



# Friends of Thetford Forest

Newsletter #76 / 2023 / Autumn / Winter Edition

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# Welcome

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*Autumn/Winter Edition*

Welcome to the second newsletter of 2023., We hope you enjoy the varied articles contained within.

The pleasant summer brought many visitors to the High Lodge site and also to the quieter areas of the forest such as St. Helen's and Lynford Stag, and we managed to organise many volunteering events across the forest unhindered by bad weather !

Then summer concerts went well during June, and once again we assisted in the stewarding over all 4 nights.

We held our 2023 AGM meeting in October attended by many of our members and 6 Forestry staff. During the AGM formal business we welcomed long standing member Mr Ryan Skeats onto the committee. After this we were treated to a very interesting talk by Naomi Smith from Forestry England on the subject of conservation rides and open habitat spaces within the forest.

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## **Your Current Committee**

Anne Mason  
*Chair/Archaeology & Heritage*

Alan Spidy  
*Treasurer/Membership Secretary*

Dave Goodrum  
*Secretary/Conservation*

Katherine Jones  
*Volunteering Co-ordinator*

Clare Tough  
*Arboretum*

Ryan Skeats

## **Photo credits in this issue:**

Cover - Alan Spidy

Page 3 - Forestry England

Pages 5 & 6 & 7 - FoTF Volunteers

Page 8 - Breckland BFTB Project

Pages 10 & 11 & 13 - Forestry England

Page 11 - D Goodrum

Page 14 - Julie Breingan

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# What is happening at High Lodge

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High Lodge has had a busy summer period in which the staff have been working hard to maintain our forest surroundings in a period of record growth. Some highlights include:

**A successful set of Forest Live concerts**

with Paul Weller, Jack Savoretti, Tom Grennan and Anne Marie performing on the main green to a packed-out crowd.

**An increase in the use of our disc golf course** with close to 1,000 people making their way round the course this summer. Keep an eye out for our winter offer.

**A re-launch of our Gruffalo orienteering course** with freshly painted statues and a brand-new map! Six-Hundred Gruffalo hunters have already completed the course over the summer months.

**The winter months**

Now that summer has come to an end, we change our focus to the winter period with lots of exciting activities planned. Despite site being a little colder, it still offers glorious views of the forest and a serene, peaceful atmosphere.

Our opening times shift slightly over the winter months. Since October 2nd we close the entrance at 4pm and the exit gate at 5pm and . Attractions may also adjust their business hours, please check with them for details.

Some things to look forward to in the coming months are:

**The return of the Elf Trail!**

Our Elf Trail was so popular last year we're bringing it back. Its free, festive fun for all the family. Eight elves will be hiding in the forest to be discovered.

The Christmas themed trail will be open from late November until early January (7 days a week) with tick sheets available from the information point. The trail will follow the Nature Trail (Brown waymarkers).

**Bike Art**

After twenty successful years at High Lodge, BikeArt is handing over the baton. The hire centre and store continue under new management from October 1st. We thank Paul and the team for their continued hard work on site over the last two decades.

*Article supplied by Forestry England*

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# Update on Archaeological Sites' Monitoring

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There are twenty-five scheduled archaeological sites within Thetford Forest which Forestry England has a legal duty to care for.

These are nationally important archaeological sites or historic buildings, given protection against unauthorised change by the Secretary of State for the Department for Culture, Media and Sport acting on recommendations from Historic England. Such sites in Thetford Forest include Bronze Age burial mounds; the moated site at St Helen's and Mildenhall Warren Lodge.

However, so rich is the historic landscape of Thetford Forest that there are over 1 500 archaeological sites which are not scheduled. Several years ago, FOTF worked with FE's Historic Environment Officer in the East District to compile a list of the sites which would benefit from annual visits to record their condition and how FOTF members could help in this work.

This is how the FOTF archaeological monitoring scheme came into being. It involves trained volunteers visiting their chosen sites and recording their general condition and noting any issues or concerns.

The volunteers use a standardised form to record their annual visits and take photographs, providing a written and visual record of a site's condition from one year to the next.

In 2023, fourteen volunteers have been involved in monitoring sites across the Forest. Most of this valuable work is undertaken in the autumn and winter months, when the vegetation is at its lowest and earthwork features are therefore more visible.

Here are some examples of how the volunteers report their monitoring:

**Ickburgh Warren Lodge:** The noticeboard has been replaced. Cleaned by us. The hawthorn sapling is now removed The bracken has been cut. Otherwise not much change from last year.

**Burial Mound Barrow, Methwold.** Though we were near this barrow, we could not access it because of fencing (grazing ponies) and it was obscured by dense gorse so we could not visually see it properly.

**Linear Mound,** off A1067 Some thinning and felling on and around site since last visit with much left where it fell. No damage to monument noted.

*Anne Mason*

*Some of the volunteers have contributed to this article:*

For me, monitoring a couple of archaeological sites in the forest adds that little extra interest to my volunteering with the Friends.

I make an annual check of two stones marking the parish boundary between Mundford and Lynford.

The monitoring task is quite straightforward: I update a form that records such things as its condition, any damage or decay since the last inspection, the vegetation around it, any animal activity or burrowing nearby, and the visual condition of nearby trees.

**If there's any ivy clinging to the stones, I remove it. Otherwise, I take along a bottle of tap water and a household brush and give them a quick wash-down. A short but simple contribution to preserving Thetford Forest's rich heritage.**

It is always good to get out to check and report on our allotted sites, though some are becoming much more difficult to get close to year by year as bracken and other vegetation seems to be no

longer trimmed or cut back. Whilst I appreciate there are wildlife reasons for this, I feel I have had more than my fair share of intimate meetings with ticks to tempt fate by wading through bracken that can be up to waist high, even previous years' growth is rarely laid flat in our recent mild winters.

We have monitored the condition of Langford Warren Lodge annually for several years following a training course organised by FoTF. The lodge stands back from the main road amongst the trees of Thetford Forest and does not appear to suffer from vandalism.

We reported that the information board had been removed and its subsequent replacement was installed by the next year.

**We clean the green algal growth from this board, and have learnt to take water and a cloth to do this. We take a few photos from the same position each spring before bracken growth starts. The lodge does not appear to be deteriorating now.**



*Langford Warren 2020*



*Langford warren - damage by burrowing animal*



**There's job satisfaction. I monitor a stretch of the Foss Ditch and some adjacent barrows. While I knew it was there, walking along it has made me appreciate the scale of the Ditch and the effort and time involved in its construction. It's remarkable how well it has survived and regular inspection will help ensure its continued survival.**

**The boundary stone between parishes of Lynford and Mundford.**

Thank you so much to all those FoTF members who monitor the archaeological sites. *Anne Mason.*

Appreciation from Forestry England too:

As the Historic Environment Advisor for East District, I have found the condition monitoring work carried out by FoTF members to be incredibly helpful. I particularly appreciated the detailed notes covering the whole of the scheduled Foss Ditch and hearing about the discovery of the previously unrecorded boundary stone close to Lynford Stag, now added to the Norfolk Historic Environment Record by FoTF and to the Forestry England GIS. Since I joined FE in 2021, I have started to add the monitoring comments to the FE GIS and to act on them, for example, alerting the relevant staff to the broken fencing reported around an area of Second World War remains in Dixon's Covert. Your work is much appreciated !

*Kryisia Truscoe - Forestry England*



*Some more images of sites monitored sites by FoTF Volunteers*



*Brandon Warren 2020*



*Brandon Warren 2023*



*Santon Warren - damage by bikes*



*Bank at Langford Warren*

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# Thetford Open Habitat Project

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There is always something beautiful to see in Thetford Forest throughout the seasons. In the summer, you may have noticed the swathes of wildflowers along some of the forest tracks, adding splashes of pastel blues, yellows, and purples. Many of these areas are known as 'conservation rides' managed specifically for the benefit of rare plant and invertebrate species.

The rare plants and invertebrates are a core reason for the majority of Thetford Forest being designated the Breckland Forest Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).



This designation includes plants that are protected by the Wildlife and Countryside Act such as this perennial knawel, spiked speedwell, and maiden pink, as well as 129 nationally scarce invertebrate species. The forest provides habitat for Woodlark and Nightjar which occur in internationally significant numbers in Thetford.

The Breckland Biodiversity Audit confirms the exceptional biodiversity importance of Breckland to the UK, especially given that Breckland represents just 0.4% of the UK's land area (Dolman et al., 2010).

However, Breckland Forest SSSI is currently assessed as being in unfavourable recovering condition. This is due to low population numbers of SSSI species driven by reduction in habitat availability and quality.

Given that the SSSI species are dependent on different forms of open habitat within the forest, creating open habitat in the best form for SSSI species will help boost population numbers.

Creating and maintaining high quality open habitat also aligns with requirements under the UK Forestry Standard for 10% open ground managed for biodiversity. Improving SSSI condition is a key objective in the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan and the Environmental Improvement Plan 2023, with the target to get 75% of protected sites into favourable condition by 2042.

*Naomi Smith - Forestry England*



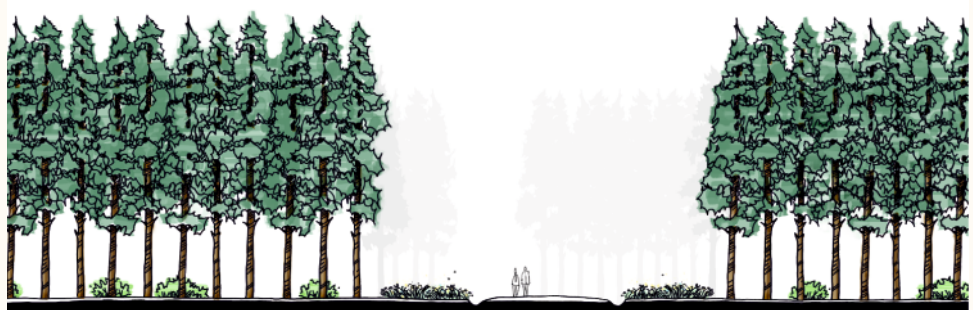
## What will this open habitat look like?

The Breckland Biodiversity Audit (Dolman et al., 2010) and other supporting studies (e.g., Pedley et al., 2012) stress the importance of the existing forest ride system as the main reservoir of the plant and invertebrate populations within Thetford Forest.

Approximately half of the heathland-associated invertebrate species and many plant species were found predominantly in the forest rides.

The conclusion was that an open habitat network, building on the existing ride system was the best form of open space for providing habitat as well as creating connectivity across the landscape.

These widened open ride corridors would act as 'superhighways' for invertebrate and plant seed dispersal between existing conservation sites.



Existing

Existing trackway and open space route through forest

← width = 20 metres (Approx.) →



Year 10-11  
approx.

The Open Habitat Project seeks to create a network of widened forest rides, providing 375 Ha of new habitat as well as connectivity between conservation sites.

The forest rides are already on average 10m wide from treeline to treeline. This plan would seek to increase the width of a selection of rides to a total of 40m. The 40m width is based on maximising the length of time for ride to be bathed in sunlight, even when the surrounding trees are at full maturity. These wider rides will also create foraging habitat for Woodlark and Nightjar. Sunlight, soil type, and successional patches of bare ground and grassland habitat are the key components for functioning open habitat in this setting. The open habitat along the ride will swap over from one side to the other to create a weaving corridor through the forest.

When deciding which side of the existing ride should be widened, Forestry England considered the soil type, orientation of the ride, heritage features needing protection, species type and age. An extensive archaeological survey using LiDAR and ground-truthing is being undertaken to ensure that features are accurately mapped and protection measures are put in place.

Widening the rides does not come without challenges. The operations involved are substantial and the habitat will take a few years to develop. Furthermore, the habitat will be costly to maintain in the long-term. We must always consider these balances when managing a multi-functional landscape. The images below show the difference between an existing ride and a widened ride in King's Forest



## How will this habitat be managed?

Many of the rarest plant species need some kind of disturbance of the sandy and chalky soil to thrive, for instance through the burrowing, scraping and close grazing of rabbits, or through physical activity such as natural erosion, vehicle tracks, and cultivation.

Forestry England will maintain the habitat by mimicking these disturbance processes through cut and collection of vegetation (to reduce nutrient levels) and discing over a proportion of the area (to create bare ground patches).

On current open habitat sites, the Friends of Thetford Forest volunteers have helped immensely with vegetation clearance on Santon Street to allow the low-growing plants to thrive and similar work near Mildenhall Warren Lodge for the Breckland *Artemisia*. We hope this new open habitat will provide further volunteering opportunities for the Friends of Thetford Forest.

Overall, against a backdrop of declining wildlife in the UK, this project will provide a much-needed boost for Breckland biodiversity. We look forward to working with the Friends in the future to help care for this internationally important wildlife.

For any enquiries, please contact us at [openhabitat-thetford@forestryengland.uk](mailto:openhabitat-thetford@forestryengland.uk)

The image below shows some of the work being carried out by the FoTF Conservation group - As you can see the RH side of the track (santon Street) has been cleared back to the new tree line ready for the discing to take place .



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# Long Eared Owls

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In May/June I located a long eared owl nesting in an old crow's nest in Kings Forest. Their preferred habitat is coniferous forest and the field vole makes up the majority of a long eared owl's diet. There is estimated to be approximately 3500 breeding pairs across the UK. However, due to their secretive behaviour long eared owls are unlikely to be seen unless on migration during winter from Scandinavia.

The long eared owl is Britain's rarest owl species and it's notoriously difficult to survey and study due to its nocturnal behaviour.

This means getting a photo in daylight is quite challenging too, however once the young had branched out from the nest and were requiring more food, I was lucky enough to photograph them.

Things to listen and look out for as we go into the Autumn is the annual red deer rut with stags roaring and bellowing throughout the forest. In addition to this the fallow deer will shortly begin making their rutting stands and bucks will be beginning to grunt.

*Daniel Buckle*

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# High Lodge Christmas Market

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Sunday 3rd December come to High Lodge to kick-start that Christmas spirit. There will be stalls selling Christmas gifts and decor, festive treats at the café and an Elf trail. You could also take part in a Christmas fun run raising money for The Big C called the 'Jingle Jangle' (see more - [Jingle Jangle Fun Run - Big C Cancer Charity](#) ([big-c.co.uk](#)))

Find out more on our website [High Lodge Christmas Market](#) | [Forestry England](#) and stay tuned for updates on our social media.



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# Lynford Arboretum in the Autumn

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*Taken by FoTF member Julie Breingan*

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# Volunteering

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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](mailto: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, safety guidance and any official health regulations**



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