

New Forest Biodiversity Forum

Socio-ecological study of large herbivore grazing in the New Forest National Park

Alexandros Theodorou¹, Brian Pickles¹, Chloe Bellamy², Andrew Hoodless³,
Rebecca Spake¹

1 University of Reading, Ecology and Evolutionary Biology research Division, School of Biological Sciences, Whiteknights Campus, Reading RG6 6AS.

2 Forest Research, Alice Holt Lodge, Wrecclesham, Farnham GU10 4LH.

3 Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust, Burgate Manor, Fordingbridge SP6 1EF.

This joint interdisciplinary research project between University of Reading, the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust, and Defra will explore the social and ecological dynamics of large herbivore grazing in the New Forest National Park.

We will be investigating three questions:

1) What are the current attitudes towards large herbivores and their ecologies?

A questionnaire will be used to survey attitudes towards large herbivore species held by all stakeholder groups in the New Forest.

2) What research is needed to inform large herbivore policies?

A research prioritisation exercise will be used to consult with diverse stakeholder groups and conduct a national-park level synthesis of top research priorities to inform the implementation of management actions related to grazing in the New Forest.

3) Can nurse plants protect oak saplings from heavy deer browsing?

Shrubs are sometimes considered competitors of planted seedlings in restoration programs, yet can also offer protection and facilitate establishment under high deer pressure. This project will compare the effectiveness of different nurse plant configurations at facilitating the growth and survival of planted oak saplings in the New Forest inclosures.