



New Forest Life
PARTNERSHIP

New Forest Wetland Restoration

The newsletter of the Sustainable Wetland Restoration in the New Forest Project

Year 3 of Life3

Welcome to the fourth edition of the *Life3* project newsletter.

The New Forest contains some of the most important and rare wetlands in Europe, but these habitats have declined and deteriorated, mainly as a result of over 200 years of human modification. The Sustainable Wetland Restoration in the New Forest *Life3* project (2002-2006) aims to restore these vulnerable wetlands for the benefit of wildlife and people, now and for the future.

Over four years a total of 604 hectares of wetland habitat will be restored by the project partnership. This will include the restoration of mires, riverine and bog woodland in areas of the New Forest that are designated a Special Area of Conservation (SAC). The project targets three main water basins in the New Forest – the Lymington River, Avon Water and Hampshire Avon.

The project partnership includes English Nature, Environment Agency, Forestry Commission, Hampshire County Council, National Trust, and RSPB, and together they form the New Forest Life Partnership. It is a £2.9 million project that receives 40% from the European Commission's LIFE-Nature fund and the remaining costs from project partners.

Since the project began in 2002 a total of 7.5km of river has been restored by the Environment Agency (EA), 23 hectares of mire restoration by the Forestry Commission (FC) and over 225 hectares of riverine woodland restoration has been carried out by the National Trust (NT) and FC.

In the last six months, the partnership has continued with the important restoration works in the New Forest and has successfully restored sections of river at Dames Slough and Highland Water. Other completed works include mire restoration at Broomy Bottom and the removal of encroaching tree species onto the mire at Stony Moors.

One of the aims of the project is to raise awareness of the practical work that the *Life3* project is carrying out in the New Forest. Several guided walks and talks are held every year to give people the chance to view the work that has been carried out and talk to the partners who are delivering the project. ■

Project Objectives:

- To restore 604ha of wetland habitats in the New Forest
- To set up a mechanism for the sustainable management of the SAC water basins at every level.

Gentle giants at work in the Forest

The *Life3* project recently stepped back in time when it used a forestry technique that has not been witnessed in the New Forest for more than 25 years.

A team of Ardennes heavy horses were brought in by the FC, at Wootton Bridge, to extract timber from a delicate riverine woodland habitat area. The horses were able to manoeuvre their way across wetland habitats to remove the timber from an area that would otherwise have been damaged by using heavy machinery.

The FC invited members of the public to come along and witness these majestic animals in action and this spectacular sight was watched by over 100 people. Visitors were able to talk to the operators and get up close to the animals. The event also attracted considerable local press attention, including the Lymington Times, local BBC news and even Radio 4's Farming Today programme!

A single horse can extract up to 20 tonnes of timber a day and, although slower than machinery,

it has a markedly reduced impact on the environmental costs of removing timber using machinery.



A heavy horse at work in the New Forest as part of the *Life3* project

The horses hauled away felled sycamore from an area of riverine woodland to allow native species, such as oak, ash and willow, to survive in these areas.

As part of the *Life3* project, a three hectare area of the Avon Water corridor has seen the removal of non-native species including sycamore by the felling of trees combined with the extraction of timber by the horses.

The project aims to restore 261 hectares of rare and vulnerable riverine woodland in the New Forest and these gentle giants have certainly played a part in this important restoration process. ■

The New Forest Life Partnership:



Proposals for Markway Lawn

In April this year, the Forestry Commission asked the Geodata Institute (University of Southampton) to undertake monitoring of the Ober Water to help understand some of the causes and possible solutions to the permanent flooding at Markway Lawn.

The services were carried out by consultant hydrologist and geomorphologist Chris Hill who undertook sediment surveys and traced the river using Lidar (radar monitoring) surveying techniques.

The findings of the survey works were presented at a site meeting on the 6th June to members of the Commons Defence Association, Verderers, English Nature Conservation Officer and FC *Life3* Project staff.

The results were discussed and several options suggested. One option would be to leave the lawn in its present state. The other is to carry out restoration works by cutting the bank on the downstream side of the river channel. This would allow excess water



The Ober Water at Markway Lawn

to flow around and re-colonise the former channel which at present is heavily vegetated but readily eaten by commoning stock.

One of the main problems caused by flooding of this area is the loss of lush summer grazing areas for commoners livestock such as cattle and ponies.

A possible solution to rectify this problem would be to carry out works upstream of the A35. The replacement of natural meanders along the floodplain and plug work downstream would send the river back through its natural course.

Proposals for the planned

restoration of Markway Lawn are subject to consultation and agreement with the projects' Water Basin Management Forum.

If an agreement is reached then the Forestry Commission are planning to commence works in July. ■

Cotton Grass comes back to LIFE!

The return of slender cotton grass (*Eriophorum gracile*) is a welcome sight to Hampshire's precious wetland areas.

The removal of encroaching scrub in the New Forest's ancient wetlands as part of the *Life3* Project has enabled this nationally rare plant species to flourish in areas like Holmsley Bog, near Burley.

So far, a total of 35 hectares of mire have been restored under the *Life3* project. ■

Did you know that...
the **BROOK LAMPREY**,
although rarely seen, is quite
common in New Forest
streams

Look out for the lamprey

Lurking at the bottom of New Forest streams lies the bizarre, strange looking brook lamprey.

Its grey-brown colour provides perfect camouflage, enabling it to blend in with the gravely river beds, which are its favourite spawning habitat. Lampreys are jawless fish and belong to a group of primitive fish. Instead of having a jaw they possess a sucker-like mouth and small rasping teeth.

The brook lamprey, also known colloquially as the mud lamprey or pride, is the smallest British lamprey. Adults are small, eel-like fish with two dorsal fins, and generally reach a length of 10-17 cm. It is the most abundant lamprey in British rivers.



A brook lamprey

Lampreys are rarely seen by the public except when spawning when they become very obvious. Then these normally shy fish move into shallow, clear waters in daytime to begin their unusual communal nest building behaviour.

Surveys by the Environment Agency have shown the brook lamprey to be quite common in New Forest streams, although nationally it has become scarce due to the siltation of rivers as a result of changing agricultural practices and pollution.

Due to a decline in several parts of Europe the brook lamprey is listed under the EU Habitats Directive, Berne Convention, and UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) and as such has had a Species Action Plan (SAP) written for it.

The *Life3* project is helping to implement the BAP & SAP for this little

known fish. The lamprey will benefit from the work carried out during the project because the restoration of New Forest rivers back to their original meandered state will create organic debris deposition areas that provide a good habitat for juveniles.

The project also removes lamprey and other fish species from sections of the river in advance of the vital river restoration works in order to protect them during operations. This is carried out using a technique called electro-fishing, where a low voltage electrical rod is used to stun the fish before they are moved upstream in a container and away from the river restoration site.

Further information on lampreys can be found on the Environment Agency website at: www.environment-agency.gov.uk. ■

The Forum in action

The Water Basin Management Forum (WBMF) meet up on a regular basis and is an instrumental sounding board for shaping the restoration plans put forward by the *Life3* project partners.

The WBMF last met on a sunny day in June for a tour of project work sites. The tour was attended by over 20 people and included morning visits to Highland Water to view completed restoration works and a tour of Blackensford Inclosure where the EA are carrying out large scale river restoration works.

The afternoon included visits to Markway and Allum Green lawns to discuss, with the Forum, the proposed summer works planned by the FC.

Local film producer, Manuel Hinge, joined the site visit in the afternoon to film the WBMF in action for the *Life3* project video that is being produced in conjunction with the FC.

An important part of the project is the development of River Basin Implementation Plans. To ensure the effective delivery of these plans, the FC have appointed a consultant to undertake the task of formulating plans for the six river catchments of the New Forest.

This is in line with the Water Framework Directive and a first draft of the River



Future restoration discussions at Markway Lawn with the Forum members filmed by Manuel Hinge

Basin Implementation Plans will be presented to the Forum in November for discussion with the partnership. ■

Did you know that...
Over 10,000 heather bales have been baled for utilisation in *Life3* project rivers and mires

River restoration update

At the beginning of the summer the EA and FC carried out restoration work in Dames Slough Inclosure.

The 1.5km stretch of the Black Water river between Blackwater Bridge and Dogkennel Bridge ran primarily through deep conifer plantation with some extensively deepened and straightened channels. The EA restored this area by re-instating old meanders, cutting new meanders and installing 10m clay plugs to divert flow from drainage channels into the new meanders.

In addition, river bed levels were raised by using locally sourced gravel, drainage channels were partially back filled and river banks were re-profiled. This created ecologically beneficial backwaters and linear ponds were created in areas of river where in-fill was not sufficient.



Before restoration of the river at Dames Slough in May



After restoration of the river at Dames Slough in June

Large volumes of spoil were evident at the downstream end of the Inclosure. The spoils were stock piled and transported to Blackensford Bottom to be used as in-fill for a section of the Black Water river that is currently being restored.

The river restoration work carried out at Dames Slough Inclosure has successfully managed to increase the length of the Black Water river in this area by 750m.

In conjunction with the EA, the FC have also carried out works at Dames Slough Inclosure – an area that was previously established for commercial forestry that resulted in a significant loss of important riverine woodland. The FC felled and removed non-native species such as Norway Spruce and Turkey Oak which restored links between riverine and bog woodland in this area and allowed access for the EA to start river restoration work. ■

Looking ahead

Work is now well underway for the summer and future restoration plans have been made for the coming months.

The Black Water river at Blackensford Bottom is a straight, artificial channel travelling through floodplain woodland that has caused erosion up and beyond the Inclosure boundary. A length of approximately 1.9km of river will be restored by re-connecting the original meanders and raising bed levels.

The horse loggers will be returning once more to Wootton Bridge in the summer to complete the extraction of sycamore from this area. The FC will also be carrying out mire restoration work at Holly Hatch this summer. Local contractors 'Five Rivers' have plenty of experience on *Life3* works and will be starting work on this site in August. North Walk Forester, Mike Abraham, will be overseeing the operation. ■

Walking the talk

On Wednesday 15 June, a group of six 'A' level geography teachers from all over Hampshire were shown around two river restoration sites by project staff.

At Blackensford Bottom (SU230 069) on the upper reaches of the Black Water, the group were shown a heavily modified water course, featuring a straight, artificial channel through floodplain woodland, with bed levels lower than the adjacent, former (cut-off) channel. The deepened nature of this channelised reach had eroded upstream past the Inclosure boundary and into headwater mires.

Maxine Elliott, EA, outlined some of the work proposed for 2005, which will involve the re-connecting of old, cut-off meanders, and infilling with existing spoil, together with raising bed levels upstream where the stream is eroding into the mire.

“I'm sure it will have a huge impact on their teaching and on the trips they organise for their own students”
Mary Dunn

The group then went on to Withybed Bottom (SU230 072), on the upper reaches of the Highland Water, where the results of river restoration and floodplain habitat restoration carried out in 2004 could be seen well.

This upstream reach was excessively deepened and straightened in the past. Log weirs were



The group observe the deepened river channel at Blackensford Bottom

installed to retain gravel bed material; eroded clay and bed substrate were replaced; old meanders were re-connected; straightened channels were plugged and infilled. The whole stretch was re-vegetating well, compared with how it looked only six to seven months earlier.

River restoration is part of the national curriculum for geography at A level, and Hampshire students and teachers are lucky to have one of the largest river

OUT&ABOUT

Learn more about the *Life3* project on our guided walks & talks in the New Forest >>>

▶ **LYMINGTON RIVER SOURCE TO SEA TOUR – Sunday 14 August**
A special event exploring the length of the Lymington River has been organised as part of the Hampshire Water Festival. The tour will include morning stops at the upper catchment area where the Forestry Commission and Environment Agency will guide you through the restoration and research work carried out as part of the *Life3* project. Afternoon stops include visits to the Lymington River nature reserves and marshes.

cost: £10 **time:** 10.30am-4.00pm (approx)
meet: near ticket office at Brockenhurst Station for coach pick-up and drop-off point.
booking: essential - call 01962 846925 to reserve a place (max. 26 people)
bring: picnic lunch, walking shoes and outdoor clothing.

▶ **NATURAL RIVERS WALK - Saturday 10 September**
Join Forestry Commission ecologist Simon Weymouth for an in sight into the work carried out under the *Life3* project. Find out how they have been working closely with the Environment Agency to restore the natural courses of rivers to allow development of streamside habitats. May be uneven and wet underfoot!

cost: free **time:** 10.00am-12 noon
meet: Anderwood car park (grid ref: SU248058)
booking: call 023 8028 6840 to reserve a place
bring: walking boots/wellies and outdoor clothing

Raising awareness

Numerous guided walks have taken place over previous months and all of which were well attended, despite the varying weather conditions!

In May, the Forestry Commission led a free guided walk around the Slufers Inclosure to see the heathland restoration work carried out as part of the *Life3* project. Other walks have taken place involving a variety of interest groups, including students from Sparsholt college who attended a site visit to Highland Water with the EA and a group of Young Ramblers were so impressed with their site visit, organised by the FC and EA, they have asked for a further tour in the autumn!

The importance of the project was highlighted by the recent visit of the National Trust's new Director General, Fiona Reynolds. Her visit focused on the National Trust property at Ibsley Common where restoration of riverine and bog woodland has been taking place.

Further information about project guided walks and updates on restoration work can be found on our website at www.newforestlife.org.uk. ■

contact us:

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Natura 2000 is a network of sites that are found all over Europe that protect the most seriously threatened habitats, plants and animals in Europe. The New Forest has been designated a Natura 2000 site and is part of the Natura 2000 Network. For further information on Natura 2000 visit the European Commission website at www.eurosite-nature.org