



Friends of Thetford Forest

WINTER 2018/19 NEWSLETTER No. 66

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Welcome to this, the second newsletter of 2018. After a very warm Summer we are now headed into Winter, but that is no reason not to visit the Forest, it may look and feel different but there is still plenty to do and see.

Strangely enough the Summer actually saw a drop in visitor numbers, not just here in Thetford - but across the country as people found being out in the forest just too hot, and it was cooler near the coasts!

FoTF have continued with its various volunteering groups and in particular the Conservation group has attracted a lot of new participants lately – more of that inside – just how many volunteers can you see in this picture ?



As we head into 2019, the Centenary Year of the Forestry Commission, we will be involved in some of the events being planned. The major event for FC will be the official opening of the Heritage Trail at High Lodge – it has taken three years from the preliminary funding application to construction, but is almost complete now – there is more on that inside this newsletter.



You can follow us on Twitter

 [@fotf_uk](https://twitter.com/fotf_uk)

TAWNY OWL SURVEY

FOTF Members can help with the Tawny Owl Survey organised by the BTO (British Trust for Ornithology)

The BTO is asking for people to listen for just 20 minutes during at least one evening between now and the 31 March. You can participate from your garden, local park, in the Forest or even from your house with the window open!

All information is valuable, even zero counts, as it helps understand populations and their distribution and their preferred habitats. Repeating your survey in subsequent weeks is especially useful but of course you can do as many or as few weeks as you are able up to 31 March 2019.

There are more details of how to take part at: www.bto.org/owl The BTO has been carrying out research in Thetford Forest for a number of years in partnership with the Forestry Commission. Its work helps FC manage the Forest for nationally important species, including up to 40 breeding bird species of which tawny owls are one.

FOTF has a vested interest too, as the Conservation Volunteers makes some of nest boxes for the tawny owls - and you can see they are a lot larger than the bat boxes that we have made in the past!



TRAILING THE HIDDEN HERITAGE OF HIGH LODGE PROJECT

With funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund, construction of the heritage trail started in October 2017 with Contractor Hugh Pearl Limited making excellent progress along the 4.2 km route. Shortcuts were installed at 1km and 3 kms and the surface completion target of the end of March of this year (2018) was met. However, there is still a great deal of work to be done before the official opening in 2019. Benches and rest perches have recently been installed at regular intervals and during this autumn, two shelters will be built along the route, providing a refuge from bad weather as well as housing interpretation about timber production and the wildlife in the Forest. Early in 2019, audio listening posts will be placed at the sites of the important heritage features along the trail then the final dust layer will be applied to the surface, making it suitable for use by wheelchairs and mobility scooters. The official opening of the trail will take place in the Spring of 2019 and will be a double celebration, providing access into the forest for everyone and marking the centenary of the Forestry Commission.



© Alan Spidy

There was an evening walk on the new trail followed by a picnic at Oak Lodge, and a Heritage Day was held on September 8th with demonstrations of Neolithic flint-knapping to make tools, arrowheads and axes and ferrets at work, as used by the medieval warreners.

There was a British Army Napoleonic War base camp and the East Norfolk Militia fired volleys from their flint-lock muskets (the original 18th century gunflints were knapped in Brandon).



© Alan Spidy

Volunteers have attended over forty workshops, receiving training to undertake archival and archaeological research and discovering an amazing amount about the historic landscape beneath the trees, from evidence of prehistoric occupation to the establishment of an 18th century farm on the former medieval rabbit warren to the 1930s Labour Camp.

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There were family archaeology activities and the opportunity to take part in an on-going archaeological investigation to uncover the foundations of the farmhouse site which stood near to where Oak Lodge is now.



The Heritage Day was supported by the Forestry Commission and by FOTF volunteers who gave very generously of their time to talk to visitors.

There are still more workshops to come and opportunities to help put together learning materials for schools and families and contribute to the interpretation of the heritage and to book for a workshop or to offer your help with the project. Please email to highlodge.feedback@forestryengland.uk

VOLUNTEER FOR FOTF IN 2019.

In 2017, Friends of Thetford Forest was given the Queen's Award for Volunteering, the equivalent of an MBE for voluntary groups. This award was a reflection of the dedication and enthusiasm of our many volunteers over the years, as well as the range of volunteering tasks undertaken for the benefit of Thetford Forest.

We are now thinking about 2019 and the need to recruit new volunteers so that we can support the Forestry Commission in its management of the Forest for trees, wildlife, archaeology and recreation.

We are particularly looking for volunteers to carry out a 'Meet and Greet' role at High Lodge Centre, welcoming people as they arrive, informing them of the work of Friends and answering their queries.

We also need more people to check the walking trails across the Forest, monitoring their condition and ensuring that they are safe for the public to use.

Other volunteering opportunities include carrying out day-to-day maintenance of Lynford Arboretum at Mundford on most Sundays and Wednesdays, or maintaining and enhancing habitats for wildlife, on the third Sunday of every month with the Conservation Group.

From time to time, Friends of Thetford Forest carries out investigations of archaeological sites and does some maintenance work on them, with training in the heritage skills required.

All volunteering comes with benefits: learning about the Forest by working with Forestry Commission staff; seeing parts of the Forest you never knew were there; being with people of similar interests. More practically, 35 hours volunteering entitles you to a complimentary Discovery Pass and a cafe discount card at High Lodge Centre.

Please consider volunteering for FOTF in 2019.

For more details and how to apply please go to our website at www.fotf.org.uk or by email to us at info@fotf.org.uk



Two cuckoos which spend the summer in Thetford Forest may be better known, thanks to Friends of Thetford Forest and the British Trust for Ornithology.

Cuckoos are nationally endangered, with an almost 50% decline in breeding Cuckoos in the last 25 years. Thetford Forest remains a stronghold for them and the BTO has been satellite-tagging its cuckoos for the past seven years, working with the Forestry Commission. As a result, two new migration routes and the wintering location in the Congo Rainforest have been discovered, along with a better understanding of the problems faced by this migrant species and the possible reasons for the declining populations within the UK. As part of its support for the wildlife of Thetford Forest, Friends' has made a donation to cover the data services records processing for two cuckoos tagged this year.

Thomas (BTO image)



Sylvester (BTO image)



In return, FOTF was asked by the BTO to name the two cuckoos, both males. Thomas has been chosen for one bird, after Thomas Paine. Born in Thetford, he emigrated to British American colonies in 1774 and wrote extensively in support of American independence and the French Revolution, his most famous work being 'The Rights of Man'.

The other cuckoo is named 'Sylvester' because the Scots Pine, the first tree species to be planted when the Forest was established in the 1920s, is 'Pinus Sylvestris'

The BTO website records the progress of the cuckoos and the following is reproduced by kind permission of the BTO www.bto.org/cuckoos

Thomas our most southerly Cuckoo - 19 Oct 2018

Since arriving in the Congo Basin Thomas has moved south and west into the rainforest proper. He is currently in southwest Congo in dense forest. As the crow flies, he is 6,222km (3,866 miles) from his East Anglian breeding site.

Sylvester is alive - 19 Oct 2018

We have received a couple of locations from Sylvester's tag in the last week or so that show he is in Central African Republic. However, the battery charge is low and considering that he is now in an area of dense forest it might not get a good charge for a while - we will have to wait and see what happens next.

Of course, we don't know for sure what has happened but all we can say is that when we last heard from him, he was alive and that there was an issue with the tag which we hope will resolve itself - fingers crossed. The tagging project has enabled the BTO to help understand why cuckoos are not as numerous as they were even ten years ago, such as how the different routes taken on migration are linked to declines, and some of the pressures they face whilst on their journeys.

Continuing to collect data will allow the BTO to examine survival and patterns of mortality and whether climate change and environmental variations, such as in the timing and amount of rainfall in both European and African stopovers, has any effects. It will also look at the effect of weather here in the UK and the impact this has on their migration. It might be that our Cuckoos struggle to get in good condition prior to migrating out of the UK, with a knock-on effect of this following them throughout their migration.

Friends of Thetford Forest will consider supporting Thomas and Sylvester in 2019 – but we would appreciate your views on this before committing funds to this ongoing project – info@fotf.org.uk

FOTF VOLUNTEERING AT A HIGH LODGE SUMMER CONCERT

Back in June, the Forestry Commission held their annual Forest Live concerts at High Lodge.

Over four nights thousands of fans were wowed by The Script, Gary Barlow, Paul Heaton & Jacqui Abbott, and Kasabian performing in the arena



Friends of Thetford Forest volunteers played a vital role in supporting FC staff on the nights. Twenty-two FoTF members provided 295 volunteer hours over the four nights, manning the information stand within the arena, stewarding pathways to and from the car parks, and helping disabled concert-goers around the site.



Katherine and I ran the information stall on the Friday night while Gary Barlow was performing. This involved answering queries from concert-goers, providing information about High Lodge and the Public Forest Estate, giving directions, and being the lost child point (thankfully this last part wasn't called upon). It was great fun, and there was an electric atmosphere in the area as Gary reeled off his hits. - Some uber fans had even been queuing since 6am to get on the front row!

Forest Live will be coming to High Lodge again in June 2019, and FoTF will be looking for volunteers to help out, so for information nearer the time if you would like to get involved, contact us at volunteering@fotf.org.uk

THE RSPB VISIT LYNFORD ARBORETUM

Every year the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds Eastern Region lays on a treat for its volunteers as a 'thank you' for their services through the year. Traditionally this has been in the form of a visit and guided walk around one of the Eastern Region RSPB reserves usually led by a warden or the site manager. This year turned out rather differently as I was at a meeting at the end of 2017 at Strumpshaw Fen where a possible visit to Lynford Arboretum was suggested.

Martin Bull the Eastern Region Volunteer Coordinator was immediately in favour of this idea, so I revealed that I was involved with the Friends of Thetford Forest and had been a regular visitor to the Lynford Estate since the early 1960's.

I was then asked and gladly agreed to lead a walk around the Lynford Estate with particular interest centred on the Arboretum. The Estate has a national reputation as a place where Hawfinches, Goldcrests, Crossbills and Siskins are regular winter visitors but less well known are the other species of birds and mammals that can regularly be seen there. Water Shrews are a 'speciality of the house' as well as nesting Little Grebe, Nuthatch and Tree Creeper and many summer visitors including Spotted Flycatchers.

In the event, Martin had no difficulty in finding 50 volunteers all keen to visit Lynford and enjoy a lunch at the Lynford Hall Hotel as part of the package. The date of 16th August 2018 was set for the visit and Martin was to be supported by his assistant Drew Lyness.

On the day, the volunteers were divided into two almost equal groups, one group started their tour in the morning, the other after lunch. Sadly, the weather in the morning was atrocious, it poured with rain until almost lunchtime keeping many birds hunkered down for the early part of the tour.

The afternoon was far better and both groups enjoyed both sight and sound of Little Grebes, Nuthatches, Tree Creepers and a family of Spotted Flycatchers that I had seen a week earlier which were obligingly still feeding in the same area.



During the more unpleasant weather I was able to regale the groups with tales about the Estate, its gardens and parkland and some of the fascinating people who had lived there or visited in its heyday. The Arboretum was in itself a highlight for the visitors and they all remarked on how well it was being maintained by our stalwart team of FoTF volunteers. Most of the visitors had never visited Lynford before but all were determined that the visit would only be the first of many to come.

Bob Greef

Terry Jennings, FC's Establishment Manager and a long-time support to FOTF died unexpectedly whilst on holiday early in the summer.

He had advised and encouraged us at the Arboretum and in our work generally and it was Terry who had nominated Friends for the Royal Forestry Awards at Mildenhall Woods in 2014 and at the Arboretum in 2017.

The Committee always enjoyed having him at our meetings as he understood our concerns; shared his knowledge with us and was always willing to discuss issues in depth. As his expertise was in timber management and forest resilience, he was a link between us and forest operations and he was always keen to promote that link.

ACTIVE FOREST AT HIGH LODGE THETFORD FOREST

The Active Forest partnership programme between the Forestry Commission and Sport England has created the opportunity to entice a new audience to the forest and increase levels of physical activity.

The partnership funding has supported the implementation of the Active Forest Coordinator job role at select forest centres across the country which has included High Lodge. This role, now led by myself, Jake Stafford, seeks to apply sport and physical activity interventions that are suitable for High Lodges' aims and objectives but also of interest to the local demographic.

This can consist of self-led activities such as utilising the walking trails or Orienteering as well as small- and large-scale events like the GO TRI Duathlons and the upcoming Bark in the Dark (a glow in the dark 5km dog walk) in partnership with the BlueCross.



This mixed approach allows the Active Forest programme to utilise the array of facilities on offer at High Lodge in an attempt to cater to a wider remit of people and entice increased visits to our wonderful forest. Moving forward with the programme there will be increasing opportunities for volunteer support on aspects such as event delivery and supporting research.

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In the upcoming months High Lodge will be host to another Duathlon (running and cycling event) on November the 25th with more dates to follow for 2019 coming soon. For more information on the upcoming events at High Lodge please check out the High Lodge web page and if interested in volunteering or you'd like more information on the Active Forest Programme please contact Jake.Stafford@forestryengland.uk

FoTF joined up with BikeArt to enter a team at the inaugural ON:IT 12-hour overnight bike race in Thetford Forest on 6th October, organised by Thetford Racing.



The team of four successfully rode through the night to finish in a creditable 15th place out of 21 teams, not bad for a bunch of riders of varying skill and, er, age. Some older legs felt quite a bit older by the end of the event, but it was a great experience hurtling around the forest on a cold and clear Autumn night.

Readers might like to know that BikeArt at High Lodge look after and hire the all-ability bikes provided by FoTF some years ago, and to find out more or to hire one please contact BikeArt at info@bikeartthetford.co.uk

CONSERVATION GROUP NEWS

The last 12 months have seen the number of volunteers gradually increase which has enabled us to take on some more ambitious tasks and achieve more on the ground – recently we made a huge difference the edge of Lynford Water that had become rather overgrown and was too shaded for the wildlife. We have also continued with our Duke of Edinburgh participants, some of whom are well on their way achieving their hours required.



FOTF 2018 A G M

Friends of Thetford Forest held its 2018 AGM on 18 October when reports were given on the audited accounts; the work of the committee during the year and the volunteers' work in the Forest. Tristram Hilborn, Forest Management Director, spoke very appreciatively about FOTF's support and dedication.

FoTF Committee for 2019 Secretary Dave Goodrum ; Treasurer Alan Spidy; Volunteering Katherine Jones; Training Bob Greef; Lynford Arboretum Owen Moore and Chair Anne Mason with one other person looking to join early in 2019.

The formal meeting was followed by Valentina Zini's fascinating presentation about her PhD work into Thetford Forest's deer populations, of particular interest because FOTF members acted as her driver while she was conducting a deer census in January to March 2018, which may be repeated in 2019.

It means a great deal to both the out-going and in-coming committee to have the support of members and Forestry Commission staff at the AGM and it is an annual opportunity for members to meet and talk to FC and to learn more about an aspect of Thetford Forest's management – so a special and grateful 'thank you' to all those who attended.

Anne Mason, Chair.

UKWAS AUDIT OF THE PFE

East Forest District (FD) has been one of two FDs in the PFE in England that has been externally audited against the UK Woodland Assurance Standard (UKWAS) this October 2018. UKWAS reflects the UK Forest Standard and the law it crucially allows FC England's timber and venison to be certified under Forest Stewardship Council and Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification schemes.



Passing this audit means that the PFE in England retains its forest certification status. This is not only important for the PFE and what we stand for in terms of sustainably managing our forests for people, nature and the economy but also crucially for our customers (timber and venison) that buy into our sustainable forest management and pass on the FSC or PEFC trademark to their customers that demand it.

This year's audit is still to be concluded, however what we can report to Friends is that East FD received a glowing interim report, with the smallest number of corrective actions ever found at audit, alongside a number of commendations. For example community relationships and environmental education was impressively demonstrated in East FD working with Friends and with the Heritage Trail.

We will update Friends on the final result as soon as we have this, however we are really proud of the outcome locally for us and indeed very grateful for our fantastic partnership with Friends which greatly supports our compliance with UKWAS.

Contributed by John Bruce (Head of Land Management – East FD)

Friends of Thetford Forest

Your current Committee

Anne Mason
Chair/ PFE
Campaign

Alan Spidy
Vice Chair / PFE
Campaign

Dave Goodrum Secretary
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Conservation

Katherine Jones
Volunteering Co-ordinator

Owen Moore
Lynford Aboretum

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