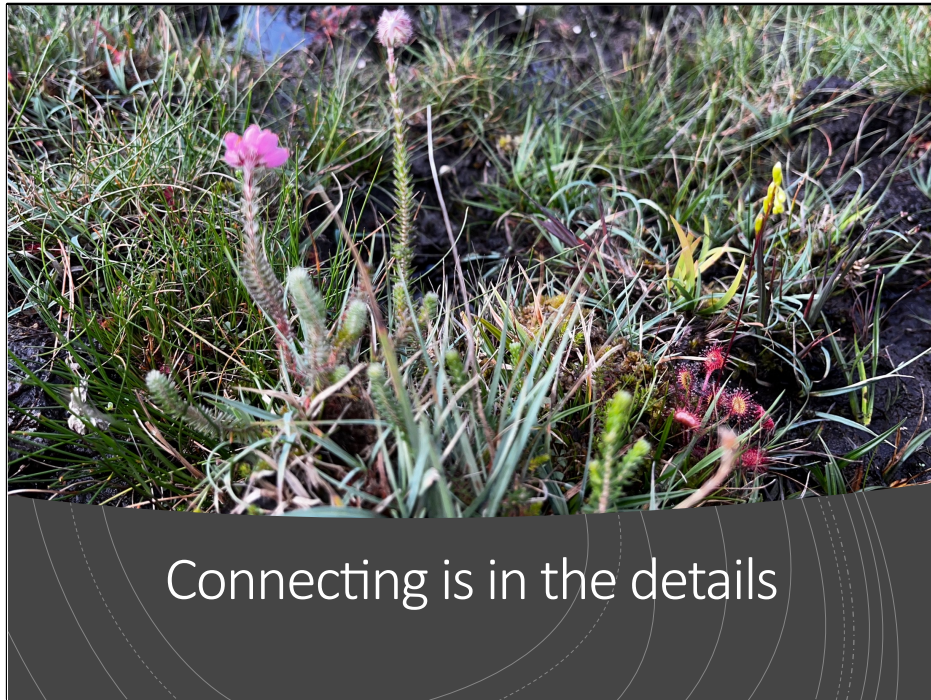


Need to see the Forest through other people's eyes.

It may not look special, but it is an incredible story of survival of what was once just normal.

85% lowland heath lost in 150 years. **Special by survival.** That is the story.

Population will continue to increase. Far from putting up the barriers we need people to re-connect with nature. The failure to do this leads to harm to nature, and harm to human wellbeing. It is a lose-lose. NF is one of the few places where connection is possible across a huge spectrum of nature, with an ancient wildness lost in this densely-populated area of Britain.



The big story of survival generates thousands of fascinating little stories.

The fairy shrimp is a favourite. But the stories of the cuckoo's epic journey, or of carnivorous plants, or of a coral necklace lying in a mud patch can all fire the imagination. Or the question for commoners that seems to be in everyone's mind: "how do you find your ponies"

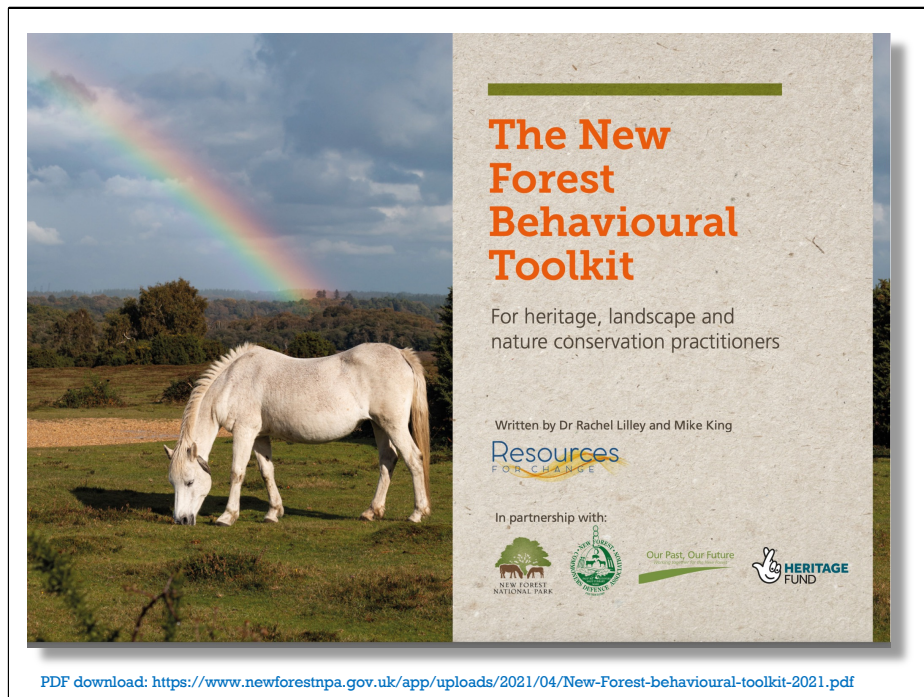
The important point is that the focus is not us (our work, our rights, our lifestyle), but the things that really connect people with a landscape. What captures their imagination?

Messengers matter



If we are going to change our behaviour, then “who” encourages us to do this matters. The messenger is as important as the message, at least. I would have never thought, watching the Undertones as a teenager that Feargal Sharkey (a recreational user of our waterways) would shift the dial on water pollution. Or that a 15 year old Swedish schoolgirl would shift the dial on climate. Change happens. Think how much attitudes on smoking or gay marriage have changed in recent times. Our own connections, friends, and role models gently influence us, so our views change, but they are still our own. Everyday experiences influence our changing attitudes, not distant dictats.

The NF benefits from a largely captive audience. 62% of visitors travel less than 5km. Most of the pressure comes from those who use it daily, sometimes more than that, and who (obviously) live close by. In the end, we want as many of these to be our messengers as possible. This is a real advantage over some other, more distant, protected landscapes



A call for collaboration. As in the Lottery Funded OPOF project (producing the behavioural toolkit) or the Verderers HLS (paying FE to restore habitats and incentivising commoners towards good practice).

NF is a complex place, with centuries of history of creative tension between habitats, species and activities. Threats from state-sponsored encroachment and forestry have receded, but together we must meet the challenge of population growth, climate change, and the urgent need for more people to get outdoors and really connect with nature.

We need to be careful in our debates. When we criticise the New Forest it can be infectious. The process of “Motivated Reasoning” leads those who do harm to cherry-pick from us: “What I do can’t make it any worse than ...”

It needs to be about “we” as a group, not “me” and my own interest, and about always looking at what we do through other eyes.