
Bird Records

Thetford Forest In 2020

Once the lockdown restrictions imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic were eased in 2020, members of the Thetford Forest Ringing Group and nest recorders for the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) were able to continue their work of helping Forestry England monitor bird populations in Thetford Forest.

These are just some of their results.

Goshawks occupied a minimum of 33 sites during all or part of the 2020 breeding season, but some sites may have been missed when no visits were possible during the lockdown.

35 young were recorded as having fledged.



Tree Pipits have been monitored in Thetford Forest since 1998. A colour-ringing project was begun in 2009, to look at site-faithfulness and survival. 214 adult birds have been colour-ringed: 191 males and 23 females.

Complementing the colour-ringing study, a new study in collaboration with Charles University, Prague, began in 2016 aiming to evaluate the recording of tree pipit song as an alternative approach to monitoring their annual survival. Amazingly, individual birds can be recognised from recordings of their songs!

Despite the limitations on access for the bird-ringers, 14 new male Tree Pipits were caught and colour-ringed in 2020, while 12 returning males colour-ringed in previous years were also resighted. Sound-recording was also possible across most of the study plots, and these are being analysed.

Nest monitoring activity was very limited across Thetford Forest, so nest totals are much lower than previous years.

However, intensive monitoring at Cranwich, on the edge of the forest, accounted for most nest totals in 2020 where the most numerous species were reed warbler, with 284 nests, Moorhen with 29 nests and Cuckoo 27 nests.

The next highest nest totals for the forest species were blue tit at 37; great tit at 20 and woodlark at 19.

Over 25 nightjar nests were recorded, which is a typical annual figure. Luckily being a later nester, monitoring was not too heavily affected but only a limited number of volunteers were able to assist due to Covid-19 restrictions...

4549 birds were ringed, consisting of 3554 adults and 995 nestlings. An extra 1547 birds were re-caught and found to have been ringed in previous years.



It is only through the work of all these dedicated staff and volunteers that the birdlife of the forest is monitored and protected. FOTF volunteers play their part too, with conservation tasks to maintain and improve habitats for wildlife and workshops to make nest boxes.

In the spirit of this threefold partnership, FOTF is again sponsoring the tracking data analysis undertaken by the BTO for two Forest Cuckoos in 2021. Follow the story of the cuckoos at: www.bto.org/our-science/projects/cuckoo-tracking-project

FOTF is very grateful to Neal Armour Chelu, FE's District Ecologist and to Greg Conway and others from the British Trust for Ornithology for permission to use this information in the newsletter.

Anne Mason

Helping Everyone

Enjoy Thetford Forest at High Lodge

Friends of Thetford Forest is celebrating the award of a grant from the Local Connections Fund which will mean wheelchair users can enjoy the forest at High Lodge Centre with their families and friends.

The Local Connections Fund, supported by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) and the National Lottery Community Fund, was set up to bring people and communities together and reduce isolation and loneliness. Friends of Thetford Forest applied for funding for a wheelchair transporter bike which would enable wheelchair users to be with others cycling at High Lodge, instead of being excluded.

We are also grateful to Bike Art who also generously donated to FoTF to assist with this purchase.

This transporter bike will enable wheelchair users to remain in their own chair while another person powers the actual bike. The platform at the front of the bike is operated to move down and the wheelchair itself is reversed onto the platform and is strapped and clamped into place and then the platform is moved gently up to above the ground level. It is ideal for users who have a complex seating system in their own wheelchair that would normally make

transferring impossible or have mobility problems making transferring difficult.

The transporter bike can be hired from Bike Art at High Lodge, in an arrangement with Friends of Thetford Forest. For enquires and booking arrangements, please telephone Bikeart on 01842 810090.



Megan Bradsworth, Visitor Services Manager at High Lodge, has commented:

I am delighted that funding from the Local Connections Fund has been secured and due to the generosity and commitment of FOTF we will be able to offer the freedom of the forest to so many more visitors. I can't wait to see the transporter bike in action and people enjoying High Lodge's multi-user trails. The Heritage Trail has a smooth surface which will be perfect for the new transporter bike and the fact that it's available to hire from Bike Art on site is just fantastic.

M o t o r c y c l i n g

in Thetford Forest

There has for many years been a problem with riding /driving illegally in and around the Thetford forest area, although it is far from unique to the East and is spread across all the Forestry England districts to a greater or lesser degree.

The last year or so has been particularly hard for us as a district with the COVID 19 lockdown bringing some very interesting characters into the woods, I believe that most of these would not have given the forest a second thought under normal circumstances.

Motor vehicles are not permitted into the forest without permission. The Muntjac Enduro which is a long - established event is itself under threat due to the illegal activity.

There are places where these people can go, for instance, Hit the dirt at Swaffham, Wild trax at Newmarket, as well as Motor land near Mildenhall. When these places re open we may see a slight drop in use age.

The Forest is designated SSSI (Site of specific scientific interest) and SPA (Special protection area). With rare flora /fauna and as such causing damage is an offence.

A very good piece of legislation is Section 59 of the Police reform act 2002, This applies to both rider/driver and or the machine, which makes it possible to seize a vehicle being used by a person's who is in receipt of a sect 59 warning. The warning is valid for 12 months from the date of issue. There is also road

traffic act, which contains the offence of riding other than on a road.

Any reports that we get are passed to the relevant police force either for intel or if the offender can be identified direct action. There have been several seizures and numerous sect 59s issued along with COVID 19 Offences.



Partnership working.

We are working with Norfolk and Suffolk police forces; Diss Motorcycle club; All Terrain UK. ACU (Auto cycle union); County Rights of way Officers. and the general public who are our eyes and ears in the forest.

Finally, we are in discussion with the police about the feasibility of setting up a forest watch scheme. If this comes off it is proposed that information on sightings, timings, number plates if possible and support vehicles etc could be passed to a coordinator for dissemination to the relevant police force. Your thoughts would be most welcome.

Dave Kingsnorth Forestry Community Ranger

W W 2 T a n k T r a i n i n g C a m p s

in the Forest near Mundford

In early 1944 several tank regiments arrived in the forest near Mundford to train for top-secret D-Day landings planned for the summer of that year. The 7th Armoured Division otherwise known as the 'Desert Rats' were already exhausted from their successful advance across North Africa, and later campaign in Italy.

They had returned to England in November 1943 and in January 1944 were now expected to return to duty to lead the invasion back into northern Europe.

They were also not in the best of spirits as they had been supplied with a new type of tank, the Cromwell, which they considered very inferior to their previous vehicles.

The Nissen huts that they lived in, together with larger huts for communal activities all stood on concrete bases. There was an extensive sanitary system linking the huts to sewage treatment works and an outflow from these to the River Wissey at Ickburgh. The High Ash area and Shakers Wood seems to have been the centre of activities. Here there were REME workshops, a NAAFI, a medical centre, and a chapel amongst other things.

The huts were placed in a haphazard pattern amongst the trees, hidden from aerial view. This can be seen on the RAF aerial photographs from 1946. There were camps

in Betts Covert, Dixons Covert, Sugar Hill and Quadrilateral Covert as well as High Ash and Shakers Wood. It is not positively known how many troops were there as it was all so secret. It is said that the only local people who knew what there was were those who collected the refuse! It is clear from the surviving concrete roads that troops moved from these to the centre of operations at High Ash.

Many of the concrete hut bases survive, covered by leaf litter, brambles, bracken, and ivy. Some have been removed, and those that remain are gradually being broken apart by the roots of trees. Some are visible to the eye; others can be located with a 'prodder' a few centimetres below the surface. In places the imprint of corrugated iron suggests that the huts were assembled before the concrete was set. By one large base, probably a mess, steps were found, with a boot scraper was still in place.



Everywhere there are drains disappearing down into the ground, and in the bases we found a pattern of toilet cubicles, and the bases of small stoves. Between the huts are larger drains, some covered but some standing open posing a hazard to 'explorers'!

We found some crockery and other 'artifacts' but probably most has been removed over the intervening years. We photographed and left what we found.

One of the sewage works, a large complex with two filter beds is largely intact. Another remains as a concrete skeleton in the middle of a field, despite the farmer's best efforts to remove it.



Some restoration work has been done at High Ash, where a Cromwell Tank stands by the A1065 road. Here a Nissen Hut, typical of those that were there in 1944 has been rebuilt, and behind it a few bases with a winding path between them have been cleared, giving an idea of what was there.

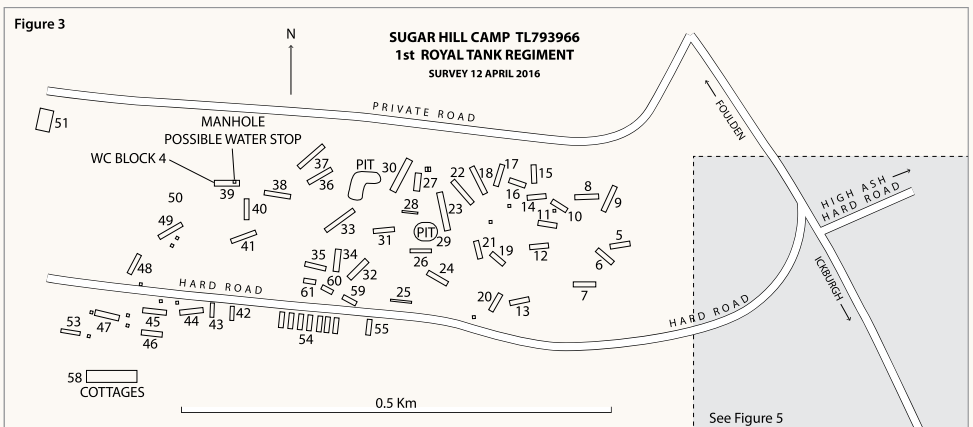
However, there is much to be explored in the publicly accessible areas of Sugar Hill, Dixons Covert and Quadrilateral Covert.

Beware of open drains amongst the trees.





In 2016 we investigated the remains of these camps as part of a project run by Breaking New Ground. There is a longer article on the subject in the first edition of The Breckland Journal including plans that were drawn of the layout of huts at Sugar Hill and Dixons Covert. This should be found in local libraries.



Tony and Julia Grover

High Lodge Café

run by corporate member, Churchill Catering Ltd

Exciting times ahead with a change to our offering and lay out of the café.

The old canteen food style has gone, and we are replacing the food offering with daily specials, more along the lines of a street food takeaway menu; These include southern fried chicken in Brioche bread, piri-piri hot wraps, along with the good old favourites of jacket potatoes, paninis / toasties now being made to order plus the new and our very popular 12" pizzas. Everything is cooked fresh to order and delivered to the table (or direct outside at the moment due to covid). You may also have noticed the staff in the new brown and khaki uniform.

Volunteers, remember you get free tea, coffee and bottled water and Churchill Catering are happy to give an additional 30% off on hot food to anyone producing a FoTF volunteers card.

We look forward to seeing you in the café and serving you.

Sarah and the Catering Team



High Lodge Trails

Over the past year the forest has been incredibly busy with everyone trying to keep active and staying 'local', and we anticipate this year to be no different! However, the high volume of visitors to High Lodge takes its toll on the trails and we have had to undertake major maintenance works on sections of the bike trails.

Those of you who have visited recently will have seen that the 'Helter-Skelter' section of the Lime Burner has had diversions in place whilst we replace the surface and rebuild parts of the trail, currently we are waiting for the surface to settle and then re-opening before the summer.

Also scheduled for some major maintenance works later this year is 'The Downhill'. For latest information on trail diversions please go to our website or social media.



Left - The Lime Burner's Helter-Skelter before maintenance where the trail surface is heavily rutted, and the berm has collapsed.

Right - The same section of trail after maintenance. Although this looks ready to ride, it still needs some time to settle which is why we place branches across the track to help indicate the trail is currently closed

Oliver Rogers, Forestry England

High Lodge Learning

We are very excited to announce the launch of High Lodge's new education shelter in Coney Copse.



As an organisation we are looking to build our education offer by increasing accessibility and insight to the forest environment, and the role that Forestry England plays in creating and managing the nations green spaces and we want the new shelter to allow visiting school parties to have a working base for their exploration when they visit our forest, and in time we are hoping to add to the education experience with bug houses, sensory areas and forest art areas.



Oliver Rogers, Forestry England

Forest Events

It has been with a heavy heart that we have had to postpone so many of the events at High Lodge including Forest Live concerts, sporting events and groups, and volunteer groups including Friends of Thetford Forest during the last year.

However, High Lodge events are starting to spring back to life as a welcome addition to our core activities such as walking trails, cycling trails and play areas.

We also see the return of high rope courses and segways from 'Go-Ape!', archery from 'Lookout Archery', bushcraft courses and axe throwing from

'Back to Wilderness' and bungee trampolining from 'Thurston Leisure'.

We are delighted to confirm that High Lodge's events calendar is starting to look busy again. Shortly we will see a resumption of the ever-popular running events delivered by 'Go-Tri' and 'Inspire Races' who offer various distances from 5k to Half Marathon throughout the year.

We also have weekly groups such as yoga, Nordic Walking, boot camps and couch to 5K. For more information, please check our website and social media pages for latest information or contact High Lodge.

Oliver Rogers, Forestry England

F o T F C o m m i t t e e

We hope to hold our next AGM at Oak Lodge, High Lodge Centre, on Thursday 14 October of this year – circumstances permitting. We will deal with matters arising from our 2019 - 2020 reports at this meeting.

In the meantime, the existing committee (listed below) is willing to continue.

Anne Mason
Alan Spidy

Dave Goodrum
Katherine Jones

Clare Tough

We are seeking two members to join the committee, co-opted until we are able to hold elections at the AGM. Please email info@fotf.org.uk if you are interested or would like to know more about the role.

Non-Car Family Help

Enjoy High Lodge this Summer

Part of the 'Trailing the Hidden Heritage of High Lodge' Project was support by the Heritage Lottery Fund for the cost of tickets for non-car families to use the local community bus to visit High Lodge in 2018. FOTF continued the scheme in 2019 in partnership with Forestry England and plans to do this again in 2021.

There are families in Thetford and Brandon who do not have a car and their children have very little access to green space and all the benefits that being outdoors brings. Under this scheme, the Community Bus will bring these families from Thetford and Brandon to High Lodge on a designated day a week during the summer holidays, to give them several hours to enjoy the forest. FOTF will send publicity to the organisations already working with the families so that the information reaches those who will benefit the most.



Forestry England will give the bus free 'drop off and pick up' access and FOTF will pay for the tickets which must be pre-booked with the organisers of the community bus scheme.

As one of FOTF's aims is 'increasing access for everyone' this scheme will give income-limited families the opportunity to enjoy a summer's day at High Lodge.

Anne Mason

Go Ape

Re-opening of Forest Doors!

Following the latest government announcement on 22 February, Go Ape is delighted to be opening their forest doors on the 12th April at our English sites. Get back in touch with the outdoors and each other as you leap, swing, jump and zoom into a little more freedom.

Reconnect, re-socialise and rejoice with family friends and family members in the trees and on the ground with our spine-tingling Treetop Challenge, thrilling Treetop Adventure and invigorating Forest Segways!

New for 2021 at Thetford is Treetop Adventure Plus! It's aimed at those younger members of the tribe aged 6 & over who have already conquered the existing Adventure course but are ready for a little bit more. It is higher, wobblier and has an epic 100m zip wire finale!

COVID-19 regulations will continue to be put in place at sites. All bookings should be made in advance and a maximum of 2 households (6 people) will be accepted per booking up until 17th May. After 17th May, bookings of up to 30 will be allowed.

Social distancing is built into Go Ape operating procedures and sanitising stations are available to customers and staff at multiple points during all Go Ape experiences.

All Go Ape employees will be equipped with face shields and all customer interactions will be COVID secure. During safety briefings, customers will be instructed to maintain the appropriate distance from anyone outside of their “bubble”.

Customers can also wear personal protective equipment including masks and gloves - Go Ape gloves are available to pre-order and collect from site on arrival.

For more information about Go Ape's COVID-19 procedures please refer to the latest “COVID-19 Updates” section of the website or the “FAQs”.



Victoria Herbert – Site Manager Thetford

The Croxton Estate

Forestry England Purchases Freehold

As many of you will know, while most of Thetford Forest is owned by Forestry England (FE), a substantial area is held on leases, which limit our rights to manage those areas for multi-purpose public benefit.

As the FE Area Land Agent at Thetford for thirty years, these restrictions have long been a major constraint on our evolving management objectives and the Croxton Estate has always been the largest leasehold part of Thetford Forest.

Some 92 years after it was first offered for sale to the Forestry Commission, the 2,500 ha Croxton Estate is finally owned by Forestry England. How did this take so long and why were we so keen to buy it?

Croxton is part of Thetford Forest, England's largest lowland pine forest, covering some 20,000 hectares and straddling the border between Norfolk and Suffolk. It is the largest single land holding within the Brecklands, an area of lowland heath and forest designated as a Special Protection Area and a Site of Special Scientific Interest.

By 1919, most of the area comprised of large sporting estates of marginal agricultural value, extensively grazed by sheep.

The decline in fortunes of these traditional estates coincided with the creation of the Forestry Commission and its remit to expand forestry by acquiring and planting agricultural land. To maximise the plantable area, poorer (therefore cheaper) land such as heathland was acquired, mainly by buying a succession of estates which came onto the market during the 1920's. By 1927, Thetford Forest was the largest and fastest expanding FC holding in England.

However, when Colonel MacKenzie put the Croxton Estate up for sale in 1928 due to Death Duties, lack of finance prevented FC from buying despite a price of only £3 per acre, including some 85 houses and cottages.

As it was strategically located between the forest and the edge of Thetford, the Crown Estate were persuaded to buy it and grant a lease to FC for afforestation. This secured a temporary solution which enabled expansion of the forest, but

without long term security or the flexibility to adapt to changing objectives.

Over the years, most of the land was planted and the Crown Estate were in many ways a sympathetic landlord. However, any proposals to allow non-silvicultural use such as conservation grazing, public access or recreational events required specific consent, which was sometimes refused for commercial reasons or was subject to payment.

This limitation become especially apparent when the High Lodge Visitor Centre was constructed on nearby FC owned land in 1992, and the need for unrestricted public access became much stronger. Even part of the High Lodge Drive crossed the leased area, potentially allowing a ransom to be charged on access to the site.

The lease was also becoming due in 2025 for its first rent review since 1928, increasing every 10 years until its expiry in 2088. Substantial increases in operating costs combined with just one remaining rotation length were on the cards. 'Thinking Beyond a Lifetime' meant that securing ownership would rapidly become a priority.

Over the years, the Crown Estate sold off the houses and took back areas of forest for housing and commercial development adjoining Thetford, generating significant returns to the Treasury.

As its core objectives are mainly financial, the Crown Estate has increasingly changed focus from its rural estate to more commercial investments and this created the opportunity to negotiate a purchase.

Capital acquisitions require both funding as well as approval from our National Office. With support from Friends of Thetford Forest, I was able to make the case to prioritise the buying of the Croxton freehold from the Crown Estate.

A substantial compensation payment had been received earlier in the year from Highways England as part of a recent mitigation scheme for dualling the A11, which had affected a different leasehold area of the forest. Discreet support from FoTF helped ensure we made a strong case for using those funds locally to expand our freehold estate at Thetford.

Following three years of challenging negotiations with the Crown Estate's Land Agents, I was finally able to agree terms and completed the purchase of the freehold of 2,500 hectares of forest, heathland, and river valley. (That is 6,177 acres in 'old money' or the equivalent of over 3,500 football pitches!) Our next priority is to take

the time to plan how we can best use this great new opportunity to maximise public benefit and secure the long-term future of Thetford Forest.



In the short term we will be able to expand informal recreational use around High Lodge, but the longer-term opportunities are even more exciting, especially as we will now be able to deliver true multi-purpose management of the forest surrounding Thetford.

Charles Ashley - Area Land Agent East England Forest District April 2021

The final picture for this issue, taken by the editor



Our first socially distanced Conservation event, December 2020, just before the return of the lockdown in January 2021

V o l u n t e e r i n g

We offer lots of opportunities – and they all come with the appropriate training:

Checking the Walking Trails.

Monitoring the condition of the various walking trails at High Lodge and in Thetford Forest generally so that they are safe from hazards and litter-free, on a monthly basis.

Looking after Lynford Arboretum.

Carrying out day-to-day maintenance of the Arboretum at Mundford, including tree-planting and looking after the shrub layer, two to four mornings a month.

Conservation.

Enhancing habitats for rare plants and animals “somewhere” in Thetford Forest, under the guidance of the Forestry Commission’s East of England Ecologist, on the third Sunday of every month.

Archaeology.

Monitoring the condition of archaeological sites annually and investigating and caring for archaeological sites within the Forest, as and when required.

High Lodge

Having seasonal work parties to support maintenance of the Heritage Trail and High Lodge in general; helping at the concerts and at special events.

Please email volunteering@fotf.org.uk for further information.

Please note that all volunteers will be required to complete a welfare form and comply with the risk assessments and safety guidance and the current Covid19 regulations.



E-mail: info@fotf.org.uk

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With thanks to all of our corporate members for helping us increase understanding and enjoyment of Thetford Forest, and helping us to fund various projects.



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