

New Forest Biodiversity Forum

New Forest Habitats and management

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The habitats and wildlife of the New Forest are extremely valuable, and Forestry England maintain and restore these unique areas. The beauty of the New Forest is the scale of linked habitat and the unique wildlife developed over centuries of low impact human management. The New Forest contains an exceptional variety of plants and animals, estimated at well over 20,000 species!

Open forest habitats need some management, as grazing alone doesn't maintain the diverse structure. Management incorporates prescribed burning, heather baling, bracken forage harvesting and, in the pasture woodlands, clearance of tracks and holly cutting on rotation.

Forestry England are restoring wetlands after historic drainage for forestry and grazing; restoration of these habitats offers a greater diversity of micro-habitats, increases ecological resistance and resilience to extreme conditions (flooding, drought), and reconnects the floodplain.

Forestry England are also restoring some of the inclosures post forestry. This involves restoring the habitat back to the wetlands, heaths, and woods that they once were. In practical terms this involves removing stumps, levelling out any ridges and furrows, and infilling drainage. Monitoring before and after restoration shows initial loss of vegetation cover, but within 1 year a wide range of species utilise the area, including stonechats, woodlark, and reptiles. We will continue to monitor areas to provide evidence about how they recover. But from work done over many years restoring sites like the Verderers inclosures at Durhill, Markway and Sluffers, we can see how quickly they restore to natural habitats.