

Our Impact

2024 **2025**

With your support, we are creating and conserving a Forest that is here for life.

Look at what we achieved together.



About us

Where Warwickshire meets Worcestershire, we are planting and protecting a huge, new native Forest. Perfectly placed to deliver habitat creation and restoration within the West Midlands with the creation of new native woodland, grassland, and wetland to help support nature's recovery.

The Forest is home to rare and threatened species that rely on its diverse habitats to survive. Every tree planted, every meadow restored, and every hedgerow nurtured provides a haven for native wildlife to thrive.

From the sounds of birdsong to the stillness of the woods, the Forest provides real moments away from our hectic world. It is a space where families make memories, people share a love of the outdoors, and local communities take pride in what makes our area special.

Through our commitment to long term land protection, habitat restoration, climate resilience, and nature connectedness, we are protecting what matters most. The Forest grows stronger when we nurture it together.

The year in review

Our priorities

This year, our work focused on three priorities: expanding the Forest, restoring and protecting habitats, and deepening community connections with nature.

We acquired 146 hectares of new land and planted over 82,000 trees, with a third grown in our own tree nursery. From creating new woodlands and enhancing species-rich grasslands to carrying out over 100 wildlife surveys, we helped nature thrive today while building its strength to face the challenges of tomorrow's changing climate. Our habitat care included traditional coppicing and pollinator-rich ride creation.

We strengthened our role as a leader in nature recovery by contributing to county-wide strategies, responding to national consultations on land use, and completing multi-partner projects such as the Trees Call to Action Project, which planted more than 275,000 trees and hedgerows.

Volunteers played a record-breaking role, contributing over 15,000 hours to conservation, learning, and events, while education programmes delivered thousands of learning days for children and adults. Partnerships expanded opportunities for restoration, learning, and engagement, showing the power of collaboration.

Our challenges

Challenges reflected the realities of working with nature. Unpredictable weather – shifting from last year's heavy rain to this winter's low rainfall and high temperatures – tested tree establishment, while storm damage required urgent safety work. Managing public access responsibly, addressing resource constraints in schools, and ensuring funding for long-term projects required continued focus.

Despite these pressures, this year saw the Forest grow – both in size and resilience – through dedicated stewardship, strong partnerships, and deepening community engagement, bringing us closer to a thriving, regenerative future for people and nature.

Our people

During 2024/25 we strengthened our team with some key appointments including our new Chief Executive Andy Parsons, new Chair of the Board of Trustees Heather Acton, Director of People and Culture Laura Campbell, and Director of Land Management Tom Davies. The dedication and commitment of our passionate team of employees, volunteers, trustees and co-opted members are vital for the healthy future of our Forest.

- 70 employees
- 9 trustees
- 8 employees enrolled in apprenticeships
- 3 paid interns
- 4,430 volunteer visits

Our supporters

“Giving a little to support the Forest is helping to make it still be here for our children and grandchildren’s sake.”
– Martin

“This charity allows people to get out into the Forest who might not have done before – so they can get exercise, know what a forest is like, and find out about wildlife. It’s very important for children to find out what the real world is like – rather than being stuck in front of a computer screen. I have just been walking in the Forest and saw a greater spotted woodpecker and a roe deer!” – David



“Yesterday I walked through part of the Forest and watched a barn owl hunting in one of the clearings. Simply magical! Thank you for giving me that fabulous experience. I was paid back 100x for my small contributions in those ten minutes.” – Dionne

“If you love being in nature and feel that we need to halt its decline, making a donation every month is a small price to pay.” – Stuart

“As a small charity with low overheads more of my money goes to making a difference. I believe we can reverse climate change and loss of habitat and species.” – Anne

“I am a spiritual person, and that is partly how I see conservation – through the eyes of my faith. Creation is a beautiful place, our earth and part of our role on earth is to look after it.” – Bob



“Running the Shakespeare Marathon for the Forest was such a great experience even though it was one of the hottest days of the year. Knowing the money I’ve raised is going towards protecting and growing more trees to help tackle climate change gave me that extra push in the tougher parts of the race!” – Jack

“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... I gave one to someone when they started school. It’s fun for people to go to find them. Even though sometimes it means wading through mud. I understand that not all the saplings will survive. But even if it’s not that particular tree, the Forest will be there.” – Jenny



“I have trouble with mobility – but sitting on a bench in the Forest people come and talk to you, it’s amazing. There was such a wide variety of people in the Forest today, and they were talking to each other. So, the Forest is helping human beings too.” – Michael

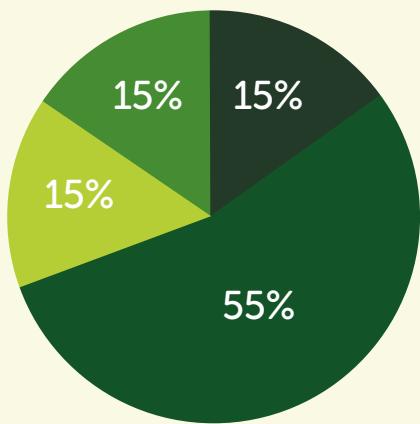
Our supporters come in all shapes and sizes, and we are grateful for every one. You are creating the impact you can read about in this report.

Thank you.

Your support in numbers

- 1128 Friends of the Forest at the end of the year
- 367 people dedicated a tree
- 132 personal donations
- 31 corporate volunteering days
- 21 corporate donations and partnerships
- 14 donations from trust and grant giving organisations
- 4 supporters ran the Shakespeare Marathon for us
- 3 times the numbers of families opting for natural burial at our Alne Wood Park site in the last two years

Donations from the public



Key:

- Tree Dedications
- Gift Aid
- Single donations
- Friendships



For the environment

Tree saplings growing in the polytunnel



Forestry team member tree planting

The bigger picture

- While canopy cover is slowly increasing, **UK woodlands are in no fit state to withstand an escalating range of threats** or fulfil its vital role in mitigating the climate and nature crises – *State of the UK's Woods and Trees 2025, Woodland Trust*
- **Delivering the UK's 30by30 target** on land in England means ensuring that our most important and wildlife-rich habitats are benefiting from effective, long-term conservation and management for nature – *Defra, 2024*

- **This winter saw below average rainfall and above average temperatures in the UK.** The last three years have all been in the UK's top five warmest on record. 2024 included the UK's warmest May, fifth warmest winter and warmest spring on record – *State of UK Climate Report 2024, Met Office*

Ensuring the Heart of England Forest is known as a **significant landscape to support nature's recovery**; we continue to play an active role in developing the Local Nature Recovery Strategies in Warwickshire and Worcestershire.

For the environment - in numbers



Over **82,000** trees **were planted**

A third of which were grown in our tree nursery.



146 hectares of land **acquired**

Wootton Wawen and Temple Grafton.

28,800 bare root saplings **lifted from our tree nursery**

From 10 different tree species, which were planted in the Forest.



3 contractors **employed to undertake hazel coppicing**

Ensuring this traditional management continues and benefitting the wildlife that relies on it in our Roundhill Wood Local Wildlife Site.



21,450 metres of native **hedgerows planted**

As part of the Trees Call to Action Project (TCAP), our flagship multi-partner three-year project which concluded this year.

210 hectares of ancient **semi-natural woodland are now under management planning**

Supported by the Mercian Woodlands Project in partnership with the Small Woods Association.

Forest Firsts

- 1 Fungi pellets were planted alongside the 24,500 saplings at Parkfield Farm** to enhance the trees' ability to absorb water and nutrients and mulch mats were used to control weeds, helping to improve their growth rate.
- 2 New working relationship established** with a local contractor who uses horses to extract logging materials, a low impact traditional management practice.
- 3 Use of Emlid Reach RX for high precision surveying and mapping of Forest sites**, enabling more accurate design of wetlands and ponds.



Highlights

In the first year of the two-year Naunton Beauchamp woodland creation and environmental project, over **40,000 trees were planted**, and **flower-rich seed mixes sown** to create a diverse native woodland and a network of species rich grasslands. This landholding, which includes the Naunton Court meadows Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), will be transformed into a mixed wooded habitat, with grasslands, forest rides and glades.

A second polytunnel was built at our tree nursery site at Coughton Park in Warwickshire, thanks to funding from our corporate partner National Grid Electricity Distribution (NGED). Their Apprentices and Lead Engineers carried out the work which will enhance our cell-grown sapling activity, allowing us to grow more trees to plant for the future.



The polytunnel at our tree nursery housing cell-grown saplings

Left: Polytunnel at Coughton Park

For wildlife



A female common darter dragonfly on marsh thistle



Sample tube and ladybird ID sheet during a survey

The bigger picture

- In 2022, woodland cover in England was about 10% with an additional 4% covered by trees outside of woodland (TOWs). This is a slight increase on the 1998 figure of 9.5%. **Despite increases in woodland, woodland wildlife is decreasing.** This is largely due to continued woodland fragmentation, habitat degradation and lack of woodland management – *State of Nature Report 2023*
- The Heart of England Forest is working to address this by **undertaking habitat management work** as well as creating more woodlands.

- Biodiversity is declining. **Currently, there are more than 169,000 species on The IUCN Red List**, with more than 47,000 species threatened with extinction, including 41% of amphibians, 25% of mammals, and 13% of birds – *The International Union for Conservation of Nature's Red List of Threatened Species*

The **positive contribution** the Heart of England Forest is making to butterfly species in Warwickshire through its work reconnecting fragmented landscape has been **highlighted in the latest Butterfly Conservation report**, specifically the small heath, brown hairstreak, and white admiral, which are all classed as vulnerable – *Butterfly Conservation 2024 Results*

For wildlife - in numbers

3,108 birds from 49 species were ringed in 2024

These included 12 Red List species, including first-time records of stock dove and green sandpiper.



Over 100 surveys delivered

The information gathered helps to inform our Forest plans as well as contributes to building a picture of the health of wildlife within the region and nationally.

13 consecutive years of bird of prey boxes monitoring

The South Warwickshire Barn Owl Survey Group surveyed 132 boxes: 51 barn owl, 44 kestrel, 33 tawny owl and 4 little owl boxes.



7 more ponds surveyed for great crested newts

We now have this important European protected species recorded in 35 ponds in the Forest.

10 volunteers recruited to help with data input

Adding this valuable biological data to our species database for analysis is a vital part of our monitoring work.



15 wildflower species recorded within the Pollinator Pathways

The 5 year project, funded by Severn Trent which provided funding of £81,570 to enhance 30 metre wide woodland rides across 68 hectares, concluded in March.



Forest Firsts

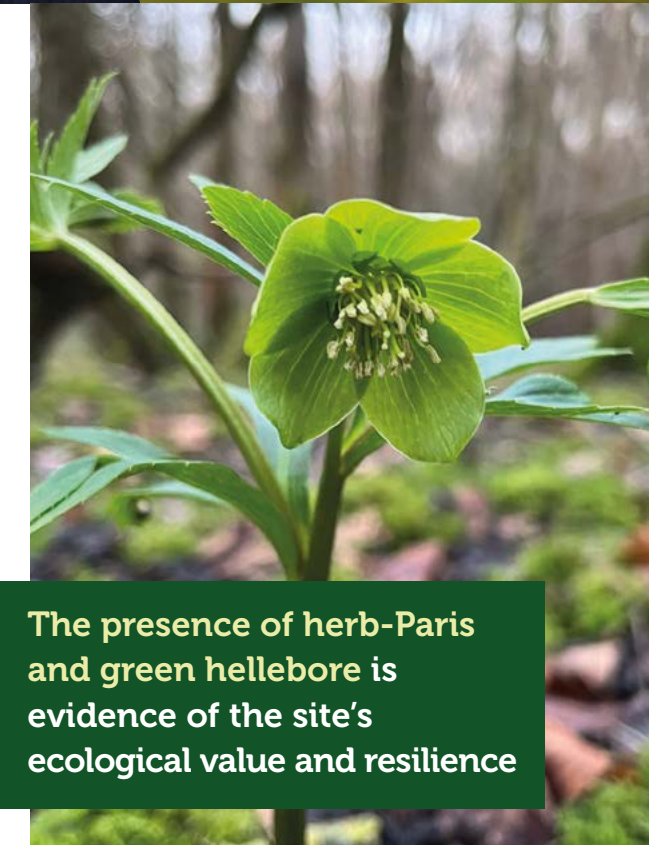
- 1 Glow-worm** recorded by a volunteer at Honeybourne in the Forest for the first time since 1995.
- 2 Shield bug surveys** were trialled in the Forest for the first time.
- 3 First bird survey** on new land at Naunton Beauchamp by volunteers from the RSPB Worcester and Malvern local group highlighted the importance of this area for farmland birds.



Highlights

A new population of **herb-Paris** was recorded in Spernal Park, along with **25-30 green hellebore** plants found growing in an area no larger than 10 x 10 metres. The native variety of the species is currently only known in Warwickshire at two sites and in small numbers. Green hellebore has been 'lost' from seven sites since 1971 in Warwickshire, although one of the sites it was present in at the time was Spernal Park. Both plants are indicators of ancient woodland and good quality habitat, so their presence is evidence of this site's ecological value and resilience.

Right: Green hellebore



The presence of herb-Paris and green hellebore is evidence of the site's ecological value and resilience



For people



Family walking in the Forest
at Morgrove Coppice

The bigger picture

- People who visit nature at least once a week are **1.9 times more likely to also report good general health**, however people from disadvantaged backgrounds have less opportunity to spend time in nature – *Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment: A summary report on nature connectedness among adults and children in England 2020, Natural England*
 - 89% of volunteers reported that they **enjoy volunteering** and for 75% it has **improved their mental health and wellbeing** – *Time Well Spent 2023: A national survey on the volunteer experience, NVCO*
 - Learning that takes place in the natural environment results in or is associated with **a range of positive outcomes for school children**. Woods and forests were associated with academic, social and personal skills, increases in confidence and self-esteem, and improvements in physical skills – *LOtC in Natural Environments 2022, Council for Learning Outside the Classroom*
- The Heart of England Forest is **committed to helping to address the 'nature-gap' between schools in better-off and more deprived areas** (Schools for Nature Report 2024, WWF). This year, a quarter of the children visiting the Forest were in receipt of free school meals, 10.6% had a special education need or disability, and 3.3% came from homes where English is not the main language spoken at home.

Two volunteers during an evening volunteer session

For people - in numbers



Over **2,800** attendees

Enjoyed our programme of walks, talks, and fundraising events.

5,625 learning days for children and adults delivered

Most visiting on multiple occasions, learning new skills whilst developing a deeper connection to nature and a lasting appreciation of the Forest.

15,075 volunteer hours given

A record breaking number, supporting conservation and site management, helping to carry out essential tasks across the Forest.

800 fixed point photographs taken

Amounting to around 160 hours given by volunteers in the 1st year of this project to capture landscape changes over time.

21 local school partnerships

Providing progressive curriculum-based learning in the Forest, with every session incorporating an activity designed to help participants develop a deeper connection to nature.

130 community groups and **196** landowners and farmers supported

With tree planting and maintenance advice as part of the Trees Call to Action Project (TCAP).



Forest Firsts

- 1 Our evening volunteering pilot saw **41 volunteers contribute 172 hours over nine sessions**, proving that people are eager to support us when given opportunities at a time that works for them.
- 2 **Meet the CEO drop-in sessions were held** in Dorsington and Spernal for immediate neighbours to gain valuable insight and help us build and maintain strong relationships with our closest communities.
- 3 We worked with the National Trust team at Coughton Court to **open a short waymarked permissive route** through the Forest, giving visitors access to an elevated viewpoint of the Tudor mansion on a circular route through establishing woodlands.



Bridging the gap between pupil's experiences in their urban lives and learning more about nature

Highlights

Year 4 pupils from Ark Kings Academy in Birmingham attended the Forest for a weekly after school club for a full year, funded by our corporate partner Gateley. During these visits they have become confident in spending time outdoors – claiming the space as theirs and **making memories that will last them a lifetime.**

Two bridges were replaced and upgraded on a walking route to improve accessibility, as part of our corporate partnership with National Grid Electricity Distribution (NGED), with the work carried out by their Apprentices and Lead Engineers.

Left: Pupils in the Forest during the after school club

Peter – a valued volunteer

Guided by a lifelong love of nature and inspired by the chance to give back to his local countryside and wildlife, Peter became a Heart of England Forest volunteer after retiring from an office job in 2024. Since then, he has embraced a wide range of practical conservation work, from seed processing and tree planting to wildlife surveys and habitat management, including green hay strewing, glade creation, and installing leaky dams. Peter has particularly enjoyed contributing to the pond project, gathering data and helping to enhance these vital habitats.



“I’ll never forget a crisp, snowy morning in December when a group of us cleared blackthorn from the side of a shady pond at Coughton Fields. After we finished, seeing the winter sun twinkling on the previously dark water surface was a truly magical sight.

Every single day in the Forest I learn lots of new things. Above all I now fully appreciate what a wonderful, precious environment the Forest is and how important the work of the charity is. It’s been quite a transition from office to forest, ponds and fields – I’ve loved every bit of it.”

The Forest so far...

Based in the heart of the Midlands, near Stratford-upon-Avon, the Forest stretches across the Warwickshire and Worcestershire borders. Our mission is to create and conserve a thriving broadleaf forest of 30,000 acres (half the size of Birmingham).

The Forest currently covers 8,000 acres and over 2.2 million trees have been planted across 4,800 acres since the charity began.

Establishing and growing the Forest on land that we have purchased will ensure it is safe and protected for generations to come.

The significance and scale of our work cannot be underestimated: the Heart of England Forest will be one of the largest native forests in the country.

As the Forest grows, so too will the benefits to both our health and that of the natural world.

What will your impact be?

To discover how you can be part of an incredible journey supporting people and planet, both now and for hundreds of years to come, visit heartofenglandforest.org



The Heart of England Forest is more than just trees

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