



New Forest Life  
PARTNERSHIP

# New Forest Wetland Restoration

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

## The final phase of *Life3*

**The *Life3* project is now in its final year and since 2002 the partners have achieved some fantastic results.**

As the project now moves into the last phase of restoration work it is also looking into the future to see how this work can be continued once the project has ended.

In order to maintain the good work, a 'New Forest Wetland Management Plan' is being produced to make sure that the work of the project is carried into the future. It will ensure the sustainability of the New Forest river systems until the year 2016 and is being developed by the Forestry Commission (FC). Further details on the new plan can be found on page 2.

The partners will be finishing off their restoration works this year and the project is well on its way to

achieving its aim of restoring over 600 hectares of wetland habitats in the New Forest. The restoration works planned for 2006 are outlined on page 3.

As well as the many guided walks and talks that are happening this year, the partnership has organised some special events to mark the end of *Life3*. More details of these events can be found on page 4, so remember to put the dates in your diary to join in the celebrations! ■

### Project Objectives:

- To restore 604ha of wetland habitats in the New Forest
- To set up a mechanism for the sustainable management of these wetland habitats

## Return of the natural rivers

**For the last three years, the Environment Agency (EA) has been working hard to restore over 10km of river in the New Forest.**

These important wetland areas were damaged in the 19th and 20th centuries, when the natural meandering channels of some New Forest rivers were artificially straightened and deepened.

This caused a faster flow and prevented the water from flooding naturally onto the nearby ground. Eventually the adjacent wetland habitats dried out and although this created good conditions for planting timber trees, many species living in these areas suffered greatly.

One of the major aims of the project has just been completed, ahead of schedule and with great results. Over 10km of New Forest rivers have been restored back to their original natural paths, making this one of the largest river restoration projects to take place in the UK.

These rivers have been restored back to their natural state by filling in the artificial channels and



Before river restoration at Blackensford Bottom



After river restoration at Blackensford Bottom

opening up the original routes once again. Cut-off meanders have been re-connected to the rivers, natural 'debris dams' made of wood have been encouraged to form and river bed levels have been raised using locally sourced deposits of gravel.

This has led to a more natural, slower water flow and allowed the river to 'overbank' - encouraging water to flow onto its floodplain. This will breathe new life into the associated wetland habitats and the wildlife that depends upon them, such as the southern damselfly.

The EA have carried out the majority of this work and their *Life3* Project Manager, Maxine Elliott, said: "The excellent results of this project will bring about great benefits for nature."

"Monitoring work will be carried out over the winter to ensure that these habitats are being left in a suitable condition for wildlife." ■

The New Forest Life Partnership:



# Planning for the future

**O**ne objective of the *Life3* project is the production of a ten year River Basin Implementation Plan for all six river basins within the New Forest.

In June 2005, the FC employed Jane Smith to undertake this task, receiving support from the Water Basin Management Forum (WBMF) and partner organisations to develop a plan for the future.

The plan is now being called the 'New Forest Wetland Management Plan'. The document firstly defines its background and purpose to carry forward the works achieved through the *Life3* project to ensure the long term sustainability and maintenance of the rivers and wetlands into the next 10 year period (2006-2016).

It also provides coverage of some of the key historical events in the Forest which have formed many of its management practices. A description of the catchment



Jane Smith joined the WBMF site visit in June 2005 to see the work of the project so far

characteristics are provided and it includes details about fisheries, ecology, geomorphology, and landscape with key issues relevant to wetland restoration highlighted for each area.

The fourth chapter of the plan focuses on the wetland restoration works which have been carried out. In addition, it includes proposals for potential future works and practical techniques that were used during the restoration work.

The final chapter concludes on statutory consents and procedures which are

required to progress future works and good practice guidance for monitoring.

The draft plan will be produced early in 2006 and will follow a final period of consultation with partners and WBMF Members, with eventual agreement and sign up in March 2006.

A practical working document for land managers will be derived from the plan that will provide a useful tool for implementation of future works.

An executive summary of the New Forest Wetland Management Plan will be produced for WBMF Members and key stakeholders and will also be available to view on the *Life3* website. ■

Did you know that...  
the National Trust have already  
restored 16 ha of vital riverine &  
mire habitats during *Life3*?

## Clearing the conifers

**A**t Newlands Plantation in the north-west corner of the New Forest, the National Trust (NT) have been working closely with the FC in removing exotic conifers (Norway spruce and Scots pine).

The closely planted conifer trees cast a dense shade and prevent wild flowers from growing beneath them. The trees are being harvested for timber and fencing materials and the removal of shade will stimulate the formerly occurring native plants and trees to grow from seed lying dormant in the soil.

The conifers were planted during the second world war, when the valley bottom was drained to encourage tree growth. The old ditches will be filled in to re-create the former mire habitats and to restore the native riverine and bog woodland.

Both these habitats are rich in wildlife and the New Forest holds internationally important examples of these habitats, which are rare in Europe. The mires,



Conifer removal at Newlands Plantation

which have returned on areas cleared only 2-3 years ago, have been surveyed by the Trust's ecologists and found to be one of the most wildlife-rich areas in the Trust's ownership.

Following the pine clearance the NT also cut silver birch. The birch had been growing amongst the pine which was cleared to maintain the open habitat being restored.

Further upstream, alongside the Dockens Water, the Trust have been carrying out coppicing of bankside birch and willow trees. Coppicing is where a tree or shrub is cut at ground level, resulting in new, bushy growth from the cut stump or 'stool'.

The reduction in shade over the stream benefits aquatic plants, and the new, low growth provides cover for nesting birds and insects. The surrounding area - Ibsley Common - was purchased by the Trust with assistance from the previous *Life2* project (1997-2001). ■

## Spot the wading bird!

**O**n your next visit to the beautiful wetland areas of the New Forest, see if you can spot one of the many species of wetland birds that live there.

The New Forest is a critical home to important populations of breeding waders such as curlew, redshank, lapwing and snipe.

In 2004, the RSPB carried out a major survey to find out how many pairs of these birds live in the New Forest. The results showed that three out of the four species appear to be on the decline, but the New Forest continues to be a critical home for them.



To have an idea of what these wading birds look like, the sounds they make and where you can find them, have a look at the RSPB's 'Guide to Wading Birds in the New Forest'.

This leaflet contains photos of the birds and a map of where to find them in the New Forest.

To order a copy contact Issy Whatmore on 01962 845369 or visit [www.newforestlife.org.uk](http://www.newforestlife.org.uk). ■

## Restoring the lawns

**During August 2005 the FC undertook a programme of river restoration along the Ober Water, which feeds onto Markway Lawn.**

Geomorphologist Chris Hill (Geodata Institute) was commissioned by the FC to carry out site surveys of the fluvial processes and sediment movement upstream of Markway Lawn. These were all undertaken before any works could take place. In addition, he made recommendations for river channel restoration.

The surveys were followed by on site consultations with the Water Basin Management Forum, Verderers and key stakeholders, as all parties had signalled a keen interest to see a resolution to the long term problems of an over flooded lawn.



The Ober Water is restored back to its original channels

The programme of works agreed involved the removal of organic material that had in-filled the natural meandering palaeo channel since the original channel had been straightened, and plugging the straightened section.

These works demonstrated the positive benefits of partnership working between the FC and the EA. The EA assisted with a fish rescue and gave on-site assistance with in-filling the straightened channel with a

400 metre clay plug on the upstream section. This successfully diverted the river course back through its original meanders.

On the downstream section of the Ober Water on Markway Lawn, where the main river channel had been silted up, this was re-defined to direct the water flow across the lawn. In addition, some of the existing channel was hand-weeded to increase the depth and improve flows.

Since works have been completed, the system has experienced a number of high flood events. The significance of the works upstream are now showing positive results downstream, by keeping the lawn flooded for shorter periods of time.

This restoration work has been very well supported by the Commoning community and the Verderers of the New Forest. ■

## Natura 2000

Did you know that...  
the New Forest is part of the  
Natura 2000 network?

**In 1992, the European Commission created a network called Natura 2000 as a direct response to public concern over the rapid loss of nature in Europe.**

A Natura 2000 site is an area that has been designated a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and/or Special Protection Area for birds (SPA). The New Forest is both an SAC and SPA and is one of hundreds of areas across Europe that has been designated a Natura 2000 site.

The New Forest contains a complex mosaic of wildlife habitats which used to be common in lowland western Europe but are now rare and fragmented. It has the largest number of Dartford warbler in Britain and internationally important populations of nightjar and woodlark. It also contains important populations of southern damselfly along stream sides and great crested newt in ponds.

To find out more about Natura 2000 sites in Europe visit [www.newforestlife.org.uk/N2K/n2kindex.htm](http://www.newforestlife.org.uk/N2K/n2kindex.htm) ■

## A rare sight

**The southern damselfly (*Coenagrion mercuriale*) is widespread, though rare, in southern central and south-west Europe. In the UK it has strong populations in Dorset, Hampshire and Pembrokeshire.**



© Environment Agency

**In Hampshire these are located in the New Forest and on the River Itchen.**

The New Forest has populations estimated to be in the hundreds of thousands of individuals, making it one of the most important areas in Europe for this species. Populations of the southern damselfly have declined or been lost where the habitat has become overgrown by scrub rank vegetation (e.g. grasses and rushes), which shades or hides the streams. The restoration work carried out under *Life3* project has helped to increase their populations.

The male is blue and black and females are dark with green or blue sides. It likes to live in shallow, well-vegetated, base rich runnels and flushes in open areas on wet heaths, or small side channels of chalk rivers. The adults fly from June to August so if you are in the New Forest during the summer months this year then keep your eyes open for these small and dainty creatures! ■

## Looking ahead

**The project is coming to end in 2006 and the partners have been finalising plans for their last phase of work.**

- The FC conducted a recent site visit to finalise plans for restoration work at Millyford and Dockens Water. It was agreed that some felling and pollarding of oak and birch will help to restore the more disparate areas of grassland which have been colonised with Scots Pine.
- At Dockens Water, the FC will be felling recent willow scrub north of the channel, as this will be very beneficial for the underlying habitat.
- The EA will be carrying out minor remedial restoration works at Highland

Water and Blackensford Bottom. At Rhinefield, further topographical and modelling work has been carried out to inform design proposals for further restoration works in this area. Results from monitoring work for macroinvertebrates and fish, and work carried out by Southampton University will be reported on by August 2006.

- In conjunction with the Forest Design Plan, the NT will be in-filling major drainage ditches and planting shallows at Newlands Plantation. Over the winter 2005/6 period, they will be removing further birch trees and using heather bales to in-fill ditches during Spring 2006. ■

- In August 2005, as part of the Hampshire Water Festival, a guided tour of the Lymington River was led by the FC and the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust.

Over 20 people attended this event, all of whom enjoyed spending a morning visiting *Life3* project restoration sites with walks led by Simon Weymouth from the FC.

- The NT conservation team from around the country recently visited restoration works at Newlands Plantation and it was confirmed that these works are the biggest to date on a single NT site!
- The FC also led a 'Natural Rivers' walk in early September which took members of the public around the post-operational river restoration works at Dames Slough.

The walk was well received and gave the public a chance to find out more about the project and the benefit its work has on the New Forest.



An FC ranger leading a guided walk for the public

- In November, the EA and FC led a group of delegates around project sites as part of the Institute of Ecology & Environmental Management conference. The delegates took a great interest in the sites and the project was praised for its achievements and successes.
- And finally, if you were watching the TV series 'In the Forest' with Phillippa Forrester during the autumn, you may have caught our *Life3* Ecologist Simon Weymouth, from the FC, talking about the work of the *Life3* project! ■



Amanda Craig presents the LIFE3 project during a workshop

In September 2005, Simon Weymouth and Amanda Craig attended the European Nature Conference 2005 in the Netherlands.

It was a great opportunity for Simon and Amanda to exchange knowledge and share experiences with other European nature organisations.

Amanda, *Life3* Conservation Officer from English Nature, presented the project during a workshop which

discussed the importance of ecological networks across Europe.

Over 60 posters were displayed at the conference held in Apeldorn, including *Life3*, which was an impressive illustration of the extent of project work being carried out across Europe.

Simon, *Life3* Ecologist from the FC, said "our project was well received as a component of a huge network of sites."

The conference highlighted some key messages including:

- a) the importance of our work to make connections with people and;
- b) ensuring that the wider public are able to see how relevant nature is to their economic and social well-being.

The conference was a valuable opportunity to present the project on a European wide basis. ■

## OUT&ABOUT

Come and find out more about the *Life3* project during events held in the New Forest this year >>>

### ▷ Friday 2 June 2006

Come and join in the celebrations to mark the end of our four year *Life3* project! At 2pm, Chris Packham will be giving a talk and there will be project staff led guided walks to look at river restoration work carried out on the Blackwater river. There will also be activities for all the family to enjoy, including storytelling and helping to make a giant willow sculpture!

**time:** anytime between 11.00am - 3.00pm

**meet:** Blackwater Arboretum, off the Rhinefield Ornamental Drive. Parking at Blackwater car park (250 yards) with additional parking available at Brock Hill car park (half a mile away)

**grid ref:** SU268047

**bring:** suitable outdoor clothing and footwear

**booking:** not required

**cost:** free

**ages:** all ages welcome

**dogs:** welcome if kept on a lead

### ▷ Tues 13 & Wed 14 June 2006

A two day technical conference, held in the New Forest, that will explore aspects of wetland restoration at a catchment scale ranging from flood management and practical restoration techniques to monitoring & survey work and stakeholder involvement. This conference is aimed at environmental specialists and will involve presentations, workshops and visits to several project restoration sites. For further details visit the *Life3* website at [www.newforestlife.org.uk](http://www.newforestlife.org.uk) or contact Issy Whatmore on 01962 845369.

### ▷ Tues 25 - Thurs 27 July 2006

At the New Forest Show this year, look out for *Life3* project leaflets and newsletters on our project partners stands! You will also get the chance to see the *Life3* project video, which shows how the restoration sites have developed over the past year.

### 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 [www.eurosite-nature.org](http://www.eurosite-nature.org)