

# *New Forest Biodiversity Forum*

## **Fauna and fungi response to heathland restoration**

### **Russell Wynn (Wild New Forest)**

Surveys were conducted at three new heathland restoration sites on the Crown Lands of the New Forest (Dunces Arch, Matley Ridge, and Turf Hill) to assess the response of fauna and fungi. The work was conducted in partnership with Forestry England and was supported by funding from the New Forest Biodiversity Forum and complements commissioned plant surveys being conducted by Footprint Ecology.

The conifer crop at all three sites was removed in late 2022, and monthly walkover surveys with 25m transect spacing commenced in spring and autumn 2023, with an additional nocturnal (dusk) survey around the perimeter of each site conducted in summer 2023. All species of observed animals and fungi were recorded.

Within a few months of conifer removal, the sites hosted several priority heathland bird species, including Woodlark, Nightjar, and Stonechat, as well as Common Lizard, Common Frog, and Glow-worm. Both Serotine and Common Pipistrelle were observed feeding along newly created 'edge' habitats.

The presence of grazing livestock in the newly opened habitat also saw Nail Fungus and other coprophilous fungi and beetle species return. Initial results suggest conifer removal leads to local extinction of fungi species that are mycorrhizal with conifers, but an upsurge in saprotrophic fungi, slime moulds, and saproxylic beetles that exploit the woody debris that remains.

These first results indicate that a wide variety of heathland-specialist animals and fungi can recolonise restoration sites very quickly once conifers have been cleared, even though full restoration to 'recognisable' heathland may take several years. Survey work will continue at all three sites in 2024.