



New Forest Life  
PARTNERSHIP

# New Forest Wetland Restoration

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

# Let's Celebrate LIFE!

## The LIFE 3 project restores the New Forest wetlands to their former glory

**The LIFE 3 project is complete. Over 600 hectares of rare and vital wetland habitats have been restored, establishing long-term sustainability of the three main water basins in the New Forest.**

The four year, £2.9 million "Sustainable wetland restoration in the New Forest" project has achieved its target of restoring more than 600 hectares of endangered wetland habitats for the public to enjoy for years to come.

The role of the LIFE 3 project was to reverse the effect of these historic drainage works at the Avon Water; the Hampshire Avon and the Lymington river. The work has improved the natural conditions, by putting the river back into its original meandering course, and replacing much of the material which has been washed away. This has encouraged back an abundance of rare brook lamprey fish that rely on organic debris deposition to survive.

Restoring the wetlands and valley mires, a critical habitat for rare species of wading birds such as the redshank, snipe and curlew, has contributed to these birds survival. These birds can be seen throughout the wetlands and mires, where they rely on its soft soils to probe worms and invertebrates.

By clearing scrub rank vegetation such as grasses and rushes, the LIFE 3 project has enabled the rare southern damselfly to once again thrive in the river areas of the New Forest.

Project partners are delighted at the success of the LIFE 3 project and its impact upon the wildlife and New Forest habitats. As a result of its success, the LIFE 3 project has received wide acclaim and international interest.

The project was completed within the agreed timescale and well within its budget. Hampshire County Council (the lead body) and the five project partners - English Nature, the Environment Agency, the Forestry



Restored wetland at Dames Slough



Riverine woodland along the Avon Water

### Restored:

|                  |                          |
|------------------|--------------------------|
| 261 hectares of  | <b>Riverine Woodland</b> |
| 18 hectares of   | <b>Bog Woodland</b>      |
| 141 hectares of  | <b>Wet Grassland</b>     |
| 184 hectares of  | <b>Valley mires</b>      |
| 10 kilometres of | <b>River restored</b>    |



Breeding Redshank has benefited from the LIFE 3 project restoration

Commission, the National Trust and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, formed a very successful partnership to implement the project, which was supported by the European Union via its LIFE - Nature Fund.

English Nature is pleased with the achievements of the LIFE3 project, which has made a significant contribution to on the ground delivery of nature conservation objectives in the New Forest Special Area of Conservation (SAC).

Inspired by the LIFE 3 project, several new initiatives have been developed, including one supported by the Rural Pathfinder project. The LIFE3 project was celebrated with two end of project events held in June (see back page for details).

The New Forest Life Partnership



THE NATIONAL TRUST



## Rare Riverine *and* Bog woodland Restoration

**The New Forest is considered to be one of the best areas in the UK for riverine woodland and bog woodland.**

In the lowlands of Britain and Europe, intensive agriculture and flood control, combined with woodland clearance, have reduced these habitats to small, fragmented areas. Since both habitats are rare and restricted, they have priority conservation status at a European level.

Riverine woodlands grow on the wet, relatively fertile floodplain soils found along Forest streams, which flood seasonally as water levels rise. Their mixture of alder, willow, field maple, ash and oak trees support a rich and diverse ground flora. A total of 261 ha of riverine woodland has been restored, or conditions created in which it will re-colonise over the next 50-100 years.

The LIFE3 project restored areas of habitat by coppicing and pollarding holly and by pollarding ash, beech and oak trees, letting in more light to encourage natural regeneration and benefit wildflowers and lichens.

**Did you know.....**  
Re-instating the natural meanders has seen river length increase by **40%**!

## Valley Mire & Wet Grassland Restoration

With the New Forest containing around 75% of NW Europe's valley mires, they are an important part of the Forest landscape.

Valley mires form where peat accumulates under waterlogged conditions. They are rich in plant species, including sphagnum mosses, sundews, cotton grass and orchids. Through the infilling of drains with heather bales and bank spoil to stop headward erosion and raise water levels, and the clearance of invading scrub, LIFE3 has restored a total of 184 ha of mire.

The work, mainly undertaken by the Forestry Commission (FC), was subject to extensive consultation with the Commoners and the Verderers of the New Forest. One of the latest sites to be restored was Wilverley Bog, where 21 ha of invading Scots pine was removed.



Wootton Coppice Inclosure in the New Forest

Exotic, invasive species were removed to prevent their further spread. At Waters Copse, new hedges were planted using native broad-leaved shrubs, and fencing was erected to protect them from deer. Within the Inclosures, large areas of conifers were removed from the floodplain to create the right conditions for further regeneration. A recent example of this was at Knightwood where 75 ha of spruce was cleared from the streamside.

Bog woodland occurs on peat in which bog species make up a significant part of the ground flora. Only small areas are left

along forest streams. A total of 18 ha were restored, or suitable conditions created in which it will regenerate, mainly by the removal of conifers. This can be seen along the Dockens Water at Newlands Plantation. Re-alignment of fencing has allowed the introduction of light grazing by Commoners' livestock, to prevent the dominance of rough grasses and bracken following the removal of plantation conifers.

European Commission makes an example of LIFE 3

**The New Forest LIFE 3 Project has been recommended as an example of good practice in project management by the European Commission's External Monitoring Teams.**

The New Forest team have been asked for information on their project management by the European Commission (EC), in order to share its tools and systems with newly funded projects.

These included the project handbook, which helped to give a formal structure to the way the project is managed, and systems for partners to submit technical and financial reports.

The communications work of the project has been very successful in reaching a wide range of targeted audiences. The Communication Strategy shaped how the work of the project was communicated, and outputs included the design of the New Forest Life website, regular newsletters, information leaflets, press releases and events.



Valley Mire in the New Forest

The New Forest wet grasslands, known locally as "Lawns" are found on poorly drained clays which seasonally flood. They are an important part of the Forest landscape, providing rich grazing for commoning stock and supporting unique and rare species of plants.

The LIFE 3 project has restored 141 ha of wet grassland through the clearance of encroaching scrub, and indirectly through the river channel restoration work. A new example can be seen at Millyford Lawn, where birch, pine and willow have been felled to halt the loss of the wet grassland.

# A massive 10km of River Restored

**A total of 10 kilometres of rivers have been restored in the New Forest, concentrating on the upper reaches of the Lymington river, the Black Water and the Highland Water.**

Around 150 years ago, New Forest rivers were canalised through deepening, straightening and widening. This drained the Forest, providing better conditions for growing timber, but at great cost to natural habitats and wildlife. Faster flowing rivers led to an increase in erosion and drying out of adjacent wetland features.

The Environment Agency (EA) has played a key part in reversing the damage, by scraping out the original channels and introducing new material to raise bed levels and in-fill the drainage channels.

Over 50 staff were involved from monitoring



Restored river channel along the Black Water

water levels and examining species populations, to installing log weirs to trap sediment, re-connecting old meanders using clay plugs to block off former straightened channels, and raising river bed levels to reverse past over-deepening and reduce headward erosion.

By slowing the flow and raising river beds (in places by over one metre), water will spill over onto surrounding areas (the rivers original natural floodplain), in times of intense rainfall. Reactivating the rivers

ensures they can perform as they would do naturally, which in turn helps to recreate the wetland habitats which had all but dried up as a result of historic drainage practices.

This important work has breathed new life into the rivers and the wildlife populations that depend upon them.

## Surveys and Monitoring

Valuable survey and monitoring work has been carried out, including macro-invertebrates, fisheries and wading birds. The latter survey, undertaken by the RSPB highlighted the importance of the New Forest for breeding waders, which have nationally important populations there. The EA surveyed the physical characteristics of the

### Did you know...

LIFE3 is one of the largest river restoration projects to take place in the UK!

Highland Water and the Blackwater; the FC carried out ecological monitoring of the wet grasslands and mires, the NT monitored ecology at Dockens water and Newlands plantation; and EN assessed the project's achievements in reaching 'favourable / unfavourable - improving condition' for the targeted habitats.

## A rare sight



Bog Orchid

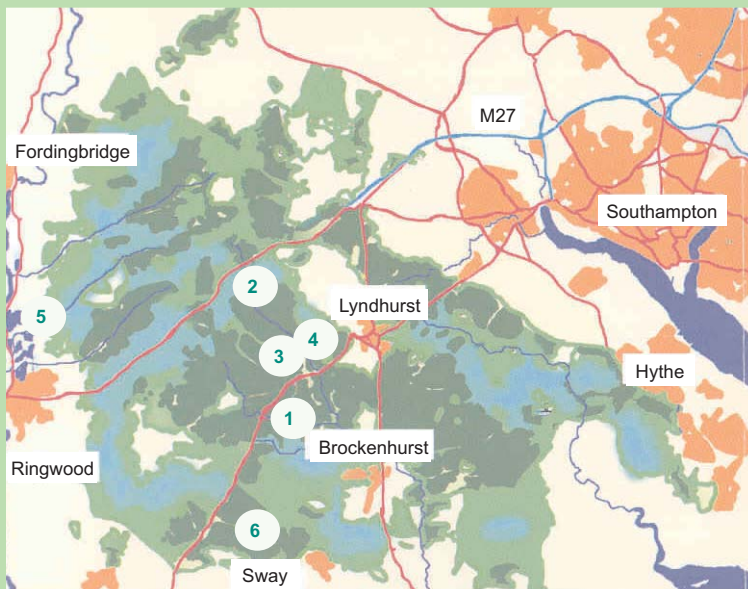
The Bog Orchid (*Hammarbya paludosa*) usually associated with Sphagnum mosses, is one of the most difficult orchid species to find. This is partly because of its rarity, partly because it is so tiny and inconspicuous and partly because it flowers very erratically.

They are easily overlooked as they are small and well-camouflaged. Bog Orchid seems to prefer bogs with water movement, and the New Forest's wet acid grasslands are perfect for this plant species to survive.

The New Forest LIFE 3 project has helped to improve their natural habitats by restoring seasonal flooding of rivers and re-wetting adjacent wetlands at locations in the New Forest such as Newlands Plantation.

## Visit the work of LIFE 3

On your next visit to the beautiful areas of the New Forest, come and see the valuable work completed by the LIFE3 project.



### KEY

1. BLACK WATER, RHINEFIELD
2. HIGHLAND WATER
3. KNIGHTWOOD
4. MILLYFORD LAWN
5. NEWLANDS PLANTATION
6. WILVERLEY BOG

## LIFE *after* LIFE 3

*What will happen after the LIFE 3 project draws to a close?*

Inspired by the LIFE 3 project, other organisations and projects are being set up and funded to restore additional habitats within or close to the New Forest.

### New Forest Wetland Management Plan

The plan has been produced as part of the Life 3 project. It's purpose is to carry forward the works achieved through the project to ensure the long term sustainability and maintenance of the wetlands over the next 10 year period (2006-2016).

The management plan focuses on key issues relevant to wetland restoration, highlighted for each area, including details about fisheries, ecology, geomorphology, and landscape.

Additionally, details of future works and good practice guidance for monitoring and sustainability, are part of the plan, which will be available on the LIFE 3 website.

### Rural Pathfinder

Rural Pathfinder is a government funded project offering counties the funds to improve their area. Smaller partners and organisations within the county then make bids to gain the funding for their cause.

Hampshire is one of eight counties in the UK selected by the government for funding. The success of the Life 3 project has helped the Forestry Commission to make a successful bid for funds to restore over 2000 hectares of SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest) wetland habitats throughout the New Forest.

### Natura 2000

The important work carried out by the LIFE 3 project is helping to manage, protect and conserve the New Forest Natura 2000 site, now and for generations to come. Natura 2000 is a network of sites designated under the EU Habitats and Birds Directives.

## Chris Packham Joins LIFE 3 to celebrate the project's success



Chris Packham speaks to the public at the celebratory event in Rhinefield, New Forest.

### Celebratory Events

On Friday 2nd June, 52 guests representing partners and other organisations came together in Brockenhurst at the New Park Manor Hotel to acknowledge the achievements of the project, and to celebrate its success.

The event's speakers, chaired by HCC Leader, Cllr Ken Thorner, spoke enthusiastically about the project and its positive impacts on the New Forest.

In the afternoon, wildlife enthusiast and celebrity Chris Packham spoke to the public at Rhinefield Drive, where he gave talks about the project and its completion.

He highlighted the importance of wetlands for wildlife and as a resource for people, requiring sensitive management. He commended the New Forest LIFE3 partnership on its impressive results. Over 200 members of the public attended,

some participating in guided walks led by the partners to view river restoration work along the Black Water.

This was followed with children's activities, including willow weaving, pond-dipping and story telling.

### Technical Conference

During 13th & 14th June, a two-day technical conference on "Wetland Restoration at a Catchment Scale" was held. It included presentations, workshops and site visits. The conference, organised by HCC and the project communications team was attended by 65 delegates and 20 speakers, including visitors from Ireland, Italy and The Netherlands. It offered valuable opportunities for experts to network and exchange experiences.

One delegate commented:

"The field visits were extremely informative and inspiring. I was particularly impressed with how "joined-up" everyone involved with the LIFE 3 project was – i.e. it was hard to tell which organisation each speaker and "tour guide" worked for because they were all speaking the same language with a high degree of multi-disciplinary expertise!"



Guest speakers from left: Dr Alan Law, Regional Director, EN; Gwynne Williams, Head of Countryside Conservation, RSPB; Sir John Harman, Chairman, EA; Cllr Ken Thorner, Leader of HCC; Fiona Reynolds, Director General, NT and Simon Hodgson, Chief Executive, FC.

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