



Friends of Thetford Forest

Newsletter #75 / 2023 / Spring Edition

Welcome

Welcome to the this newsletter, the first of 2023. Our main focus over the last few months has been to increase the number of volunteers that we can support in and around the forest.

This has proved very successful, and recently we were part of a team having display stands relating to Thetford Forest at the annual fair at Lakenheath Airbase that they hold themselves to get the visitors to our county involved in the local community.

Ourselves, Forestry England, Go Ape, Bike Art & the High Lodge café all had adjacent stands inside the hall and there was a level of engagement far in excess of our expectations, and in fact we already have families signed up to volunteer.

Inside this newsletter, amongst other information, you will find a new 'what's in a name' article & map and an item from the BTO team; details of Mildenhall Warren Lodge Open Day with the Open Day at the Rex Graham reserve.

As always we are always looking for interesting or thought provoking items for our next newsletter, so if you have something you would like included, or an idea for us to cover, please do let us know on the main email address.

The cover picture of this issue was taken by Alan Spidy whilst out doing some monitoring of warren banks.

Your Current Committee

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Treasurer/Membership Secretary

Dave Goodrum
Secretary/Conservation

Katherine Jones
Volunteering Co-ordinator

Clare Tough

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Page 13 - D Goodrum

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Thetford Forest Bird Group

Report on 2023 Meeting

Many of us have seen and listened to birds on our visits to the forest but the annual Thetford Forest Bird Group Meeting that scientific monitoring and analysis are vital to understanding and maintaining its bird species.

Saturday 25 February, at Santon Downham Village Hall, was the first 'in person' meeting of the group since 2019. It was led by Richard Brooke, Neal Armour-Chelu and Andy Pallas-Clark, of Forestry England's Planning and Environment, East District. Presenters and attendees included the British Trust for Ornithology; RSPB; the Norfolk and Suffolk Wildlife Trusts and the many volunteers who help carry out bird counts and surveys.

Thetford Forest is within the Breckland Special Protection Area (SPA) for its populations of stone curlew, nightjar and woodlark. Breeding pairs in 2022 were: stone curlew 4; woodlark 227 and nightjar 260.

The tree pipit researcher explained how individual birds can be identified by their unique song repertoires, a technique known as acoustic monitoring.

Geolocators fitted to willow warblers have revealed that those nesting in the

Forest favour Nigeria, Ghana and the Gambia for the winter months, 2000 kms from Thetford.

One of the challenges for foresters is to continue to manage the forest for its wildlife whilst introducing new tree species and management practices to make timber production more resilient to climate change. However, these changes could impact on the wildlife and in particular, the designations of Thetford Forest as a Site of Special Scientific Interest and a Special Protection Area.

Neal Armour-Chelu described the measures already underway to ensure that the legal designations are observed and biodiversity enhanced. These measures include increasing the area of permanent open habitat; exploring the suitability of alternative habitats such as felling strips and establishing areas of coppice and increasing connectivity between adjacent habitats with wildlife corridors.

Speakers emphasised that the Forest has significant populations of Priority 1 species including kestrel, turtle dove, song thrush, yellowhammer, skylark & marsh tit.

It is also home to rare and declining

species, such as lesser spotted woodpecker and willow tit. Birds of prey such as hobby, sparrowhawk, buzzard and goshawk and tawny and long-eared owls are present too.

Whilst the British Trust for Ornithology, RSPB and the Wildlife Trusts carry out regular surveys, reports of forest sightings for any of the above species can be submitted by FOTF members to Birdtrack <https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/birdtrack>

Finally, one theme was stressed throughout the meeting – the importance of habitats and having them in favourable condition for invertebrates, insects; plants and birds. Those of you who undertake the conservation tasks to improve and enhance habitats one Sunday a month, can be very proud of the part you're playing to ensure that Thetford Forest's wildlife thrives into the future.

Anne Mason

More What's in a Name ?

1 King's Forest was named in commemoration of the Silver Jubilee of King George V and Queen Mary in 1935.

George V began the annual Christmas Broadcast by the sovereign, the first being transmitted in 1932.

When he died on 20 January 1936, his eldest son Edward succeeded to the throne as Edward VIII but then abdicated to marry Wallis Simpson and his younger brother became king as George VI, the father of Queen Elizabeth II.

2 Queen Mary's Avenue

Mary was a great-granddaughter of George III.

She married King George V in 1893 and they had six children, including kings Edward VIII (afterward duke of Windsor) and George VI. Parallel rows of beech trees were planted in 1935 to make the avenue.

3 Mayday Farm may originally have been 'Mosydale', from the Old English 'mose' for 'moss'.

4 Shaker's Road and Shaker's Wood, derived from the medieval practice of 'shack' or 'shackage', the grazing of livestock on the stubble of the open fields after the crop was harvested.

The normal season for 'shack' ran from Michaelmas (29 September) to Lady Day (25 March).

5 Harling Drove the place name means 'settlement of the people of Herela' from an Old English personal name Herela and the Old English group name 'ingas'.

6 Mickle Hill 'micel' or 'micle' means large, tall or great -very appropriate as this is a Bronze Age or Early Saxon round barrow, 1.8m high and 32 m in diameter.

7 Lynford linden tree ford". We know 'linden trees ' as lime trees.

8 Waterloo and Wellington Belts (Eriswell).

A 'belt' was a shelter belt of Scots Pine planted to stop soil erosion and sand blows, often in conjunction with newly-created fields in the 18th and 19th centuries.

These two names indicate that the belts were originally planted in and just after 1815, commemorating the Battle of Waterloo and the Duke of Wellington, Commander of the British Army.

9 Berner's Heath is named after Lord Berners (1761–1838) who owned Didlington Hall. The Heath is now a biological Site of Special Scientific Interest but was used as a high altitude bombing range from 1936 until after World War II.

10 Falconer's Lodge was part of the Didlington Estate.

He was President of the Confederate Hawks of Great Britain, the Falconers' Club and Didlington became the centre of formal falconry in Britain and reportedly Europe. Lord Berners had Falconer's Lodge built on the estate in 1814 and it was used to fly falcons at herons.

Anne Mason



Nightjars

Research report on diet & foraging of these birds

Dr Greg Conway and Dr Ian Henderson have been working on Thetford Forest's breeding Nightjars for more than two decades. Here they set out some of the more recent findings from their research

The Nightjar is still a species shrouded in mystery due to its nocturnal lifestyle, making it very difficult to observe or follow its movements. Also, its superb camouflage renders it invisible during the daytime, where it remains motionless on the ground or roosting high on a tree branch. These summer migrants, arrive from late April and depart during September to spend the winter on the African savannahs south of the Congo basin.

Foraging movements and habitats used

During the breeding season we had very little detailed information about important foraging areas or habitats used by nesting Nightjars. Current Nightjar habitat management mainly focuses on the provision of nesting habitat with the expectation that this also caters for their foraging needs.

However, with recent advances in miniaturised GPS tracking technology we were able to temporarily fit tiny devices to Nightjars to track their nightly movements in great detail. This allowed us to build an accurate picture of their movements and discover where they go to feed.

The GPS data revealed a surprise in that almost every nesting adult left the forest to feed, flying between 2 km and 5 km to do so.

The main foraging habitats selected beyond the forest contain grassland and cropped fields. Here Nightjars frequently fed along hedgerows and ditches, presumably to exploit high concentrations of insect prey. They often revisited the same foraging locations on the same and successive nights to visit these feeding hot spots.

In the example map, a tracked Nightjar's night begins in Thetford Forest, with a post-sunset foraging flight, both to feed up after over 17 hours on the nest and to return food for its hungry chicks. Then, both parents either remain at the nest or nearby within the clearfelled, during the darkest period of the night, before, a final

feeding excursion before dawn,, which may also be mixed with a bit of exploration en route.

What do Nightjars eat?

Traditionally, most diet studies of insectivorous birds have relied upon undigested remains in regurgitated pellets and droppings to identify prey. For Nightjar, this has been effective for examining the hard chitinous remains of beetles and other larger insects, which can make up 10-20% of prey items. However, as Nightjars mainly prey on moths, the vast majority of remains tend to be wing scales and of limited use for species identification.

Fortunately, new DNA metabarcoding methods now allow us to recover the prey's DNA from their droppings to identify exactly what they have been eating.

The results reveal that Nightjars are very selective, preferentially targeting medium to large sized moths and avoiding the often more abundant smaller species.

They also prefer to hunt in open habitats where prey is presumably easier to see and catch.

The majority of moths consumed belong to the families Noctuidae and Geometridae, which comprise many macro moth species currently experiencing ongoing population declines in Britain.

Further work is underway to understand how local Nightjar breeding populations might be impacted by continuing reductions in their moth prey.

Find out more

Evens et al. 2020. *Ecology and Evolution* 10: 13044-13056.

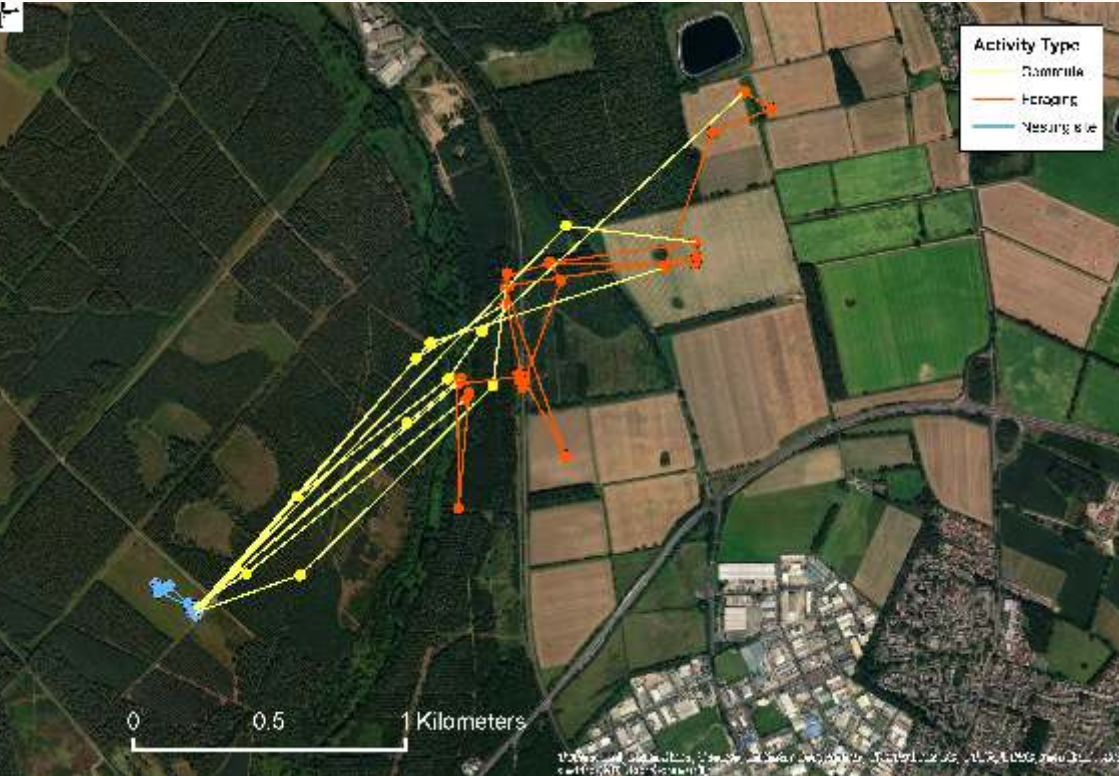
Acknowledgements

We are very grateful to the Forestry England for supporting this work and allowing permission to access sites in the forest

The wider tracking and diet work has been supported by Mark Constantine, Mike Wortley, Rod Leslie, British Birds Charitable Trust and Natural England.

Our many project collaborators and contributors include Ruben Evens, Jen Stockdale, Kirsty Franklin and Tom Bolderstone, as well as the numerous volunteers from Thetford Forest and Wicken Fen Ringing Groups and The Friends of Thetford Forest.

NIGHTJAR FORAGING TRACKS (SINGLE NIGHT) Close proximity (within 5 km of the nest) of feeding sites is an important requirement for successful Nightjar breeding habitat management and creation.



As part of the ongoing Nightjar research in Thetford Forest, researchers from the British Trust for Ornithology will be monitoring nesting success and tracking the year round migration of our local breeding birds.

This work will be undertaken from June to early August, mostly during evenings from 7pm to midnight where we will undertake surveys of singing males, map territories, locate nests, and catch adults to retrieve migration data.

We are always grateful for help from volunteers, particularly with evening surveys and nest finding. All survey and nest finding activities will be supervised by qualified BTO staff and volunteers from Thetford Forest Ringing Group.

If you are interested in helping with this, please contact Greg Conway (greg.conway@bto.org), who will add you to the mailing list. Each week a plan of activities will be circulated via email. As vehicular access within the forest is restricted we will be limited to the number of vehicles with permits and volunteers that can be accommodated per evening.



GPS tags like this are temporarily attached to each bird's tail feathers and remain fixed for a few weeks.



Lynford Arboretum

Volunteer Tree Planting

Planting trees is always a positive experience, especially at a time when carbon capture becomes more and more relevant in attempts to mitigate the damage to our climate. So it was especially pleasing that in March our volunteers had the chance to plant 3 species of conifer at Lynford Arboretum.



Each species were planted in groups of three. This is a common practice within arboreta which allows for the chance of at least one tree to survive to maturity.

The species planted were:

Cupressus sargentii – Sargent's cypress, a conifer from the Coast Range mountains of California that typically grows 10 – 15m tall. Its conservation status in the wild is vulnerable.

Pseudotsuga sinensis – the Chinese Douglas fir. Like Sargent's cypress, its conservation status is vulnerable. It can grow up to 50m in height.

Pinus Nigra – the Austrian or Black pine from Southern Europe. Its conservation status is of least concern. It grows 20 to 55m in height.

Our conservation work usually involves some sort of vegetation clearance, so tree planting was a pleasant diversion. However, an encroaching rhododendron bush had to go as it would begin to compete for light and water if left to grow unchecked - The volunteers made short work of it!



Nearly 2000 hours

Volunteering in the last year!

Friends of Thetford Forest record the number of hours our volunteers contribute to various volunteering activities in the forest.

We use these to make sure anyone qualifying for a free High Lodge entry pass from Forestry England receives one - these are received for over 35 hours volunteering over a year (running from May-April). Additionally, we use these hours for grant applications to show the time contribution our volunteers give to the forest.

The last year of volunteering is the first full year post-covid restrictions where volunteering opportunities were reduced and Friends volunteers gave a wonderful 1921 hours of their time. As well as about 500 hours contributed by each of the Lynford arboretum and conservation groups, nearly 200 hours of walking trail checks were completed! Thank you to all our volunteers for the time they give, and to everyone for their assistance with collecting the hours data.

Katherine Jones





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Mildenhall Warren Lodge Open Day



Sunday 28 May from 10.00 to 15.30

Visit the Warren Lodge and get a unique insight into the warrener's life 600 years ago. Guided walks at 12.30 and 14.00 starting from the Warren Lodge. Annual opportunity to go inside the lodge.

Please follow the temporary signage on the A1065 north of the Barton Mills roundabout to Warren Lodge car park. We suggest you do not use your Sat Nav. Ten minute walk up the hill to the building. Grid Reference TL735752.



Combine this with a visit to the nearby Rex Graham Reserve. This is a site for rare orchids and is not normally open to the public.

Please follow the temporary signage to the Rex Graham Reserve on the A1101 towards Bury St Edmunds, off the roundabout at Barton Mills. We suggest you do not use your Sat Nav. Steep steps down to the pit in the forest; no dogs allowed.

These are free events and no booking is required.

In partnership with



Forestry England

Volunteering

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, up 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.



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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.



Corporate members receive many benefits from the Friends of Thetford Forest. If you are interested in becoming a corporate member, please see full details at www.fotf.org.uk

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