

New Forest Biodiversity Forum

Communicating about forest management to public and policymakers

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Can we expect others to be excited about this exceptional landscape of connected habitats if we aren't? "It doesn't look that special". The New Forest is an amazing story of adaptation and survival - of habitats, customs, and species. The most indifferent tend to be those most used to it. Its greatest threats, save for a changing climate, probably lie near home. It is our own beliefs, perceived rights and behaviours and failure to empathise with other perspectives that need to change. Evolutionary psychology shows how some give and take within a group makes the whole group stronger. Beneficial behaviour spreads and harmful behaviour becomes more difficult to sustain. Elinor Ostrom's global work on governance of the commons showed that "conditional co-operation" in a large group can be messy, but worth the effort to sustain. There will never be simple "common-sense" solutions to managing a complex mosaic of habitats and an even more complex mosaic of people. Our interventions will usually produce "insights" not "answers". We need to be humble, to learn and adapt. Behavioural norms rarely change quickly, but change does happen. Norms are dynamic, not static, Rules, regulations and punishments have a part to play, but they really only play an effective part when all agree on their purpose. Protecting the New Forest cannot be about reducing the fun of the Forest or about strengthening access barriers when people need to connect with nature; it has to be about willing engagement, working together to show its real value. Change happens when it feels good.