans to improve the environment for domestic animals also benefits the Forest's unique ecosystem.

Forest keepers sometimes pollard back wild holly trees, leaving the branches on the ground to provide winter nutrition for the livestock whose own actions in creating the 'browse line'; the flat base of the deciduous trees where they have stretched up to munch at the foliage,

is at human head height, says Clive. 'These browse lines have made it easier for humans walk through the Forest.'

The beautifully-named silver-studded blue butterfly has its strongest British population in the New Forest because, says Clive, the practice of burning heather to provide better quality fodder for ponies keeps the land in what has been described as a 'state of suspended adolescence'. 'Studies show that the butterfly doesn't like it when the heather is tall and what the silver-studded blues like best is the vigorous, young, fresh growth,' he says. 'It feeds on the heather then lays its eggs and the ants take them underground and care for them before the butterfly later emerges.'

Burning is a part of the Forest's management and can look harsh but even sheer destruction may not always be what it seems, says Clive.

'The New Forest's wartime airfields are wonderful for lots of species like carline thistles and wild thyme. And the bombing range near Godshell is particularly noted for one of Britain's rarest gentians, the early gentian, which grows on the chalk of an old bomb target.

'It's worth examining the forest's old bombing ranges because many rare plants require a bit of disturbance and to occasionally blow something up, as they did in the ranges, provides the kind of upheaval that benefits the rarities.'

Find out more at newforestnpa.gov.uk/discover

New Forest Commoners have five rights. Here's what they are and what they allow commoners to do.

- **Right of pasture**, commonable animals, which include donkeys, mules, ponies and cattle are allowed onto the forest to graze. A few commoners have the right to turn out sheep but few exercise it
- **Right of Mast**. The right to turn out pigs in the autumn to eat acorns

- **Right of Fuelwood**. The free supply of a stipulated amount of wood to certain forest properties
- **Right of Marl**. The right to dig for clay
- **Right of Turbary**. This allows certain commoners to dig peat for fuel.

The last two rights are not practised now.



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Naomi Ewald from the Freshwater Habitats Trust

Pond perfection in the New Forest

The New Forest is one of the most important sites for freshwater plants and animals in the UK.

This amazing landscape includes over 1,000 ponds within the woodlands, heaths, grasslands and floodplain meadows; and many thousand more temporary trackway and bog pools. Half of our New Forest ponds have been given 'priority pond' status - meaning they're of national importance. Of the estimated 500,000 ponds nationwide, the New Forest has five of the top 10 best UK ponds.

Together, they provide incredible freshwater habitats with exceptional wetland plant and insect communities; unrivalled in terms of their quality and quantity and home to some of our most endangered plants and animals. Over a third of all the UK's rarest pond plants and animals can be found in the New Forest.

Ponds of this number and quality have been lost from almost every other landscape in the UK. But here they continue to thrive, maintained by the gentle disturbance associated with the grazing ponies and cattle; and fed by clean, unpolluted water, a scarce resource outside of traditionally managed landscapes like the New Forest.

'So far the results show that 80% of the water bodies sampled in the Beaulieu catchment have clean water. This is outstanding compared to other river catchments we've surveyed.'

Naomi Ewald, of the Freshwater Habitats Trust, has been working with the National Park Authority, Environment Agency and other partners over a number of years in the New Forest.

She said: 'In some ways, the New Forest provides an embarrassment of riches with so many important species across so many important ponds, but they warrant greater attention than most.'

'In the UK, we have identified around 200 Flagship Ponds - sites supporting one or more ponds of exceptional quality; over 40 of these Flagship Pond sites are located within the New Forest.'

'Through the Flagship Pond project we have undertaken surveys of species and water quality; researched the ecology of some of the UK's rarest species; encouraged local residents to become species champions and prepared bespoke management plans for some of the most important ponds within the National Park.'

Meanwhile on the Beaulieu River, the Living Waters project focuses on managing and creating freshwater habitats and connecting them up for plants and animals. It is working with the Beaulieu estate, tenant farmers and horse owners to reduce small sources of pollution; has 35 volunteers regularly sampling water quality and has even installed 'eel brushes' which allow the European eel to move up the river more easily.

Naomi said: 'So far the results show that 80% of the water bodies sampled in the Beaulieu catchment have clean water. This is outstanding compared to other river catchments we've surveyed.'



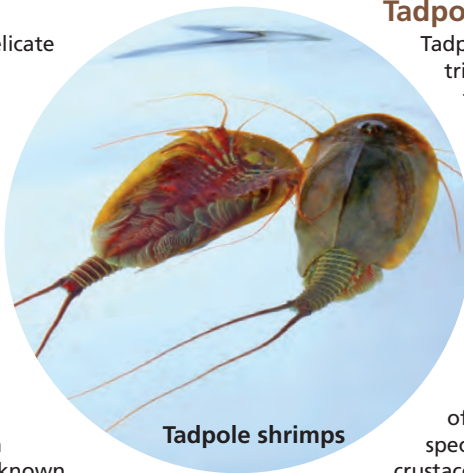
Pond rarities

Pillwort

Pillwort is a delicate aquatic fern confined to places where low nutrients, fluctuating water levels and grazing livestock stop it being crowded out by larger plants. It has been lost from nearly half its known sites in the UK, but in the New Forest it is still widespread and often abundant - making it one of the most important populations in Europe.

Medicinal leeches

Although they are bred commercially in labs for their incredible medicinal properties (to restore blood flow, prevent blood clots, and reduce inflammation) the wild populations of medicinal leech have declined to the brink of extinction, even in protected sites such as the New Forest. They mostly feed on amphibians, topped up by an occasional snack on a New Forest pony leg. Found in just five secluded ponds in the New Forest we are working hard to save these beautiful creatures.



Tadpole shrimps

Tadpole shrimps

Tadpole shrimps or triops are older than dinosaurs and can lie dormant for decades in temporary ponds. The New Forest National Park is of vital importance to the survival of this rare species of small crustaceans - it's one of only a handful of

sites in the UK where these awe-inspiring pond dwellers survive. These creatures will hatch as soon as there is enough rain to fill the pond, grow and reproduce in as little as two weeks, producing many thousands of eggs each generation, until the pond dries out once more.

Rare plants

At first glance wet winter pools in trackways look uninspiring. But take a closer look when they have dried out in the summer and you'll find a miniature world bursting with some of the rarest and most beautiful plants found in the UK - clusters of frothy white flowers along the reddish stems of coral necklace, vivid splashes of sun reflected from the flowers of yellow centaury, and droplets

of dew tempting insects into the carnivorous clutches of Sundews.

Dragonflies

The New Forest is home to more than 50 different species of dragonflies and damselflies (about two thirds of all the species recorded in the UK). Look out for the vibrant metallic colours of emerald damselflies on rushes around pond margins, the impressive emperor dragonflies constantly patrolling the water surface, or the striking golden

ringed dragonfly hunting out over the heaths. If you're really lucky you may also catch a glimpse of the elusive southern damselfly, one of the UK's rarest species.



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Wildlife sightings double thanks to landscape scheme

Volunteers laying a new hedge as part of the Better Boundaries project



New Forest Land Advice Service

Bats, butterflies and birds are beginning to thrive in newly managed woodlands, meadows and hedgerows thanks to efforts to improve and protect the Forest's landscape for wildlife.

4km of hedgerow and nearly 170 hectares of privately-owned woodland, grassland and heathland has been brought back into management since 2016 thanks to the New Forest Land Advice Service; that's the equivalent of 170 rugby pitches.

'We have already seen positive effects on species numbers and diversity'

Woodlands, hedgerows, meadows and heathlands are important havens for wildlife, but nowadays are often small, fragmented and not managed in the best way for nature.

The Land Advice Service has been working with private landowners, local countryside contractors and volunteers across 47 sites to enhance as many wildlife habitats as possible by providing advice and grants, clearing woodlands of invasive species such as rhododendron and restoring hedgerows and flower-rich meadows.

Already a hugely positive response from local wildlife can be seen thanks to monitoring being carried out across the sites by Hampshire & Isle



Dark Green Fritillary



Crossbill



Barbastelle Bat

of Wight Wildlife Trust. So far 6,959 new records for 208 species have been recorded.

Highlights have included a newly planted hedgerow being used for the first time in 2017 as a flight path by common pipistrelle bats and several sites have seen a doubling and sometimes tripling of butterfly and bird species, including the crossbill, spotted flycatcher and dark green fritillary. Double the number of bat sightings have also been recorded in a copse in 2018 compared to 2017 where vegetation management has been carried out.

Much of the rhododendron clearance work has been undertaken by volunteers using hand-held saws and cutters and traditional techniques have been used where possible. This has included hedgelaying with hand tools, hazel coppicing and timber extraction from remote woodlands by working horses.

Sarah Jackson, Senior Ecologist for Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, has been leading the monitoring. She said: 'It's been fantastic working with the Land Advice Service on the Better Boundaries, Nature's Stepping Stones and Working Woodlands projects to monitor the effects of

practical habitat management work on wildlife. We have already seen positive effects on species numbers and diversity as a result of works, which is amazing in such a short timeframe.'

Julie Melin-Stubbs, New Forest Land Advice Service Manager, said the three projects are among 21 initiatives which form the Our Past Our Future landscape partnership scheme in the Forest. It's backed by £4.4 million from the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

She said: 'Often when people envisage the New Forest they think of the grazed commons and woodland inclosures which are internationally important for wildlife. However, there is another half of the National Park where farmland and other privately-owned areas of countryside can add value to the heart of the New Forest by linking important wildlife sites together and expanding the area available for the species we have here.'

'Thanks to the National Lottery Heritage Fund, the many landowners we are working with, our amazing volunteers, plus the skills of the countryside contractors we have brought in to help us, we have started to see wildlife benefitting from the practical conservation work we are undertaking.'

Litter heroes out in force

An estimated 1,200 litter heroes worked hard in the Forest and on the coast at over 50 litter pick events to clean up the New Forest National Park.

The events tied in with The Great British Spring Clean, a national campaign led by Keep Britain Tidy, and the Year of Green Action which encourages more people from all backgrounds to get involved in projects to improve the natural world.

Everyone from surfers to scouts, schoolchildren and rangers lent a hand, with one volunteer even finding £10 for their trouble.

Nigel Matthews, Head of Recreation Management and Learning at the New Forest National Park Authority, said: 'Litter is a great threat to our natural world, having a devastating impact on the free-roaming animals in the National Park and the wildlife in our Forest and oceans. We'd like to thank all the litter heroes who took part in the spring clean and those who are out litter picking all year round. We're asking everyone to please "take your litter home".'



Litter heroes at the spring clean at Bolton's Bench in Lyndhurst



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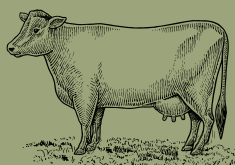
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Feathered visitors flock to the coast



Lymington Keyhaven Nature Reserve is one of the best places for coastal birds



Lapwing Credit Marc Baldwin

Many people don't realise that the New Forest National Park has over 26 miles of coastline – and one of the most spectacular sites is Lymington Keyhaven Nature Reserve.

Covering 500 acres from the mouth of the Lymington River to Keyhaven village, with footpaths and open access along the sea wall and marshes, it's a mecca for bird life from Europe and beyond.

The site is of international importance for the large numbers of breeding, feeding and roosting birds that it supports.

Pete Durnell is Hampshire County Council's Site Team Manager for the New Forest and Central Hampshire and manages the reserve.

He said: 'During the winter months there are a large number of waders and wildfowl using the site, migrating from Siberia and northern Scandinavia and they spend the winter with us here. You'll see spectacular displays with Brent geese, wigeon, black-tailed godwit, big flocks of lapwing and golden plover, sometimes disturbed by predators such as peregrine falcons and marsh harriers.'

Key to Pete's 'management team' are some cows belonging to commoners.

'Our birds like wide open expanses with short grass so predators can't hide,' Pete said. 'So each summer the cattle come off the Forest and graze the reserve. It's one of the most important types of management we do. Apparently years ago they were driven off the Forest up Lymington High Street every summer!'

Pete's been working at the reserve for 17 years and has seen several changes in his feathered visitors who come to enjoy the lagoons, marshes and salterns, which were once the centre of a thriving salt-making industry.

'Avocets have come over the past few years and are almost resident

now, which is fantastic to see,' he said.

'Spoonbill are also fairly new – you might have seen one or two when I started but we had eight on the reserve recently. Pintail duck records from the 70s and 80s show maybe 20 or 30 but now we have 300 to 400 overwintering here. Little egrets and Mediterranean gulls are also starting to come. It could well be because of climate change – they're able to survive here now because the winters are milder.'

Pete's team also manages the site for 250,000 human visitors to enjoy the bird life, fabulous views and opportunities for cycling and

walking. It's particularly popular for dog walking.

He said: 'The site is part of the National Park but the wildlife here is quite different. The great thing about the reserve is that you can see birds all the time – there's a ditch and fence between them and the visitors in most areas so they feel confident about seeing people.'

'However winter birds in big numbers can easily be disturbed and rare ground-nesting birds come here to breed so we do ask people to keep their dogs under close control. It's a nature reserve for the birds – they're our number one priority.'

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New Forest is the best place for internationally rare habitat

Andy Hill
PHOTOGRAPHY

THERE are no jaguars or giant anacondas in the New Forest National Park. But, when it comes to ecological importance, this place is home to habitats that are actually rarer than the mighty Amazon rainforest.

Why?

Because the New Forest has the most extensive area of heathland – land that is below 300 metres in altitude characterised by dwarf shrubs growing on acidic soil – remaining in Europe (over 10,000ha).

For this reason it's been recognised with an international nature conservation designation as a Special Area for Conservation but, says New Forest National Park Ecologist, Ian Barker, what makes it so special is that it is actually a 'mosaic of habitats'.

'It's very much an intimate mix of dry, wet and humid lowland heath, wetlands, acid grassland and wood pasture and is one of the few places in the UK where you get all these different habitats nestling up against each other and mixing in together – you often can't really see the boundaries as it transitions,' he says. 'Biologically, this helps to make it extremely diverse.'

It's also, surprisingly, almost entirely man-made.

'It's a cultural landscape formed by the actions of man over thousands of years,' he says. These actions included tree felling which removed the source of nutrient for the soil, making it more acidic and less fertile, which in turn allowed different species to establish and thrive.



National Park Ecologist Ian Barker

The New Forest's lowland heath is still managed today, not just by the actions of the ponies, donkeys and livestock which roam the National Park, but also by humans, who undertake controlled burning to manage gorse and prevent the invasion of scrub. 'If scrub became established again it would invade the valuable, more open habitats and change the soil nutrient level,' says Ian, who explains that the 'washing out' of these nutrients from the soil has helped established the conditions that plants such as heather species need to thrive. 'It means that no one plant has become dominant,' he says.

And that's what makes it so important for the creatures and plants that live here, some of which are barely found anywhere else in the UK.

'If people think of the New Forest National Park area as a setting, the rare plants and animals and insects are like jewels embedded within it,' says Ian. 'Coming across a green tiger beetle, a nightjar, or a bog orchid is literally like finding a little gem.'

Green tiger beetle
Credit: Paul Brock



And given that lowland heath is so rare, and that the Forest has a relatively large, contiguous area, there are a huge number of gems to discover.

The best-known is probably the Dartford warbler. 'The male has been described as being the punk of the bird world and it's certainly very distinctive-looking,' says Ian, describing a 'long tailed warbler with red eye ring and rusty plumage', which can be spotted singing its scratchy song on top of the heathland gorse bushes.

'Green tiger beetles are not restricted to the heathland but they like this area and are wonderful things to find; a beautiful iridescent green colour, the same size as a thumbnail,' he says.

He is also keen to encourage visitors to 'get on their hands and knees' and look carefully at the heather. 'From above heather can look very similar but look more closely and you'll discover the ling flowers are quite different from the bell heather and you can also find cross-leaved heath,' he says.

However, there are three particular Forest treasures, which Ian says, are worth keeping an eye out for.

'Our orchids really are beautiful,' he says. 'They benefit greatly from what we call the Open Forest, the core New Forest, which is unsown, grazed and is not subject to any agricultural improvement; no fertilisers or use of chemicals.'

The orchid that visitors are most likely to see is the heath spotted orchid although, says Ian, the wetland areas of the lowland heath are particularly important as one of the few places to spot a bog orchid in lowland England.

Bird lovers – or anyone who enjoys tracking down a creature of myth and mystery – will want to spot a nightjar, a highly-camouflaged, ground-nesting species which appears at dusk to catch insects and moths, and which makes a strange 'churring' sound.

However, Ian's particular interest is the smooth snake; he's part of a survey of the creatures, which are so-called because, unlike the other

A smooth snake Credit: Stuart Woodley



British snakes, they do not have a small ridge on their scales.

'They are quite difficult to find but if you are lucky enough to spot one it's fascinating to watch them,' he says. Smooth snakes are non-venomous and completely harmless to humans and pets, preferring to crush their very small prey. The survey will discover how and where they are thriving in the National Park.

'Some people feel the lowland heath is a bit bare, and because it is not a habitat which has large species, can't be wildlife rich,' says Ian. 'But beauty is in the eye of the beholder and if you can take a little more time, and look a bit more carefully, you can find the most wonderful things to see.'



Heath spotted orchid, Beaulieu Heath
Credit: Clive Chatters

Witnesses to history

– the New Forest's ancient trees

Park Life Spring/Summer 2019 13

Immensely old and full of character and charisma, ancient trees have been sculpted by time and revered by generations of local people.

They are great survivors and have lived through remarkable changes in the world around them. Many were fully grown trees when the Roundheads and Cavaliers were fighting the English Civil War or even when Elizabeth I defeated the Spanish Armada.

The New Forest is of exceptional importance for ancient and veteran trees. It has a greater concentration than anywhere else in northern Europe - more than 1,000 have been recorded here so far!



Nik Gruber,
NFNPA Senior Tree Officer

Nik Gruber, the New Forest National Park Authority's Senior Tree Officer, said: 'Ancient oaks may be 400 to 800 years old, while beech can reach 300 to 400 years. The



Andy Page, Forestry England's Head of Wildlife in the New Forest

most ancient of all are yews, some of which are thought to be over 1,000 years old. You can identify the oldest trees because they'll have a great girth, often a hollow trunk or branches and a much-reduced crown.

'Veteran trees will be the next generation of ancients; they are slightly younger in age, often still with a full crown, but clearly showing signs of age such as damaged branches or dieback.

'Every ancient tree provides an ecosystem in its own right and can be home to hundreds of different species.'

Andy Page, Forestry England's Head of Wildlife in the New Forest said some of the

most obvious species are bats. He said: 'At least 13 of the 18 British species of bats are found in the Forest, including the rare Bechstein's and barbastelle bats, both of which have important populations here.'

The continuity of generations of ancient and veteran trees existing close together makes the New Forest particularly important for woodland lichens and beetles. The Ancient and Ornamental woodlands have the richest lichen flora in lowland western Europe.

Andy said: 'These curious associations of algae and fungi require clean air and many are restricted to ancient trees.'

'Some of the woods, such as Mark Ash, just south of Bolderwood, hold more than 250 different species of lichen, and the New Forest is home to several species that have so far been recorded nowhere else.'

Saproxyllic beetles are specialists that rely on plentiful supplies of dead or decaying wood to complete their life cycles. The veteran and ancient trees of the New Forest support at least 326 native species of these beetles, including the well-known

Ancient beech tree at Millyford Bridge

stag beetle and the equally spectacular noble chafer.

Andy said: 'Many are rare, and the Forest is the main stronghold for 10 British species. This makes the New Forest the most important site for saproxyllic beetles in the UK, along with Windsor Great Park, and also one of the premier sites in Europe.'



Noble Chafer
Credit Paul Brock

Help protect our trees

The New Forest National Park Authority is promoting 'biosecurity' — ways to prevent harmful tree pests and diseases being introduced and to limit their spread. Here's how you can help:

- drive and park your vehicle only on hard-standing surfaces such as tarmac where possible when visiting outdoor areas such as woodlands, parks or gardens
- clean mud, organic material and water off your boots, bikes and buggies — and the dog — before you leave, because fungi, bacteria and insects can live in these materials
- 'Don't risk it!' — please don't bring any plant or tree products back from trips abroad, because these might be carrying harmful non-native tree pests or pathogens
- report any trees that you suspect are in ill-health to the Forestry Commission using Tree Alert.

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Exhibitions and events at the New Forest Heritage Centre

Gallery open daily, 10am to 4.30pm to 27 October (10am – 3.30pm at all other times)

New Forest Heritage Centre, Lyndhurst, SO43 7NY

Forestry Commission Centenary Year

Open daily until 7 July

Celebrating the Forestry Commission's achievements over the past century, this exhibition also looks at the importance of forests as biodiverse habitats.

The Seventh Annual New Forest Open Art Exhibition

13 July – 7 Sept, open daily

An exhibition showcasing the best of the creative New Forest.

Family Discovery Days

30 July

1, 6, 8, 13, 15, 20, 22, 27, 29 Aug

New Forest Heritage Centre, Lyndhurst, SO43 7NY

Learn about the New Forest and have fun with our family-friendly activities. No need to book, just drop in between 10am and 3pm – different activities each day. (Museum entry is free, donation per craft activity.)

Key

■ New Forest National Park Authority led event

■ Forestry England led event

■ New Forest Heritage Centre led event

MAY

TALK: 'A FORESTER'S CAREER' BY HARRY ORAM

Wed 22 May, 7pm

New Forest Heritage Centre, Lyndhurst, SO43 7NY

Harry Oram, former Chief Forester / Operations Manager at the Forestry Commission, managed the timber enclosures and the Open Forest. With help from the collections here in our museum, he will recall how some of the forestry tools were used.

£6 per person, £4 for friends. Booking advised. Enquiries 023 8028 3444

WILD WEDNESDAYS

Wed 29 May

Drop in between 10.30am – 3.30pm

New Forest Reptile Centre, A35 south of Lyndhurst

Enjoy a date with nature at the Reptile Centre, with fun activities for the whole family. Quiz trail and making activities for children. Come and see our nestcam video from a bird of prey's nest as well as the reptiles and amphibians.

Car parking donations welcome. Suitable for all.

Dogs welcome on leads. No booking required. Enquiries 0300 067 4601.

JUNE

NEW FOREST FILM FESTIVAL (8 – 16 JUNE)

Including 'New Forest: A Year in the Wild Wood'

Thurs 13 June, 7pm

Lyndhurst Community Centre

Producer Nick Stringer from Big Wave Productions will be taking your questions about his BBC Four documentary which took over a year to make in the New Forest. £5 on the door or to book visit filmnewforest.com/film-festival

HEDGEROW MEDICINES WORKSHOP

Sat 8 June

10.30am – 3pm

New Forest Heritage Centre, Lyndhurst, SO43 7NY

Kate Scott is educated in sustainable agriculture. She has worked alongside her husband for 25 years in both forestry and agriculture and will share her knowledge on how to use hedgerow plants to create simple remedies.

Cost £45pp, provide own lunch. Booking essential.

Enquiries 02380 283444.

ROYDON WOOD FAIR

Sun 9 June, drop in between 11am – 4.30pm

Roydon Woods Nature Reserve, Lymington, SO41 8PN

Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust is hosting the 10th wood fair supported by the New Forest National Park Authority. Woodland products ranging from charcoal to hurdles will be on display on the day and there will be plenty of opportunity to have a go at woodland crafts. Lots of locally produced food and products will be available and a wide variety of children's activities will be laid on.

Free entry. Dogs welcome. Please bring suitable clothing for the weather. Children must be accompanied by an adult. Plenty of parking at Roydon Woods Nature Reserve, off Sandy Down, Setley, near Brockenhurst (Map ref. SZ 313 995).

FAMILY FUN DAY

Sat 22 Jun, drop in between 10am – 2pm

New Forest Heritage Centre, Lyndhurst, SO43 7NY

Fun and entertaining activities for all the family, all in aid of our museum and library.

Donations for activities. Suitable for all ages (children must be accompanied by an adult). No booking required. Enquiries 02380 283444.



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6 July – 8 Sept

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Go to thenewforesttour.info for further information and to book tickets. Concierge service also available at Brockenhurst Station.

ROCKBOURNE VILLA FESTIVAL OF ARCHAEOLOGY

Fri 19 – Sun 21 July, 11am – 4pm

Rockbourne Roman Villa,
Fordingbridge, SP6 3PG

Join Avon Valley Archaeological Society (AVAS), Hampshire Cultural Trust (HCT) and New Forest National Park Authority (NFNPA) for a long weekend of exciting archaeological events and activities at Rockbourne Roman Villa. Get hands-on experience with a variety of archaeological activities and skills and use new technologies and techniques to reveal more about the old.

Free entry although donations welcome. Enquiries: 01590 646600.

WILD WEDNESDAYS

Wed 24 July, drop in between 10.30am – 3.30pm
New Forest Reptile Centre, off A35 south of
Lyndhurst

See Wed 29 May for details.

FUN IN THE FOREST

Thu 25 July, drop in between 10am – 3pm

Puttles Bridge car park, Brockenhurst,
SO42 7QB

Catch up with the New Forest Rangers for a host of activities such as scavenger hunts, colouring and crafts. Wear old clothes and wellies and be ready for forest fun!

Suggested donation £1/child. Suitable for all (children must be accompanied by an adult). No booking required. Enquiries: 01590 646600.

NEW FOREST SHOW

Tue 30 July –
Thu 1 August

New Park, Brockenhurst
SO42 7QH

The New Forest Show offers visitors 30 acres of showground for the whole family to explore and is now rated among the top 10 agricultural shows in the country.

Go to newforestshow.co.uk

WILD WEDNESDAYS

Wed 31 July, drop in between 10.30am – 3.30pm
New Forest Reptile Centre, A35 south of
Lyndhurst

See Wed 29 May for details.

MARINE WONDERS

Wed 7 and Thu 8 Aug,
drop in between
10am – 4pm

Lepe Country Park,
SO45 1AD

Come to Lepe for two days of marine-themed fun: seashore safaris, arts and crafts, storytelling and much more.

Free event, donations for craft activities welcome. No booking required. Parking charges apply (free for blue badge holders). Suitable for all (children must be accompanied by an adult). Enquiries 023 8089 9108

WILD WEDNESDAYS

Wed 7 Aug, drop in between
10.30am – 3.30pm

New Forest Reptile Centre, off
the A35 south of Lyndhurst

See Wed 29 May for details.

BARK RANGER WALK

Sat 10 Aug, 11am – 1pm

Deerleap Car Park, Totton, SO40 7EH

Bring your canine friends along for a walk that's all about them! Led by a National Park Ranger and Natalie Light, a behavioural specialist, and pick up top tips on how to keep your dog safe and happy whilst out walking on the Forest. It includes activity stations to practice likely scenarios you may encounter whilst out walking in the New Forest, as well learning about the fascinating history, flora and fauna of this special place.

Free event. Booking required. Suitable for all, dogs must be kept on leads. Enquiries: 01590 646600.

FUN IN THE FOREST

Thu 15 Aug, drop in between 10am – 3pm

Wilverley Inclosure car park,
Brockenhurst, BH25 5TZ

Catch up with the New Forest Rangers for a host of activities such as scavenger hunts, colouring and crafts. Wear old clothes and be ready for forest fun!

Suggested donation £1/child. Suitable for all (children must be accompanied by an adult). No booking required. Enquiries: 01590 646600.

SUMMER WILD PLAY DAY

Tue 20 Aug, drop in
between 10am – 3pm

Whitefield Moor,
Brockenhurst, SO42 7QB

Discover fun ways to explore, play and get creative in the outdoors, from your back garden to the New Forest woods, streams and heaths. Create some forest art, sail leaf boats, explore with scavenger hunts and much more.

Suggested donation £1/child. Donation for parking. Suitable for all ages (children must be accompanied by an adult). No booking required. Enquiries 01590 646600.



WILD WEDNESDAYS

Wed 14 Aug, drop in between 10.30am – 3.30pm

New Forest Reptile Centre,
off the A35 south of Lyndhurst

See Wed 29 May for details.

WILD WEDNESDAYS

Wed 21 Aug, drop in between 10.30am – 3.30pm

New Forest Reptile Centre,
off the A35 south of Lyndhurst

See Wed 29 May for details.

WILD WEDNESDAYS

Wed 28 Aug, drop in between 10.30am – 3.30pm

New Forest Reptile Centre, off the A35 south of
Lyndhurst

See Wed 29 May for details.

FUN IN THE FOREST

Thu 29 Aug, drop in between 10am – 3pm

Anderwood car park, Lyndhurst Road, Burley BH24 4HS

Catch up with the New Forest Rangers for a host of activities such as bug and scavenger hunts, colouring and crafts. Wear old clothes and be ready for some Forest fun!

Suggested donation £1/child. Suitable for all ages (children must be accompanied by an adult). No booking required. Enquiries 01590 646600.

KEYHAVEN NATURE RESERVE OPEN DAY

Sun 15 Sept, drop in between 10.30am - 4pm

Lymington-Keyhaven Nature Reserve,
Normandy Lane SO41 8AE
Grid ref: SZ330 943

Come to Hampshire's premiere coastal reserve and enjoy the spectacle of birds as they stop off on their annual migrations.

Stalls, crafts, guided walks, family activities, wildlife viewing and more.

This is a joint free event between Hampshire County Council, Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust and the New Forest National Park Authority. Suitable for all (children must be accompanied by an adult). No booking required. Enquiries: 01590 674656.

NEW FOREST WALKING FESTIVAL

Sat 12 – Sun 27 Oct,
locations across
the Forest

Join local experts for fascinating New Forest walks at the seventh annual Walking Festival. Includes wildlife walks, history hikes and family strolls and so much more!

Booking is essential. Browse the walks and book from August onwards at newforestnpa.gov.uk/walkingfestival

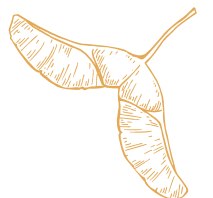
AUTUMN WILD PLAY DAY

Wed 30 Oct, drop in
between 10am – 3pm

Holmsley Campsite,
Forest Road,
Burley, BH23 8EB

Discover fun ways to explore, play and get creative in the outdoors, from your back garden to the New Forest woods, streams and heaths. Create some forest art, sail leaf boats, explore with scavenger hunts and much more.

Suggested donation £1/child. Suitable for all ages (children must be accompanied by an adult). No booking required. Enquiries 01590 646600.



Keep your distance



'New Forest livestock are unpredictable. They may appear tame, but they aren't.'

Everyone who uses the New Forest is being asked to keep their distance from the area's free-roaming animals – to keep themselves safe, to keep the commoners' animals well and their natural grazing habits intact.

The animals are unpredictable. They will react very suddenly when they feel threatened, and can barge, bite or kick. This is especially true when they have young with them. Sadly some people are hurt each year.

Livestock grazing has always maintained the natural habitats that make the area internationally important for nature conservation and has kept the New Forest accessible for everyone to enjoy.

Chairman of the New Forest Commoners' group, Tony Hockley, said: 'New Forest livestock are unpredictable.

They may appear tame, but they aren't. Their natural grazing is vital to maintaining the New Forest as a very special place.

'Interfering with them in any way is forbidden for good reasons: it puts you and them at risk. Animals have died because of artificial feeding, and by being drawn by people to the car parks and roads. Disrupting with their natural grazing habits means that they lose weight and have to be removed.

'Enjoy your time in the grazed New Forest, but please keep your distance from our animals.'

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