



Your Forest

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Forest management

Embracing the natural look

Nurturing young minds

Hear Zoe's inspiring volunteer journey

Nature on the brink

How the Forest is helping local wildlife



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SUSTAINABILITY WEST MIDLANDS MEMBER

We are delighted to now be a member of Sustainability West Midlands (SWM) and are looking forward to working with them to build mutually beneficial partnerships with other members, local authorities, businesses, and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in the region.

“Our membership is significant for us as an environmental charity, enabling us to amplify our regional impact whilst also continuing our own journey towards sustainable practices. By networking and collaborating with SWM and their dedicated member organisations, we can learn more about one another and can demonstrate our commitment to cultivating a healthier environment and inspiring positive change across the region.”

*Fran Bos,
Senior Corporate Partnerships Manager*

Summer 2025 Edition. Many thanks to all the contributors who made this issue possible.

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Welcome

There is no better time to experience the Forest in all its glory than in the summer months. Leafy canopies provide welcome shelter from the sun, and you will find habitats alive with a rich diversity of plants, an abundance of wildflowers, thriving butterflies, and busy pollinators.

With so much activity in the woodlands it can be easy to forget that we are in a nature crisis, with a staggering one in six species at risk of extinction. But we are fighting back in the Forest and your support is enabling us to give wildlife a place to thrive. You can meet some of the local species the Forest is supporting on pages 17 - 19 and find out how you can help our struggling bees on page 20.

In this issue, we also explore the power of working in partnership with other organisations. You will read about an ambitious wetland restoration project with Warwickshire Wildlife Trust, and our multi-year partnership with National Grid Electricity Distribution. We know that collaboration is key to success and that we can achieve so much more when we work together.

We hope this issue inspires you to connect with nature and continue to support the work that helps the Forest flourish all year round.

*Andy Parsons
Chief Executive, The Heart of England Forest*

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© Gary Farmer



Did you know?

Scientific research has proven that **hugging a tree for just 20 seconds** can increase oxytocin levels, the hormone responsible for feelings of calm and emotional bonding. So, something as simple as just hugging a tree can boost your overall wellbeing. Take a walk in nature and find a quiet spot near a favourite tree. Think about how it makes you feel and what emotions come to mind when you are sitting nearby. How does it affect your senses?



Cover image: Pond in the Forest | Design: Rebecca Jezzard
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Nurturing nature and young minds: Zoe's volunteer journey



Learning and Skills Volunteer Zoe

At just 20 years old, Zoe is already making a lasting impact as a Learning and Skills volunteer at the Heart of England Forest. Her passion for nature and dedication to supporting young people is helping to inspire the next generation—while also offering her a sense of balance and wellbeing.

Zoe began volunteering in October 2024, drawn to the Forest by its beauty and proximity to her home near Sponal, Warwickshire. With a professional background working with children, she saw the opportunity to combine her skills with her love for the outdoors.

“I really enjoy being outside with nature and listening to the world go by,” she explains. “But I also wanted to learn how to look after the planet a bit more – and how to survive in a forest!”

In her volunteer role, Zoe supports a wide range of activities, from Mini Foresters clubs to Young Foresters and the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme. These sessions offer young people the chance to connect with nature, develop new skills, and build confidence. Zoe plays a hands-on role in helping to deliver the sessions, guiding children and young people through activities like

tree planting, den building, and foraging.

“I really enjoy watching those moments when it ‘clicks’ for the youngsters,” she says, “or when they work together to achieve something.”

Zoe's time with the Forest has been one of personal growth as well. From overcoming her fear of snakes and spiders to foraging for wild foods like nettles and gorse, she's stepped well outside her comfort zone. Volunteering has also become an essential outlet for her own wellbeing.

“Being outside really helps me to ground myself,” she reflects. “Even if I’m just walking through the forest or planting trees, I feel like I’ve helped the environment in some way. It leaves me feeling so refreshed and calm.”

Outdoor Learning Officer Elly Joplin has seen Zoe's impact firsthand: *“She’s energetic, enthusiastic, and a great role model. Her friendly personality shines through, and her hands-on approach makes her a joy to work with.”*

Ellie Jones, also from the Learning and Skills team, echoes this sentiment: *“Volunteers like Zoe bring so much passion and energy. They’re a vital part of how we deliver our learning*

programmes and build connections with young people.”

And for anyone considering getting involved, Zoe's advice is simple: *“Just go for it! It’s so rewarding and refreshing. You’ll help young people see the beauty of nature—and learn how to care for it, too.”*

Flexible volunteering, lasting impact

From getting trees in the ground, to helping at vital fundraising events, and supporting our Learning and Skills team, there are a wide variety of ways that you can give your time and make a difference.

Meet like-minded people, gain new skills, enhance your physical and mental wellbeing, get free training, and do as many or as little hours as you want with our flexible volunteering programme.

Information about current volunteer roles is advertised on our Jobs and Careers web page heartofenglandforest.org/jobs-and-careers. To receive details about our regular volunteer sessions, sign up to Volunteering News – heartofenglandforest.org/volunteer



A mini forester connecting with nature



Aerial view of Cutlers Farm

Designing the Forest: Cutlers Farm

Designing, planning and planting a new forest takes time. From the moment we acquire a piece of land to planting the first tree, we are learning about it and seeking to understand what is important and valuable as we shape the future Forest. Learn from Tom Davies, Director of Land Management, about our plans and what is involved in designing a brand-new area of the Forest.



New land acquisition in the Forest

In November 2024, we bought 129 beautiful hectares of land in western Warwickshire. Cutlers Farm is an exciting and diverse new area of mixed arable, grasslands, and woodlands near Henley-in-Arden in Warwickshire. The landscape is

striking, with a distinct valley running through the centre of the farm, slopes with opportunities for new woodlands and grassland management, and the potential to enhance and expand historic parkland, which is likely associated with the nearby Edstone Hall.

Understanding the landscape

The process of transforming this landscape into a diverse mixed woodland and grassland habitat will take several years. It is important to understand a landscape before committing to change, so we respect and protect the existing biodiversity and cultural value of the site.

During 2025, we are undertaking site surveys and engagement with the local community to help us find out everything we need to know about Cutlers Farm. This includes on site meetings and talking to our neighbours, as well as those who have worked the land. This takes several months and enables us to build a picture of the farm and how the landscape works together, so we know what impact any changes will have.

Once we have all the information we need, we send our plans to the Forestry Commission who check our work against the UK Forestry Standard and the woodland creation Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) regulations. This involves a period of public consultation where anyone can comment on our plans.

Our plans for Cutlers Farm

Our current plans involve a mixture of new woodland on the slopes of the farm, grassland on the northern pasture fields, and parkland running through the centre of the farm. We are hoping to create about 70 hectares of new woodland, which will mean planting approximately 100,000 trees. This work will take place over two years in winter 2026/27 and winter 2027/28, and we hope to start in autumn 2026.

As part of our commitment to reduce plastic usage across the Forest, at Cutlers Farm we aim to use deer fencing, rather than tree tubes, to protect the newly planted trees from deer browsing. We also hope to use natural colonisation methods – woodland creation through natural processes, by allowing the seeds from existing trees to regenerate where they fall. These methods have benefits including reduced costs, increased biodiversity value, and natural matching of trees to sites.*



Oak tree at Cutlers Farm

There are three zones in the design for Cutlers Farm: woodland zone, parkland zone, and grassland zone

- 1** Woodland zone – aiming to create approximately 75 hectares/185 acres of mixed broadleaf woodland, with space for footpaths, glades and viewpoints
- 2** Parkland zone - maintain the open landscape, with grazing animals managing the grassland amongst newly planted parkland trees
- 3** Grassland zone - undertake conservation grazing to improve the biodiversity of the fields

The property has several footpaths running through it, allowing people to walk through the farm and woodlands. This presents opportunities to create new permissive paths to link existing routes to viewpoints where the landscape can be enjoyed by visitors.

Something special

There is a very special tree already at Cutlers Farm, which is one of the most significant trees on our entire estate. It is an old oak on the parkland area and stands at 19.2 metres tall with a huge girth of 748 cm. We have estimated the age of the tree to be 300 years old, however we are still searching for historic records to help us understand the history of this magnificent tree.

We hope to create many more mighty oak trees at Cutlers Farm so in centuries to come the new woodland will grow and evolve into rich landscape benefitting people and nature. ●

*<https://www.forestryresearch.gov.uk/research/natural-colonisation-as-a-strategy-for-woodland-creation-and-expansion/>

Experience nature differently with our Forest workshops

The Heart of England Forest offers exciting skills workshops throughout the year; an excellent way to experience the outdoors while learning new skills. With guidance from professionals, all materials and equipment provided, and stunning Forest settings, our workshops are for everyone.

“My connection to the Heart of England Forest goes back to my teaching days at the Vale of Evesham School, where I’d bring Sixth Form students for weekly work experience. The woodland environment brought out something special in them – it was a joy to see them thrive outside the classroom.

After retiring, I reached the final of The Great Pottery Throwdown on Channel 4, which inspired me to turn my pottery hobby into a career.

Elaine and Ellie from the Forest team helped me combine my love of ceramics and the outdoors, leading to workshops that start with guided woodland walks where potters explore the environment, collecting samples, photos, and sketches, followed by pottery-making sessions inspired by seasonal changes.”

Dave Short, Channel 4’s Great Pottery Throw Down Finalist, Ceramic Specialist, and Ceramic Workshops Instructor.



Join Dave on one of his upcoming ceramic workshops in the Forest:

Summer Tile Making 23rd August
Embossed Coffee Cup Making 20th September
Leaf Bowl Making 29th November

All set in the stunning woodland surroundings of Gorcott Hill, nr. Redditch, Worcestershire.

August

Macro Photography Workshop with award-winning photographer Lee Frost

Discover the hidden world of invertebrates through the lens in this hands-on macro photography workshop led by renowned photographer Lee Frost. Learn essential techniques to capture nature’s smallest wonders, with expert guidance on fieldcraft, lighting, and composition, amid the vibrant woodland setting.

September

Beginners’ Outdoor Cooking Workshop

Ignite your passion for outdoor cooking in this practical and beginner-friendly workshop. From mastering fire safety and spirit stove use to cooking delicious flatbreads and kebabs over coals, this session blends essential skills with woodland charm.

Hedgerow Berry Bootleggers

Forage, create, and sip your way through this unique adult-only workshop exploring the rich hedgerows in the Forest. Guided by seasonal inspiration and provided recipes, you will craft your own wild-infused drinks - perfect for gifting or enjoying come Christmas.

October

The Secret Life of Woodlice - Online Workshop

Delve into the overlooked world of woodlice in this informative online session with invertebrate expert Avery Hill. Gain insights into their vital ecological role, learn to identify common species, and explore the fascinating adaptations of these miniature forest recyclers.



Macro photography



Outdoor cooking



Hedgerow Berry Bootleggers

Ready to try something new?



Scan the QR code or visit heartofenglandforest.org/events to explore our workshops and book your place today!



New growth and a mossy log
on the Forest floor

Embracing the natural look: why less is more when it comes to forest management

Forests are by their nature wild, natural landscapes many of which have evolved over hundreds of years with little human intervention. It is this wild beauty that often attracts people to spend time in forests, and to protect them, but as a forest conservation charity how do we find the right balance between positive interventions and letting nature lead the way?

A helping hand for nature

With woodland cover in the UK representing just 13.5% of our total land area and forests under threat across the world, it is no longer enough to just preserve the forests we already have and hope they will flourish on their own. The Government's plans to significantly increase tree cover in the UK, including the announcement of a Tree Planting Taskforce last year to support the planting of millions of new trees, highlights the increasing

need for action to plant and manage UK forests to protect and grow them for the future.

While a 'managed' forest may sound contradictory to the idea of a natural woodland wilderness, there are ways that we can operate with a 'minimal intervention' approach that provides support and maintenance to the Forest where needed, at the same time as allowing it to thrive in all its messy glory!

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Championing a minimal approach to forest management

Minimum intervention is a management prescription which is used for parts of the Forest where we plan to do very little, except access maintenance. This is to allow natural processes to occur where trees which reach their biological rotation degrade and collapse, leaving natural space in the forest for new growth where new trees will grow and fill the gaps on their own. In many cases this new growth will be a different species, but intervention will only be required if an invasive species starts to dominate, and we need to remove some or all the trees to allow for a range of species to grow.

Of course, for newly planted areas of woodland, maintenance is required for the first five years to ensure the trees are healthy and well established, but beyond this point we will leave them to develop on their own. Deer and squirrel control is sometimes undertaken during this early period of growth, but we will not manage the vegetation or thin the woodland. Only after around 20 years will the forestry team consider stepping in with more active management of the woodland, but at this stage it is likely to have developed natural processes for management such as the

regeneration of a natural edge to the woodlands through the establishment of shrub species.

Resisting the urge to tidy

As visitors walk around the forest, they may notice signs of our 'minimal intervention' approach that could be mistaken for lack of maintenance but are in fact entirely intentional. Fallen trees are a great example of this – in most cases we avoid removing fallen trees as it is important to retain deadwood to create habitats for insects and the wider food chain. Both standing and fallen deadwood are essential for lots of species, so we do not clear this up but leave it in situ.

Another example is mowing of the forest – we minimise mowing of ride edges to allow scrub to develop to create natural edge to a woodland. We also let hedges grow on to become large trees and shrubs so they can create thickets of scrubby woodland, which has lots of benefits for the ecosystem.

The benefits of letting nature lead

Natural processes such as decay, regeneration, and natural disturbances all have a part to play in contributing to a healthy forest ecosystem, which is why it is so important for us to let nature take



A mix of alive and standing dead mature trees
and bracken covering the Forest floor

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the lead in the Forest. This approach also leads to greater diversity which creates opportunities for a wider range of species to live and thrive in woodlands.

Hedgerows in the Forest are particularly valuable to wildlife, supporting around 50% of our mammals, 30% of our butterflies, and 80% of our woodland birds, as well as amphibians and reptiles too. Hedgerows that are optimised for wildlife are, by nature, a little untidy as we need to let our internal hedgerows grow naturally and expand out to provide hibernation spots for wildlife and allow flowers and fruit to grow in abundance. By leaving the hedgerows to grow there are nectar-rich blossoms in the spring and summer, extending the food source for our pollinators, and berries and fruits in autumn and winter.

The various types of deadwood in the Forest, from standing deadwood to stacks and piles or woody debris in the waterways, are another great example of how, by leaving nature to do its job, we can support many forms of life to make a home here. Thousands of invertebrates rely on deadwood, which in turn provide food for a whole host of other animals, whilst several types of fungi, lichens and moss can often be seen growing off both stumps and snags within



the Forest. Not only does deadwood play an essential role in sustaining biodiversity, but it also plays a key role in processes such as soil formation and nutrient cycling. As wood decomposes it returns important nutrients to the soil, supporting new growth.

With so many benefits for nature and the environment of

adopting a minimalist approach to woodland management, we believe that embracing the 'messy' side of forest landscapes is key to protecting and maintaining these natural spaces for many years to come. ●

Above: View of a blackthorn hedge and a young plantation in the Sernal area of the Forest. Woodland ride in Coxmere Wood.



“I am not very good at identifying tree species, but that doesn't stop me enjoying them.”

“Nature is essential to us. If I do not breathe fresh air and get my hands dirty each day – my mental health goes right down. That's personal to me. But we all need nature to survive in a world where we have so much pollution. It's so fundamental, it's the essence of life.”

“I love the scheme of tagging trees. I have memories of walking with friends, some of whom have passed now. So, I have tagged trees in memory, but also on other occasions. For example, I gave one to someone when they started school. It's fun for people to go to and find them. Even though sometimes it means wading through mud! I am hoping some of those youngsters will go back and visit their trees when they are older. I also have some family who live in New Zealand, and I hope that when they come to the UK, they will see theirs. It's a marker in the land – because we have so few – you belong somewhere. Literal roots rather than metaphorical roots. I understand that not all the saplings will survive. But even if it's not that particular tree, the Forest will be there.”

“If we do not have a healthy ecosystem we do not have anything, and once you have lost one thing there is a spiral of loss. We need to regenerate the landscape and need trees to improve habitat. I have a garden that encourages all types of creatures... I've planted an apple, rowan, and cherry amongst already established trees. I love that the Heart of England Forest plants the natural trees of the country. I am not very good at identifying tree species, but that doesn't stop me enjoying them. I think of trees as individuals with their own characters which develop as they grow.”

“The seasons in the Forest are so important to me. The sculptural empty branches of winter when sounds are different, the spring blossom and full-on bird song, the full greens of summer and its butterflies, and the autumn colours. They all help us reflect on time passing and changing lives.”

– Jenny, Friend of the Forest –

Restoring wetlands together:

A partnership for nature

The Heart of England Forest has embarked on an ambitious wetland creation project in partnership with Warwickshire Wildlife Trust and funded by the Environment Agency's Water Environment Improvement Fund (WEIF), to support natural flood management.



Toads mating in a pond surrounded by toadspawn

By slowing the flow through ponds, scrapes, re-meandering ditches and damming, water is held in the landscape for longer, reducing the risk of flooding and supporting habitats such as woodland, floodplain grassland, and wetland. Wetland and wet grassland habitats are uncommon in the West Midlands, especially those with slow-flowing, clean water.

Projects like this help to encourage a rich diversity of wildlife and provide vital homes for:

- Wading birds such as lapwing, snipe, and ringed plover
- Invertebrates like diving beetles, dragonflies, freshwater shrimp, and molluscs
- Amphibians including great crested newts and toads
- Mammals such as the water vole

Why wetlands?

Over time, agricultural land management has compacted soils and disconnected water from its floodplain, causing water to rush off the land and into watercourses during heavy rainfall. As water is channelled through straightened ditches and streams, it quickly reaches the rivers, causing flash flooding. It also means that during drought, water drains away too fast, increasing the likelihood of dry, cracked soil.

Why Middle Spenal?

Middle Spenal was chosen as it sits within a low lying area of the Spenal estate in the Forest. It houses three ponds and a network of straight ditches that lead straight into the River Arrow. Most of the surrounding surface and groundwater ends up in these channels, which then flow quickly into the Arrow. By filling in sections and offering alternative routes, we are intercepting



Above: Map of the site at Middle Spenal

that flow and holding back more water before it reaches the river.

Partnership in action

Avery Hill, Biodiversity Officer (Wetlands), has worked closely with Jake McAlister, a Catchment Restoration Officer from Warwickshire Wildlife Trust, to develop and deliver the plan. The Trust provided specialist support, including an elevation measuring device that helped identify low points within the area and get an indication of how the water was moving on the land. The excavation work, conducted by contractors and overseen by Avery and Jake, was funded by the Environment Agency.

This project also supports the broader goals of the Heart of England Forest; clean water helps store carbon, which is important in the fight against climate change, and reduces flood risk, contributing to a healthier, more resilient landscape.

Laying the groundwork for wetland revival

The work has been taking place across three areas at Middle Spenal and is divided into five phases:

- 1 Turf stripping across all areas
- 2 Bank excavations in Areas 2 & 3
- 3 Deeper offline excavations and beaver dam analogue installation in Areas 2 & 3
- 4 Deeper excavations and bund creation in Area 1
- 5 Additional scrub clearance and final beaver dam analogue installation in Area 1 in September.

Main construction work for phases 1 - 4 took place throughout early spring this year and included:

- **Turf stripping** – removing the top layer of grass and soil to expose bare ground and prepare the area for further excavation and wetland creation.

- **Bank excavation** – cutting into the edges of a ditch to lower them or create notches allowing water to spill over into surrounding land during high flows.
- **Excavation of new wiggly channels** - taking water diverted from the existing straight drainage ditches
- **Excavation of deeper offline wetland areas** – creating basins in nearby flat ground away from the main watercourse to capture and hold water during high flows.
- **Installation of beaver dam analogues** – creating structures out of wood and other natural materials to slow the flow of water, create pools, and improve wetland habitats, mimicking the function of beaver dams.
- **Ditch filling** – blocking or filling in man-made drainage ditches so that water can spread naturally across the landscape again.
- **Bund creation** – building low earth banks to hold water in place or direct it into certain areas. Bunds help retain water in wetland areas and slow its movement across the site.
- **Scrub clearance** – removing dense vegetation such as overgrown shrubs, opening up areas for wetland creation and preventing fast-growing plants from dominating.



Above: After the excavation works at Middle Spenal

In June, gravel was introduced to the ditch, creating varied flow types, such as riffling, which will speed up or slow water in different areas and increase oxygen levels. The banks were also seeded with wet and damp-loving plants, encouraging invertebrates and small mammals to make this newly created edge habitat their home.

What is next?

To give local wildlife the best chance to thrive, phase 5 will take place in September, once the bird nesting season has ended. It is also a legal requirement under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, reinforcing the importance of putting nature first.

Looking further ahead

As the wetland becomes more established and the ground more saturated, the water will spill out into the surrounding woodland during high flow, creating a unique mosaic of wetland, wet grassland and wet woodland, supporting a variety of species, as well as continuing the work of slowing the flow.

Avery and the team will monitor its progress, including water testing and surveying for invertebrates and water voles. There is also potential to introduce cattle grazing to manage any scrub encroachment, ensuring the site remains a thriving wetland for years to come. ●



Avery overseeing the excavation works



Nature on the brink – and how the Forest is fighting back

The UK is facing a nature crisis, with one in six species at risk of extinction. But while the scale of the challenge is daunting, there is still time to turn the tide, and here in the Heart of England Forest, we're taking action.

We are working to reconnect fragmented habitats, create vital corridors for wildlife, and support the recovery of threatened species in Warwickshire and Worcestershire. Thanks to your support, we're helping nature find its voice again.

From birdsong growing fainter in our hedgerows to once-common wildflowers vanishing from our fields, the warning signs are clear. The State of Nature report paints a sobering picture – 16% of over 10,000 mammals, birds, insects, amphibians, and plants assessed are now threatened. Since the 1970s, monitored species have declined in abundance by an average of 19%.

At the heart of this decline is the loss and fragmentation of habitats - caused not only by large-scale development and agricultural intensification, but also by everyday choices like paving over lawns or fencing off gardens. As landscapes become disconnected, wildlife loses the corridors it relies on to move, feed, and breed.

But amid the urgency, there is hope – and action. Here in the Heart of England Forest, we are not standing by. By weaving together woodlands, grasslands, and species-rich hedgerows, we are building a living network – a "Nature Recovery Network" – that

allows animals like barn owls, bats, and butterflies to move safely and sustainably through the landscape.

While we cannot singlehandedly reverse national trends, we are proud to be playing our part. From tree planting and grassland enhancement to collaborating in the creation of Local Nature Recovery Strategies, we are putting nature – and the future – first.

Monitoring wildlife in the Forest

More than 100 wildlife surveys are delivered annually, building our knowledge of species in the Forest and providing a baseline on which we can monitor long-term change.

Our records help fill data gaps nationally, regionally, and locally. Locally, our records help us to know what species are present and how they are faring, and to inform our management. Regionally, they help to put into context the importance of the Forest for local biodiversity. Wider than this, they feed into national databases and help inform organisations like the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), Butterfly Conservation, and the British Dragonfly Society, about how species are faring on a national scale, which then informs larger

pieces of work such as the State of Nature reports.

Species groups monitored in the Forest include amphibians, butterflies, bumblebees, dragonflies and damselflies, birds, reptiles, fungi, moths, aquatic invertebrates, ladybirds, and woodlice.

Although staff complete many different types of surveys, volunteers are essential in helping to survey and monitor the wildlife across many areas of the Forest, simply because of the scale and array of habitats that are ever-growing. ●

Here are just a handful of species local to Warwickshire and Worcestershire that the Forest is supporting:

Common name:
Wood white butterfly
Scientific name:
Leptidea sinapis



Habitat Woodland grass rides and margins, damp, warm, partially shaded and sheltered areas, with vetches and trefoils to feed on. In the Forest can be found flying around in open sunlit areas in the rides of Roundhill Wood.

Conservation status Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP): Priority Species Butterfly Conservation priority: High Great Britain Red List (2022): Endangered

Notable features or facts Its flight pattern is one of the slowest and delicate of all British butterflies.

Threats Habitat loss – due to destruction of woodlands and a reduction in coppicing in the UK over the last century.

Why they are thriving in the Forest By coppicing and ride management, we are providing suitable conditions for this species to colonise.

Interesting fact Males fly almost constantly throughout the day in good weather to find a mate. Females, on the other hand, spend much of their time feeding on the nectar of flowers and resting.

Common name:
Great Crested Newt
Scientific name:
Triturus cristatus



Habitat Utilises a varied landscape including grasslands, farmland, wetlands, and freshwater habitats, but favours large ponds with no fish and plentiful aquatic plants.

Conservation status Least concern / UK Post-2010 Biodiversity Framework: Priority Species / A protected species in the UK under the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981

Notable features or facts Is warty in appearance; black or dark brown, the underside is bright orange with irregular black markings. Males have a crest along their backs and a white flash on the tail. Females have an orange/yellow marking on their tail.

Threats Habitat loss and the growth of farming practices across the landscape over time.

Why they are thriving in the Forest 42 ponds in the Forest test positive for great crested newt activity. Working on landscape scale pond habitat management projects we hope to see populations connecting in the Forest.

Interesting fact During mating season, males will perform an elaborate 'dance' to capture a female's attention. He will stand on his front legs, in a handstand, move his tail, back and forth, and rock his body.

Common name: *Reed bunting*
Scientific name: *Emberiza schoeniclus*



Habitat Reedbeds, wetlands, and marshland are most suitable for the species, but they have been recorded in a variety of habitats across the UK. In the winter, reed buntings particularly enjoy feeding in arable landscapes.

Conservation status UK Birds of Conservation Concern - Amber listed

Notable features or facts Males have a striking black head with a white moustache stripe. Females have a browner head with the white stripe still visible. The male's call is very distinctive.

Threats In the late 1900s, the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) research attributed their decline to intensive agriculture practices, reducing the species' food availability over the winter months.

Why they are thriving in the Forest

The mosaic of habitats the Forest provides, alongside wetland creation and conservation grazing using cattle, helps to provide habitat throughout the year.

Interesting fact The oldest reed bunting recorded by the BTO is 9 years, 11 months, 18 days (set in 1978). The average is around 3 years.

Common name: *Slow worm*
Scientific name: *Anguis fragilis*



Habitat Thrives in an environment with plenty of plant matter and dense vegetation. Found across the UK in grassland, woodland edges, gardens, and meadows. Recorded in areas throughout the Forest including Middle Spenal, Coughton and Honeybourne.

Conservation status Least concern A protected species in the UK under the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981

Notable features or facts A slow worm is a species of legless lizard but is often mistaken for a snake. Adults reach up to 50cm in length, they have shiny, smooth skin.

Threats Habitat loss and degradation of habitats. Other threats to this species are pheasants, as well as the use of pesticides, which either poison them directly or reduce their prey.

Why they are thriving in the Forest

We leave many undisturbed areas with plenty of ground cover and encourage safe places for hibernation, such as deadwood piles.

Interesting fact Despite commonly being mistaken for snakes, there are differences. Slow worms can blink, unlike snakes, and can also drop their tails if attacked!

Volunteer with us and help native wildlife

A significant portion of our biodiversity survey work is carried out by our amazing team of volunteers, providing a rewarding opportunity to contribute to our conservation efforts and help local species thrive. Interested in finding out more? Visit heartofenglandforest.org/volunteer

Bees in Trouble

What's at stake and how you can help

Bees and other pollinators are quietly holding up the foundation of our ecosystems and food systems, yet their numbers are in troubling decline. Entomologist Aaron Bhambra shares insights into the importance of bees, how local conservation efforts like those at the Heart of England Forest are making a difference, and how everyone – from gardeners to city dwellers – can take simple steps to support these vital little creatures.

Q What made you get into bees?

A I became interested in bees quite by accident whilst volunteering at a RSPB nature reserve near Birmingham. I was fascinated by the assorted colours, sizes, and shapes that these species come in and how little we know about the 270 species we have in Britain. So, I decided to start collecting and studying them and now I'm completing my PhD on pollinators at the University of Birmingham.



Q Our bees and pollinators are in decline – why should we be worried about this?

A Bees and other flying insects like flies, wasps and beetles are important pollinators of wild and managed ecosystems. They not only pollinate wildflowers, helping plants to produce seeds and berries for birds and mammals, but they are critical in supporting human food security, providing us with fruit and vegetables and even supporting meat production through the pollination of fodder crops. Without them, our diets would be nutritionally poor, and our ecosystem would suffer.

Q How is our work in the Forest helping bees?

A The work at the Heart of England Forest is helping to conserve bees by improving management of micro-habitats at their sites, such as exposed sandy bare earth and heather. Also, by inviting researchers like me to study their sites, we're working together to collect valuable information about the distribution of species across the wider West Midlands region.

Q If work like this doesn't carry on, what will happen to the bees? What are the consequences of doing nothing?

A If we don't try to conserve bees and the habitats they depend on, we risk losing many species to urbanisation, agricultural intensification, climate change and pollution. A significant proportion of the UK's pollinators are in decline and have restricted their ranges across the country. More work is needed to provide essential habitat to prevent these species from going locally, regionally and in some cases, nationally extinct.

Q What do you think is special about the work that the Heart of England Forest is doing?

A The Heart of England Forest are taking sites that have long been mismanaged or undervalued and are reconverting these spaces into thriving reserves with a variety of habitat types. The charity is also engaging members of the public with nature conservation through volunteering opportunities, improving education and knowledge about the importance of managing greenspaces for wildlife.

Q Is there anything people can do at home to help bees – whether they have a garden, patio, window box or shared green space in their community?

A Grow flowers! We have lost around 97% of our wildflower meadows in England since the middle of the last century and this has impacted bee species across the country. If you want to help bees, try growing native wildflowers in your gardens or greenspaces to feed these hungry critters.

Above: Entomologist Aaron Bhambra
Right: Ivy bee

Bee Kind Appeal

Pollinators are in decline; struggling to find the food and shelter they need to survive. Bees play a vital role in our food supply, but they need our help.

Please give £20 today to support our work creating microhabitats for bees, and other pollinators.



Scan the code or visit:

heartofenglandforest.org/make-donation



£20 could pay for **2kg** of mixed grass and pollinator wildflower seed – enough to plant **40m²** of bee-friendly habitat.



Powering change: A partnership for lasting environmental impact

Our long-term collaboration with National Grid Electricity Distribution (NGED) began in 2022 and is a dynamic alliance set to thrive until 2028 and beyond. Stemming from a shared passion for conservation and reforestation, the partnership aims to establish a meaningful environmental project that goes beyond simply tree planting and demonstrates a proactive commitment to conservation.

Benefits of working in long-term partnership

This partnership is a vital piece of NGED's strategic approach to achieving its net zero targets through synergistic collaborations with various environmental organisations. For the charity, this collaboration is an opportunity to craft projects that align with our values, while also fostering a culture of learning and community engagement on an impactful scale. The core deliverables within the partnership include supporting:

- Woodland habitat creation via tree planting which will lead to multiple improvements to associated biodiversity

- Enhancements to community amenity value such as habitat creation, enhancement and maintenance, provision of footpaths and access
- Volunteering opportunities for NGED employees and community groups to engage more people with nature and its protection.

“The enhancement of the environment and the natural world is essential for the future of any business. We have core deliverables that we aim to achieve. The more we collaborate with the Heart of England Forest, the more potential we release. By working closely, understanding our values and aligning them

together, new possibilities grow and as the Forest grows and matures, our partnership grows.”
Andy Martyr-Icke, Lead Environment Advisor

Funding vital Forest work

Year 1

The first year of our partnership created 59 acres of new native woodland at Spernal Hall Farm, planting 32,105 young trees and supporting three months of volunteer team resource to help make this happen. This site was planted plastic-free as part of a trial to explore more environmentally friendly tree planting options. Planting on a large scale without tree protection will enable us to learn more about how to grow trees in a way that is better for the environment.

Year 2 and 3

During 2023/24 and 2024/25, NGED's support has been instrumental in our efforts in the Lenches area of the Forest in Worcestershire, supporting essential ecological development across some special and important habitats including:

- **Restoring and enhancing natural habitats**
Continued improvement of local habitats through woodland creation and care, included 150 acres of tree planting at Naunton Beauchamp and ongoing management of 700 acres at The Lenches. Pollarding helped improve pond health by reducing leaf litter and increasing sunlight. At Roundhill Wood and Sheriffs Lench, grassland restoration supported biodiversity, benefiting species like the brown hairstreak butterfly.
- **Water and wildlife conservation**
Three ponds were restored to boost biodiversity and support a variety of wildlife. Conservation grazing at Ab Lench, Naunton Beauchamp, and Sheriffs Lench - covering over 167 acres - was supported by the installation of stock-proof fencing to protect livestock and encourage wildflower growth.

Left: Volunteers planting at Spernal Hall Farm



Essex skipper butterfly

- **Monitoring and sustainable land management**
Vegetation and biodiversity surveys focusing on butterflies, mammals, invertebrates, reptiles and plants, were conducted by our dedicated staff and volunteers. These insights inform sustainable practices such as targeted grazing and habitat management to ensure the continued health of our landscapes.
- **Community and volunteer involvement**
This work was made possible through the enthusiastic involvement of Heart of England Forest volunteers. Corporate volunteer days with National Grid Electricity Distribution and biodiversity training events further strengthened our community engagement, ensuring both people and nature thrive together.

Strengthening teams while supporting nature

Engaging their employees in the Forest is particularly meaningful for NGED and an important part of our partnership. It benefits the Forest and brings colleagues together in the great outdoors, strengthening team spirit and employee morale, and provides a unique opportunity to connect with nature and develop new skills outside of the usual work environment. Staff volunteering days are organised 4 - 5 times a year, with activities including tree planting and woodland maintenance.

Apprentices building a greener, more accessible future

Two projects have been completed by National Grid Apprentices and Lead Engineers in the Forest as part of their Apprenticeship skills training, making areas of the Forest more accessible for visitors and developing our tree nursery.

In June 2023, the installation of a 50 metre and a 30 metre boardwalk, while also improving our accessible trail, enabled visitors to enjoy woodland walks even in wet weather and enjoy and foster a deeper connection to nature, whilst preserving the forest floor to ensure that the flora and fauna can thrive around them.

In March 2024, another dedicated group built a second polytunnel at our tree nursery site at Coughton Park in Warwickshire. This new facility will significantly enhance our cell-grown sapling activity, allowing us to grow more trees to plant for the future. In addition, the team constructed two new, wider footbridges in the Forest at Middle Spernal, to replace existing ones, improving accessibility throughout the Forest.



Scan the QR code to watch the Apprentices in action on YouTube

Supporting conservation and volunteer engagement

In 2024/25, the partnership is funding the ongoing management of The Lenches and the grazing licences across the site and a contract position of a Biodiversity Officer (Hedgerows) for six months to support hedgerow surveying in the Forest. It will also support staff and volunteers to repair and replace deer fencing across 37 hectares of woodland, which is crucial for the conservation

management of Roundhill Wood to protect natural regeneration and hazel coppice regrowth within this ancient semi-natural woodland.

NGED is further boosting volunteer support by funding a new Volunteer Management System to help recruit, engage, and retain those who help the Forest thrive.



Apprentices constructing polytunnel at the tree nursery

“It’s been both a privilege and a pleasure collaborating with The Heart of England Forest. National Grid Electricity Distribution is immensely proud of the benefit which our partnership has brought to enhancing natural habitats, forest management and biodiversity improvements. We have developed valuable volunteering opportunities for NGED employees and apprentices providing support to the work which the charity carries out, but also wellbeing and team building initiatives for our employees. We look forward to many more years developing and progressing this unique and valuable partnership.” - Jill Russell, Environment Manager ●

Could your business create a lasting impact?

By collaborating with forward-thinking businesses like yours, we can more effectively grow and protect our precious natural landscapes. To explore how we could work together, contact Fran Bos, Senior Corporate Partnerships Manager: corporate@heartofenglandforest.org

Who wouldn't want 25% more of something wonderful?

25% more cake,
25% more laughter,
25% more trees

You already know how important it is to protect our precious green spaces. But did you know that by adding Gift Aid, you could make your support go even further? It's one of the easiest ways to help us grow the Forest and care for it.

giftaid it

Simply tick the Gift Aid box, and you'll increase the value of your donations by 25%.

How it works

The UK government fund public services through taxes, and the Gift Aid scheme allows charities to claim back the tax you've already paid on your donation. So, if you declare you are a UK taxpayer, the government will add 25p to every £1 you donate.

That means a £100 donation becomes £125 – all without any extra cost to you.

Taking part is easy, but the impact is huge

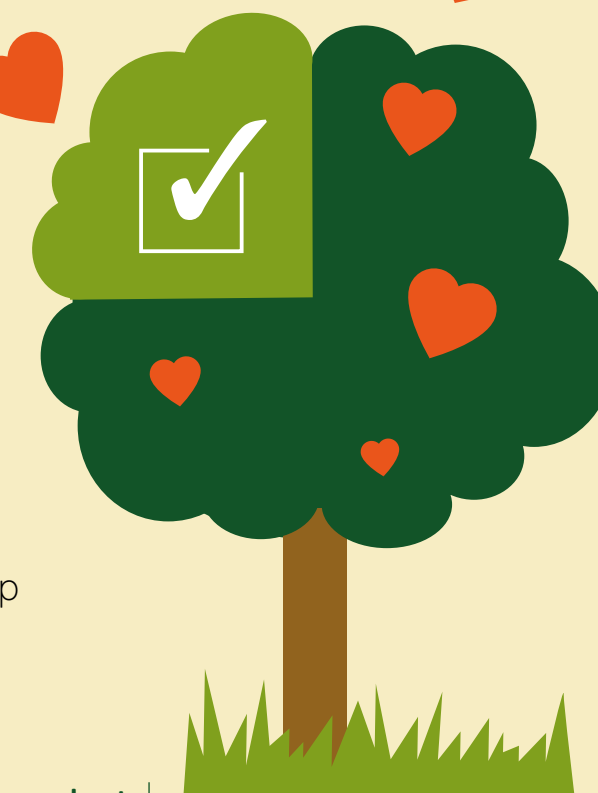
For smaller charities like us, having access to Gift Aid makes a world of difference. For the tax year to April 2024, UK charities received £1.6 billion in Gift Aid donations. If all our supporters were to Gift Aid their donations, this could bring us thousands of pounds every year. And you would know every donation you make is having a much greater impact.

Just think... if we could secure an additional £10,000 in Gift Aid, that could fund planting an extra 2,000 trees or help carry out much-needed biodiversity surveys to ensure our woodland is thriving.

How you can help

Perhaps you could **donate to our Bee Appeal today** and tick the Gift Aid box. This one tick would allow us to claim Gift Aid not just on that donation, but any other donations you have made in the last four years. If you are a Friend of the Forest, it will apply to your regular donations. And it will also allow us to help the bees! Gift Aid allows us to maximise the value your generosity. Helping to plant more trees, protect wildlife, and provide a beautiful natural landscape for the local community.

Thank you for helping us grow – literally.



Forest Diaries

Thanks to your support, our Forest continues to grow through every season. Ian Hayward, Senior Forest Ranger, offers a behind the scenes glimpse into how your generosity helps us care for and expand our woodlands, one tree at a time.



- Spring -

Following a successful tree planting program over the winter, we had the driest spring in over a century. In addition, there was lots of sunshine – April was sunniest on record in the UK, following the third sunniest March ever (Met Office). The newly planted trees need both sun and rain to grow and establish, and drought stress causes severe problems for trees, which can result in tree mortality.

There are always some losses, which are replaced in the following winter, and we're hoping that the different tools used last planting season – both the Rhizocore pellets and mulch mats, will help our trees establish despite the tough conditions.

- Rhizocore pellets increase the ability of tree roots to harvest water from the soil, very important when the water is scarce.
- Mulch mats suppress weeds, which compete with the trees for moisture, nutrients, and light once they grow tall. They also help protect the soil around the tree from the worst of the sunlight, retaining moisture in the soil, which all helps a newly planted tree.

Hopefully the loss assessments in late summer will reveal our trees have survived the challenging conditions.

- Summer -

We're now planning the planting program for this winter and are hoping to plant approx. 90,000 trees across two new woodland creation sites



A mulch mat being secured with a bamboo peg

(around 65ha.) and beat-ups – replacing dead trees in our woodlands. As always, our volunteers will join our Forest team in the planting effort.

Controlling weeds and maintaining footpaths across the Forest are key tasks in our summer work programme. The team will be focussed on maintaining our existing woodlands by ensuring they are suitably protected. We are delighted to have recently become a Tubex location for recycling tree tubes – both from the Forest and local area. More information on this here: tubex.com/sustainability



Cell grown sycamore saplings growing in the polytunnels

- Autumn -

This year, our beat-up program will start in September, thanks to being able to use cell grown trees grown in the polytunnels at our nursery at Coughton Park. We can start using these trees earlier than the bare-root trees, which must be dormant before we can lift them, which is usually November.

Each autumn, our volunteers collect seeds and fruits from specially selected populations of healthy and resilient trees across the Forest. We don't collect all the available seed to ensure wildlife has sufficient food for winter. These seeds are nurtured in our tree nursery until they are ready to be planted, becoming the next generation of native broadleaf and hedgerow species that contribute to the growth of the Forest.

- Winter -

All efforts will be focussed on tree planting. Any time that the team has around tree planting will be spent on woodland work including coppicing and woodland management to open up glades and rides, allowing more light onto the forest floor, helping to create more diversity in our woodlands.

A living gift for life's special moments

Whether it's a birthday, anniversary, Christmas, or just because... A tree in the Heart of England Forest is a special way to mark your occasion or show someone how much you care. You can create a lasting gift that grows with time, whilst helping to conserve our precious green spaces.

Plant a tree today and watch it thrive for years to come.

Enjoy a unique visit to the Forest. Choose the species of your special tree, meet with one of the team and plant your tree alongside a plaque holding a dedication in your own words*. You'll receive a personalised certificate and location map, to help you visit whenever you choose.

Find out more about ways that you can dedicate a tree

heartofenglandforest.org/donate/dedicate-tree



*Our planting experience is available during the planting season – November to March. This is one of our busiest times in the Forest, so please secure your planting day now.