

## *New Forest Biodiversity Forum*

# **New Forest Biodiversity Forum Strategic Research Programme**

- The New Forest Biodiversity Forum - Strategic Research Programme aims to support research and survey activities related to New Forest biodiversity and conservation.
- The scheme will have up to £65k available per annum and will likely fund between two and four projects per year.
- The first call will open on 01 July 2024 with a deadline of 31 July 2024; further calls will be announced in Q1 2025 and 2026.
- Projects should include some of the following elements: biodiversity research, survey, monitoring, and recording.
- Priority will be given to projects that include student training, e.g. postgraduate research projects, and/or the training and co-ordination of volunteers.
- Applications should seek to address one of the identified priority topics relating to New Forest biodiversity and conservation (see appended list of priority topics).
- Priority will be given to projects including innovative techniques and/or technologies, including 'high-risk high-reward' pilot projects that have potential for wider impact.
- Priority will be given to applications that build upon or leverage other funding sources, e.g. PhD match funding and/or other grant funding.
- Applications can be submitted by both individuals and organisations, including those who may not have access to conventional grant funding schemes.
- The forum chair is available for informal discussion with applicants about their project proposals prior to submitting any application.
- Applications will be assessed by the forum chair, sponsors, and steering group, with decisions communicated no later than four weeks after the application deadline.
- In some cases, additional informal input may be sought from independent external experts, especially where additional technical or site-specific expertise is required.

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- Applications should be no longer than two sides of A4 with a further two sides available for images (using a 12 pt regular font with minimum single-line spacing).
- Applications should include e.g. project rationale, methods, outputs, partners, co-funding, policy implications, and required resources.
- Applications will be assessed against the following ten criteria, which will have equal value in the assessment:
  - Overall quality of proposal
  - Overall quality and experience of delivery team
  - Relevance to priority topics
  - Urgency of proposed work
  - Feasibility of proposed work
  - Relevance to forest policy and management
  - Extent to which project builds upon previous work
  - Extent to which project leverages co-funding and/or in-kind resources
  - Extent to which project supports student and/or volunteer training
  - Extent to which projects delivers innovative techniques and/or technologies
- Successful applicants will be required to provide an end-of-year summary and will be invited to present their initial results at the annual New Forest Biodiversity Conference.

For further details contact the forum chair, Prof Russell Wynn: [russ@wildnewforest.co.uk](mailto:russ@wildnewforest.co.uk)

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The following topics are deemed to be a high priority for future work under the NFBF Strategic Research Programme and will address key evidence gaps relating to New Forest biodiversity and conservation. They are topical and of high strategic importance but are not thought to be adequately addressed via other mechanisms at the present time. These topics were initially proposed by workshop attendees at the New Forest Biodiversity Conference on 06 Feb 2024 and ranked according to number of responses; they were then reviewed and rationalised by Steering Group members at a meeting on 15 Apr 2024 and subsequently via email. Note that some of the priority topics identified by workshop attendees will be covered by other Forum activities, including the Small Grant Scheme, and these are appended.

## **The nine priority topics for the NFBF Strategic Research Programme are:**

- 1. Distribution, abundance, and ecological impact of large grazing herbivores.*
- 2. Management and restoration of designated habitats.*
- 3. Recreational impacts on vulnerable habitats and species.*
- 4. Habitat mapping and ecosystem monitoring.*
- 5. Pollution impacts on habitats and species.*
- 6. Linking the forest core, fringe, and wider landscape.*
- 7. Building resilience to climate change and extreme weather.*
- 8. New technologies and techniques for biodiversity monitoring.*
- 9. Species (re)introductions and non-native species.*

The following section provides examples of activities under each priority topic that were identified by workshop attendees as being strategically important and that will help to fill key evidence gaps; other activities may be considered for funding under the NFBF Strategic Research Programme, but those listed will be prioritised. Note that this list will be refreshed annually.

### **1. Distribution, abundance, and ecological impact of large grazing herbivores**

- Spatio-temporal distribution, abundance, and behaviour of livestock and deer.
- Influence of large herbivore grazing on biodiversity in different habitats.

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- New technologies to monitor grazing herbivores and their impacts, e.g. drones.
- Inventory of back-up grazing and potential for increased biodiversity and protection.

## **2. Management and restoration of designated habitats**

- Impact of current heathland management practises on biodiversity and soil health.
- Identify mechanisms to reduce wildfire risk while maintaining biodiversity.
- Changing dynamics of woodland habitats and impacts on priority species.
- Identify impacts of wetland restoration on biodiversity and ecosystem services.

## **3. Recreational impacts on vulnerable habitats and species**

- Measure and mitigate impacts of dogs on vulnerable habitats and species.
- Measure cumulative impacts of different recreational pressures.

## **4. Habitat mapping and ecosystem monitoring**

- Update vegetation / habitat maps to detect change and inform management.
- Map the New Forest freshwater network including ephemeral waterbodies.
- Identify habitat-based species assemblages and key indicators of good ecological status.

## **5. Pollution impacts on habitats and species**

- Measure impacts of pollution on New Forest waterbodies and their biodiversity.

## **6. Linking the forest core, fringe, and wider landscape**

- Opportunity mapping for habitat creation / restoration and landscape-scale connectivity.

## **7. Building resilience to climate change and extreme weather**

- Investigate impacts of climate change and extreme weather on habitats and species.
- Develop climate resilience strategies to mitigate impacts of drought, fire, flooding etc.

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## **8. New technologies and techniques for biodiversity monitoring**

- Use of eDNA to measure biodiversity in aquatic and subsurface habitats.

## **9. Species (re)introductions and non-native species**

- Investigate ecosystem impacts of increasing / reintroduced predator species.
- Identify current and future vectors for non-native species.

**The following topics were also identified as high priority by workshop attendees but will be covered by other mechanisms:**

- **Increasing the knowledge base for under-recorded species and species interactions**

Work on individual species and species interactions will be covered by other mechanisms including the NFBF Small Grant Scheme; this will include targeted surveys to develop baselines and establish trends for under-recorded species groups, including (but not restricted to) bats, small mammals, nocturnal wintering birds, aquatic and saproxylic invertebrates, heathland moths, fungi, bacteria, and coastal and marine species. Work on species interactions could, for example, include effects of ticks and other diseases on birds and other vertebrates, and influence of prey availability on breeding wader productivity. Studies into movements of priority species within and beyond the forest boundary will also be included here.

- **Increasing the quantity, quality, and accessibility of biodiversity data**

The Forum is currently exploring options for a biodiversity audit for the New Forest National Park, as well as a central directory of surveys and survey data.

- **Building effective networks of stakeholders, volunteers, and citizen scientists**

In addition to delivering the annual New Forest Biodiversity Conference, the Forum is developing online communications and resources (via the Hub) and has also recently submitted a proposal to Forestry England to support volunteers seeking to undertake ecological surveys on the Crown Lands.