

New Forest Biodiversity Forum

New Forest Nightjar Survey 2023

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Nightjar surveys were conducted across the New Forest as a requirement of the Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) agreement to monitor Special Protection Area (SPA) bird species.

This involved two visits to 154 transects between May and July 2023 by a team of 65 surveyors following previously established routes.

A total of 1,379 nightjar observations were recorded including churring males, calling birds, wing clapping and flying birds. This identified a total of 353 territorial males (a representation of breeding pairs). This is equivalent to 7.7% of the UK population, based on the 2004 national survey identifying 4,606 territorial males. Unfortunately, this is a decline on the previous results in 2018 which recorded 435 territorial males. However, the number of territorial males still exceeds the target of 300 breeding pairs for Special Protection Areas (SPAs) in Great Britain.

There have been slight changes in density and range, with nightjar territories becoming more densely clustered where they are present, but being lost elsewhere. One explanation for the decline may be weather related, potentially resulting in fewer birds returning to the Forest or the impact on plants and consequently the invertebrate numbers. Other potential factors include loss of habitat, forestry works, changes in habitat management practices and recreational pressure. It is also highly likely that the location of suitable nightjar habitat has simply changed in recent years as a result of changes in habitat suitability across the Forest. Therefore, it is possible that they occupy new territories outside of the area surveyed.