



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 *Life3* PROJECT RESTORES THE NEW FOREST WETLANDS TO THEIR FORMER GLORY

The *Life3* project is complete. Over 600 hectares of rare and vital wetland habitats have been restored, establishing the long-term sustainability of three of the main water basins in the New Forest.

Greatest importance was given to the restoration of riverine and bog woodland, the two habitats found in the New Forest which have the highest conservation priority in Europe. Over the last four years, they have been restored, together with mires and lawns, largely through the removal of exotic conifers and invasive scrub. Work concentrated along the Lymington river, Avon Water and Hampshire Avon catchments.

The project was created to reverse the damaging effects of past drainage works, carried out mainly to improve the conditions for timber production. This led to a decline in wetland features through their drying out and erosion. A major achievement to reverse these practices has been the rehabilitation of 10km of rivers and streams.

Natural conditions have been returned by reconnecting the original meanders and replacing river bed material which had been excavated or washed away, together with the in-filling of adjacent drainage ditches. This has allowed the rivers to over-bank in times of flood, re-wetting the priority habitats.



Restored wetland at Dames Slough

Restoring the mires and wet grassland, a critical habitat for wading birds such as redshank, snipe and curlew, has contributed to their continued survival in the New Forest, which holds populations of regional and national importance. By clearing scrub and encouraging the grazing of rank vegetation eg. grasses and rushes, the *Life3*



Riverine woodland along the Avon Water

project has also benefited the rare Southern damselfly along New Forest streams.

The dynamic project partnership is extremely pleased at the project's outstanding achievements, and its impact upon the wildlife and New Forest habitats. As a result of its success, the *Life3* project has received wide acclaim and international interest.

The project was completed within the agreed timescale and within its £2.9m budget. Hampshire County Council (the lead body) and the five project partners - English

Nature, the Environment Agency, the Forestry 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.

The *Life3* project has made a significant contribution to on the ground delivery of nature conservation objectives in the New Forest Special Area of Conservation (SAC), where over 1300 hectares have been restored to improving condition. ■



Breeding Redshank has benefited from the *Life3* project restoration

## RESTORED:

- ▶ 261 hectares of Riverine Woodland
- ▶ 18 hectares of Bog Woodland
- ▶ 141 hectares of Wet Grassland
- ▶ 184 hectares of Valley mires
- ▶ 10 kilometres of River restored

The New Forest Life Partnership:



# Rare riverine and bog woodland

**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 261ha 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



Wootton Coppice Inclosure in the New Forest

natural regeneration and benefit wildflowers and lichens.

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 75ha 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 18ha 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. ■

Did you know that...

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 184ha of mire.

The work, mainly undertaken by the Forestry Commission (FC), was subject to extensive consultation with the Commoners and the Verderers of the



Valley Mire in the New Forest

New Forest. One of the latest sites to be restored was Wilverley Bog, where 21ha of invading Scots pine was removed.

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 *Life3* project has restored 141ha 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. ■

## European Commission makes an example of Life 3

**The New Forest *Life3* 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. ■

# A massive 10km of river restored



Restored river channel along the Black Water

**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 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 river's 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. ■

**Did you know that...**  
**Life3** is one of the largest river restoration projects to take place in the UK!

## Surveys & monitoring

**V**aluable 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 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

**T**he 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.

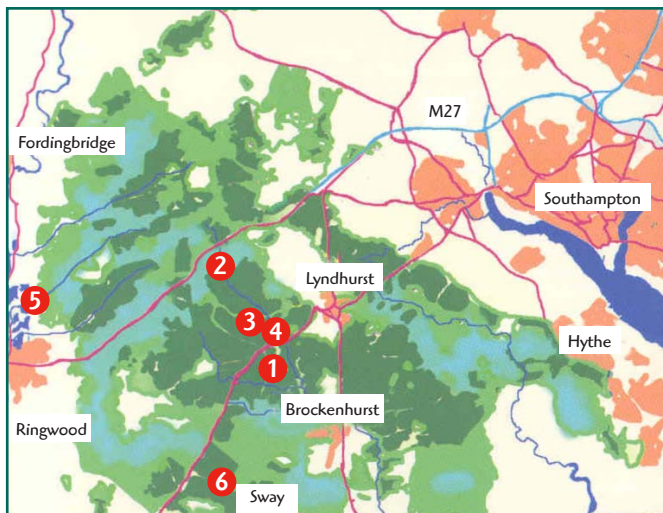
The New Forest *Life3* project has helped to improve their natural habitats by restoring seasonal flooding of rivers and re-wetting adjacent wetlands at locations in the New Forest such as Newlands Plantation. ■

## Visit the work of Life3

**O**n 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

## 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 Thornber, 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 *Life 3* 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.



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

## 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 Thornber, Leader of HCC; Fiona Reynolds, Director General, NT and Simon Hodgson, Chief Executive, FC

## contact us:

The New Forest *Life 3* Project, Environment Department, Hampshire County Council, The Castle, Winchester, SO23 8UD  
tel: 01962 846823 fax: 01962 846776 email: enquiries@newforestlife.org.uk



*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)*