



Friends of Thetford Forest

SPRING/SUMMER 2019 NEWSLETTER No. 67

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Welcome to Spring and Summer and the latest edition of our newsletter!

Not much in life stays still, as the dynamic wildlife of Thetford Forest proves. In this edition we learn why the toad crosses the road, which species has journeyed to Africa and back and why Lynford Arboretum is the favoured destination for birds and bird-watchers.



Bluebells at Lynford Arboretum

We have several events for members to attend and these are listed further on in this newsletter. We also have information about what's happening at High Lodge, with particular emphasis on the Forestry Commission's Centenary Celebrations being held over the August Bank Holiday Weekend.

Friday 7th June is the official opening of the High Lodge Heritage Trail, which will provide all-ability access into the wider forest surrounding the Visitor Centre. The trail will showcase the heritage, wildlife and forestry operations of Thetford Forest. Please make time to walk the trail of 4.2km or take either of the short cuts at 1 km or 3kms



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

Every January, Friends' volunteers find themselves helping to erect a toad fence near Cranwich. Member and Froglife volunteer Clare Tough explains what happens after the fence has gone up and asks the question...

Why Is The Toad Crossing The Road?

Each year as the nights get warmer and especially if it's wet, thousands of toads and frogs make their annual migration to their ancestral breeding grounds. Unfortunately, as humans have developed on these sites and built roads across their routes, an estimated 20 tonnes of toads are killed each year on the roads.

In response to this, the charity Froglife started organising toad patrols where volunteers don their high viz and hopefully waterproof coats, grab a torch and walk up and down some of the main crossing points, picking up as many toads and frogs as possible to safely transfer them across the road.

Cranwich is one of the few sites in the country where it's possible to erect a fence blocking their path just before the extremely busy A134. Buckets are sunk into the ground at regular intervals into which the toads drop, from where a rota of volunteers collect them and ferry them across to their breeding site.



This is where the Friends of Thetford Forest come in, as each January the conservation group meet up with the local toad patrol and jointly install this vital fence. The collaboration is a great start to the year, there's something very satisfying about knowing you'll be saving a creature's life and shows that Friends isn't only a forest group but is willing to help others where needed

At the time of writing, with the fence in place and a rota of bucket checkers, 4,118 toads and frogs have been saved from making the perilous road crossing this year alone. Only 16 have been found dead on the road, which compares well with other patrolled but non-fenced sites.



In case you're wondering, at the end of the main migration season the fence is removed so the toads can return to their summer habitat. This isn't patrolled for the simple reason that the toads aren't in as much of a rush to return as they were to breed so they can move back over many weeks or even months - getting the volunteer manpower to patrol for that length of time just isn't feasible. The toads do have the advantage that as the days are longer their return journey is later in the day when there's less traffic about, unlike the first time which is usually at rush hour.

As always Friends would welcome any new members as would Froglife, details of your nearest patrol can be found on their website.

So a better way to answer the question at the start of this article is that the toad isn't crossing the road, the road is crossing the toads' ancestral route and they need all the help they can get. With the Friends and Froglife Toad Patrollers help at Cranwich, they certainly get that little bit extra

News From Africa - One of Our Cuckoos Is Missing...

Last year, Friends sponsored two cuckoos from Thetford Forest who were being tracked by the British Trust for Ornithology as part of a major research project into the birds' habits and lifestyle. Since then, we've eagerly followed their progress as they left the forest and headed south. Thomas and Sylvester safely made their separate ways through Southern Europe, over the Straits of Gibraltar to North Africa and across the Saharan Desert to end up in Nigeria. Thomas has regularly checked in but Sylvester hasn't been heard of since December. Hopes are fading with the BTO officially listing him as 'missing, presumed dead'.

We look forward to hearing Thomas 'in person' this Spring and have our fingers crossed that Sylvester will find his way out of the Central African jungle and join him in Thetford Forest once again.

To keep up with the progress of Thomas and the other cuckoos being tracked by the BTO please go to:

<https://www.bto.org/science/migration/tracking-studies/cuckoo-tracking>

Thomas (BTO image)



Sylvester (BTO image)



All in a day at Lynford Arboretum – Winter Visitors

Bob Greef spends a Winter's day at Lynford Arboretum and catches up on some visitors.

Photographs by Rachel Greef.

Lynford Arboretum has become well known as a site that attracts a number of attractive winter visitors from Northern Europe as well as having a number of comparatively rare residents.



One of the most sought after species by visiting bird watching enthusiasts is the Hawfinch which arrives in its largest numbers in the New Year. Its favourite food is the fruit of hornbeam which Lynford has in abundance.

Running a close second is the crossbill which tends to be around in smaller numbers throughout the year but like the hawfinch is mainly a winter visitor. The abundance of conifers throughout the forest is the attraction for this bird which has evolved a beak capable of tackling pine cones.

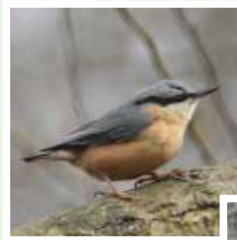


The Siskin is almost always present throughout winter at Lynford, favouring the smaller cones of larch and alder. The deep but very narrow beak of the siskin enables this bird to winkle out the seeds from these smaller cones.

The brambling is a very attractive bird that frequently travels in the company of chaffinches. It can sometimes at first sight be difficult to spot among the similarly coloured chaffinches but once you get your eye in it becomes quite easy. This bird feeds mainly among fallen leaf litter rather than up in the trees but can often be seen on the bridge that crosses the lake where visitors often leave gifts of seeds for the wildlife.



A couple of delightful permanent residents, perfectly adapted to the arboretum usually show themselves more readily in winter. The tree creeper and the nuthatch can both be seen scuttling up the trunks of trees especially when the leaves have fallen.



All the accompanying pictures were taken in a single day at the arboretum or by the lake side although to be honest this was an exceptional day.

A Rare Mammal at Lynford

Lynford Arboretum is rightly sought after for its abundant bird life but the lake created by William Andrews Nesfield during the 1850s also hosts abundant wildlife. A quiet approach to the bridge that crosses the inlet to the upper lake will often reward the visitor with a view of a very unusual British mammal.

This creature is the water shrew, a voracious little carnivore that lives on aquatic insects and even small fish. To help it with this lifestyle it possesses a mild venom in its saliva which stuns its prey. This venom will actually cause a rash on human hands if the animal is handled even if it does not actually bite.

The conservation status of the animal is largely unknown, being locally abundant but nationally scarce. It is present on most of mainland Britain and some of the Scottish islands but absent from Ireland.

Lynford Arboretum - Tree Audit

Friends' volunteer Charlie Cooper describes the work of identifying the trees in the Arboretum.

The collection of specimen trees at Lynford Arboretum has not been comprehensively surveyed or audited for several years and such details as existed were incomplete and held on a number of separate data bases.

That situation is now being addressed following a LIDAR (Laser Imaging Detection and Ranging) survey of the arboretum. This has enabled the location and relative position of virtually all the trees in the arboretum, with some exceptions (more later).

Based on the survey, Chris Reynolds, Project Leader of Forest Research has produced maps of each section of the arboretum showing the location and the number of each tree with an accompanying list from a new data base showing the species name of each tree and its life history.

This is where the Friends Volunteers at Lynford come in. Armed with Chris's maps and lists, we are section by section inspecting every tree in the arboretum. This has highlighted some inaccuracies in the numbering and location of trees, some have died, some felled and some were not recorded.

However the main task is to try and locate on each tree an identity tag. These you may have seen, small metal strips with a series of embossed numbers which show date of planting, section number and the number of the tree. A great many of these tags are missing or broken and these are being noted. When the audit is complete (about 85% so far) our next task is to make and fix new identity tags.

The audit also records if trees have labels or not, again many are missing or damaged. It is planned that a re-labelling programme will be undertaken after all the identity re-tagging has been finished.

Frequently visitors to the arboretum are fulsome in their praise but express a wish for more information about the trees. The labelling will of course go some way to addressing that issue. However we think more is required and it is the ambition of the volunteers to establish a series of information boards to provide more details about individual specimens. For example this would include the Latin name, the common name, the country of origin, timber usage and any other pertinent facts.

From the volunteers point of view this is an ongoing, absorbing and informative experience. We have discovered some wonderful trees with fascinating stories. Our current favourite has to be the Dawn Redwood or if you want to show off to your

friends, *Metasequoia glyptostroboides*. This tree was thought extinct and known only from fossilised remains but a living one was discovered in China in 1941. Since then seeds and cuttings have been taken and now it is found in arboreta world-wide. It is also somewhat unusual being a deciduous conifer.



We mentioned that there were some exceptions regarding the survey, specifically of the trees in the New Plantation area (where the dog agility course is located). In theory, according to old records there should be more than 200 specimen trees in those sections. However, it is an area long neglected and has become overgrown with brambles and bird cherry. We still have to audit this but it is readily apparent that a great number of the specimens have been overwhelmed by brambles or succumbed to deer damage. A clearance and replanting programme is now being contemplated for this area with protection from deer.

More new planting is currently underway in other sections and we'll report progress on that at a later date.

Concurrent with the audit and replanting we are of course continuing with our regular activities including maintaining access routes, grass cutting, leaf collecting, weeding and mulching, storm damage clear up, making mulch and chipping compounds and much more.

Trailing the Hidden Heritage of High Lodge by Anne Mason

The 'Trailing the Hidden Heritage of High Lodge' Project is nearing its end, with the official opening and celebration on 7th June 2019.

There is much to celebrate. The 4.2km trail, with shortcuts at 1km and 3kms, will provide access for everyone into the Forest from High Lodge Centre, as it has a surface suitable for pushchairs, wheelchairs and mobility scooters and benches and rest perches at 100m intervals. Interpretation along the route focuses on the heritage beneath the trees, the wildlife and how the timber is produced.

The involvement of volunteers has been the most outstanding aspect of the project. Some were already members of FOTF or have become members and others were completely 'new' to High Lodge and Thetford Forest



Volunteers investigating the site of the farmhouse at High Lodge.

Overall, the volunteers have given an astonishing 4326 hours to the project, which amounts to £30 900 of their time (calculated at £50.00 for a 7-hour day).

I can't thank them enough for their enthusiasm, commitment and dedication. They have made this project very special for me.

They have attended forty-eight workshops, day schools or events and carried out research into the historic landscape and the wildlife of High Lodge. The information they have amassed has contributed to the interpretation, the web-pages and to the learning materials, with a group of especially dedicated volunteers writing the learning activities for both primary and secondary schools.



Forestry Commission staff have been involved too, with ten recording the tracks for the audio-listening posts along the trail and up to eight others giving generously of their knowledge and expertise.

Please make sure that you walk the trail when you're at High Lodge – some of the interpretation will change with the seasons – and enjoy the benefits of this National Lottery Heritage funded project.

Friends' Supports Forestry Commission Apprentices

FOTF was particularly pleased when the Forestry Commission decided to set up its own apprenticeship scheme a few years ago, to ensure that the knowledge and expertise of experienced foresters would be passed on to those just starting their careers.



To help support the recent intake of four apprentices and trainees, FOTF gave each of them a cheque for £100 towards their books and equipment.

Lynford Heritage Leaflet



The former grounds of Lynford Hall, part of which is the location of the Arboretum, is a Grade II listed parkland.

Friends' member Bob Greef has researched this historic landscape, helped by Archaeologist David Robertson and Anne Mason. This summer we will publish his work in a leaflet which will be available from the Friends' Lodge at the Arboretum.

Conservation Group Winter Diary by Robert Whittaker

The Friends of Thetford Forest Conservation Group continues to meet on the third Sunday of each month, conducting a variety of different tasks to enhance habitats in the forest for different wildlife species. We work under the direction of Forestry England's Ecologist Neal Armour-Chelu. The sessions run from 9am until around 12:30, with a welcome break for refreshments (tea, coffee, biscuits and often cake are all supplied). We would welcome new volunteers to join us; please contact conservation@fotf.org.uk if you are interested. Details of our recent activities can be found below.

November 2018

We returned to Lynford Lakes to continue working on clearing small trees and bushes from near the water's edge. Over the years, the shallow edge ponds and reed-bed had become shaded out. The group's ongoing work here will keep the area sunny and warm for dragonflies, and a range of other creepy crawlies, some of which are very rare



December 2018

Our usual December meeting involves a construction task at the Forestry Commission workshops at Santon Downham. This year we were making mink rafts. These floating wooden platforms include a covered area of soft clay, and are used on local rivers as part of survey work to determine the presence or absence of non-native mink in the area.

January 2019

This month we joined with the Cranwich Toad Patrol to help set up their toad fence on the edge of Cranwich Woods. Further details can be found in an earlier article in this newsletter.



February 2019

We worked on a new site this month: Float Meadow on the edge of Lynford Woods. We worked on clearing scrub and small willow trees that were overgrowing and shading a marshy area in one corner of the meadow. This work will help restore habitat for various wetland plant communities that are present on the meadow.



March 2019

This month we returned to a site in Harling Woods to work on ponds that are home to many amphibians, including the rare great crested newt. We worked to clear trees and bushes that were overgrowing the ponds in order to provide more light and better conditions in the ponds.

April 2019

Because of Easter, we met a week earlier than usual on 14th April. We returned to the Santon Downham workshops to finish off the mink rafts we started in December.



Deer Research in Thetford Forest by Valentina Zini

My PHD focuses on the understanding of deer ecology and their impacts on forestry at a local and landscape scale. As part of this work I have collected distance sampling thermal imaging data together with the Forestry Commission. Thermal Imaging (TI) surveys have been carried out in Thetford for the last 10 years; therefore I have access to a unique long term data set showing deer density trends across Thetford Forest.

In order to collect TI data, FoTF volunteers have been driving a FC pick up while I was scanning the forest with a thermal camera to detect the animals. Once the animal is detected I measure the distance to the animal and record species, sex, get the GPS location and record the time of the sighting. All this information is fed into a statistical model which calculates the deer density. FoTF's help has been vital to my PhD project's data collection. We collect these data in the winter because the vegetation has died out and it is relatively easier to spot the deer and as the temperature is lower and we are spotting them with a thermal camera, there is more contrast between them and the vegetation compared to the summer time. Another crucial reason is that we are trying to estimate the population before reproduction.

I've used this big database plus all the information collected in the deer larder such as deer body weight and fertility to investigate deer distribution, condition and reproductivity across Thetford Forest.

I used TI data to explore how habitat features and recreational pressure affect muntjac and roe deer density by creating spatially explicit models of deer density across the forest for every year that the survey has been carried on. I used these models together with the deer larder data to test competition between roe deer and muntjac (i.e. whether roe deer fertility is decreasing in high muntjac density areas). These maps will be used to identify what the "ideal" deer density is and inform the wildlife management strategy to reduce deer impacts on forest crops to 20%.

The idea is to develop a framework that forest managers can use to take evidence-based decisions about where fencing is necessary to safeguard trees, which tree species are more prone to deer damage and how to increase the impact of wildlife management on the deer population.

I had 9 volunteers from the FoTF and they helped for a total of 35 nights. Without their help the wildlife rangers would have had to drive and therefore being taken away from their deer management duties.

Events at High Lodge Spring/Summer 2019

High Lodge are delighted to announce that they have a number of events planned for 2019.

- The Easter Bunny Trail, which is sited on the Nature Trail and all artwork has been commissioned from our very own Forestry England colleague at Santon Downham HQ, Linda Pavitt
- Heritage Trail Grand Opening on 7th June
- High Lodge Forestry England Centenary Event on 30th and 31st August

This will feature 'Pop Up Cinema' with accompanying live acts, a forest management educational stand as part of the FoTF 'Discovery Day' event and on-site business partners and attractions.

This will be a very sociable and interactive couple of days, enabling greater engagement and understanding of what is available at High Lodge and how Forestry England works.

- Rise & Shine Festival | 4th September

A stand-alone ticketed event featuring 'come-and-try' activities, motivational speaking, food and drink, kidzone, crafting, workshops, outdoor meditation and yoga, mental health workshops. This is also a High Lodge Flagship Pilot Scheme event which has the opportunity to increase in scale and locations in the future

New for 2019 – late night Fridays at High Lodge

Why not make the most of lighter evenings this summer? Hire a BBQ for an early evening treat, let off steam on the cycle trails after a hard week at work or just come to enjoy the pleasant summers evening air.

High Lodge late night opening is every Friday starting Friday 31st May until Friday 19th July, excluding Friday 21st June. The site is open until 9pm with last entry at 7.30pm on advertised Fridays. Regular opening times apply at all other times (7pm closing during the summer months).

Friends' Events for Spring and Summer 2019.

Sunday 26th May from 9.30am to 3.30pm

Mildenhall Warren Lodge and the Rex Graham Reserve share an Open Day.

This is the annual opportunity to go inside the warren lodge and view documents about its history. New this year – warreners' smocks and purse nets.

The Rex Graham Reserve nearby has the largest colony of military orchids in Britain, with access only on this one day in the year.

Directions : The warren lodge is situated in Mildenhall Woods, north of the Barton Mills Roundabout. From the A1065, the minor road (on the left coming south from Brandon and on the right coming north from Barton Mills) is signed 'Household Waste Site'. Turn here and drive past the Household Waste Site to the Forestry Commission car-parking area, signed as 'Mildenhall Warren Lodge'. The Lodge is about ten minutes walk up the hill. Temporary signage will be on the A1065. Grid Ref TL735752.

The Rex Graham Reserve is situated at Ride 306 in Mildenhall Woods, on the A1101 towards Bury St Edmunds, off the five-ways roundabout at Barton Mills. Parking is via ride 306 and will be signed off A1101 on the open day (locked at all other times). There is a boardwalk and steep steps down to the pit and no dogs are allowed. Grid ref: TL 737746.

For more details, information@fotf.org.uk



Friday 17th May 6pm Nunnery Lakes, Meet at British Trust for Ornithology Car Park, Thetford.

FOTF sponsors the data tracking of two cuckoos by the BTO so a visit to the BTO's Nunnery Lakes Reserve seems appropriate.

Nunnery Lakes is a County Wildlife Site between the Rivers Thet and Little Ouse. It was created as old gravel workings filled with water and became lakes and these are surrounded by a variety of Breckland habitats including dry, sandy heathland, wet woodland and flood meadow, supporting a wide range of resident and seasonal wildlife.

**Tuesday 25th June and Tuesday 2nd July 8.30pm – 10.30pm.
Nightjar Evenings.**

For an unforgettable experience as the summer dusk falls in the Forest, come to a Nightjar Evening (or two !).

Friends of Thetford Forest members are invited to join the Forestry Commission's Ecologist Neal Armour-Chelu and Nightjar Expert Ron Hoblyn for an opportunity to see and hear these amazing birds.

Venue tbc when the nightjar return from Africa and take up territories in the Forest. Please email information@fotf.org.uk to register your interest and details will then be sent to you.

Please note: all events are free for FOTF members.

Volunteers are always needed to:

take part in **Conservation Tasks** on the third Sunday of every month 9am - 12.30pm

help at **Lynford Arboretum** on most Wednesday and Sunday mornings

check a walking trail

carry out a **'Meet and Greet'** role at High Lodge.

To volunteer for, or to request more information about any of these FoTF volunteering opportunities, please email volunteering@fotf.org.uk.

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