



## Your Forest

Winter 2025/Spring 2026 | [heartofenglandforest.org](http://heartofenglandforest.org)

### Butterfly emergency

How the Forest is offering hope

### Evening volunteering

Connecting with nature out of hours

### Growing the Forest

New land acquisitions and plans



# Your Forest

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# TREE PLANTING – PROGRESS SO FAR

This winter season we're aiming to plant 100,000 trees, including the creation of 125 acres of new woodland. We're proud that this year over half of the trees being planted are from the Forest's own tree nursery.

The hard work for our forest team and volunteers began in October with the important job of replacing the lost saplings planted the previous winter. Losing 50% rather than the usual 5 - 15% due to the unrelenting drought last year made this no small task. With optimism and determination, the young trees that did not survive were replanted by January.

From December, it has been all hands on deck to plant new woodlands across two Forest sites, and this work will continue until the end of March. Huge thanks to everyone who is putting spades in the ground and supporting us to ensure that the Forest continues to grow.

*Tom Davies,  
Director of Forest Operations*



Winter 2025/Spring 2026 Edition. Many thanks to all the contributors who made this issue possible.

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



## Welcome

As we look ahead to a new year, it's the perfect moment to pause and reflect on our shared progress. The Forest estate has grown by an impressive 20% over the past 12-18 months. Now standing at 9,000 acres, we are already 27% of the way towards our long-term goal of creating a 30,000-acre Forest.

**Y**ou can read more about our recent land acquisitions and our ambitions for further expansion on pages 14-15. With this exciting growth, however, comes an ever-greater responsibility to care for, protect, and nurture the legacy we are all building together.

We also know that adapting to create a resilient Forest in a rapidly changing world is essential. On page 11, Rob Mackenzie, Professor of Atmospheric Science at the University of Birmingham and Heart of England Forest Trustee, explains how forests offer hope for a better tomorrow in the face of the climate and biodiversity crises.

As you make plans for the year ahead, why not pledge to spend more time outdoors and deepen your connection with nature? It's a wonderful way to lift the January blues and support your physical and mental wellbeing throughout the year.

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A huge thank you to everyone who donated to our festive Big Forest Plant appeal. Your donations are being put straight to work as every day through the winter we plant new trees across Worcestershire and Warwickshire.

We'll be planting trees right through to spring, so there's still time to donate to support our efforts! To find out more, visit [heartofenglandforest.org/big-forest-plant](http://heartofenglandforest.org/big-forest-plant) or scan here and donate.



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Volunteers weeding the sapling beds at the tree nursery

# Out of hours: connecting with nature

There were many successes during our 2025 Evening Volunteering Programme, from maintaining footpaths and nurturing our young trees, to building a thriving new volunteer community. Access and Volunteer Lead Ben Toney takes a moment to celebrate what was achieved and shares a glimpse of what is to come in 2026.



## What is evening volunteering?

The Evening Volunteering Programme is designed to give more people the chance to get involved in the Heart of England Forest. Taking place between 6.30pm and 8.30pm throughout the summer months, the sessions provide flexibility for those who work during our regular volunteer programme session times or have daytime commitments – making it accessible to everyone.

## A season of success

Last year's programme built on the incredible enthusiasm we saw for this type of volunteering

in the 2024 pilot. From June through to early autumn, volunteers contributed over 1,000 hours of their time:

- Managing footpaths and grassy rides to keep routes open and safe for everyone.
- Collecting and processing woodland seed to grow the next generation of trees.
- Tending to young trees in our tree nursery, ensuring they thrive before planting.
- Fixing and maintaining our tools and equipment.
- Improving pond habitats to support wildlife.
- Surveying our hedgerows to track biodiversity across the Forest.

Each task has made a tangible difference, improving habitats for people and wildlife alike.

The sense of community and teamwork that's developed along the way has been a particular highlight; a reflection of the commitment and positivity volunteers bring to every session.

One regular volunteer shared: *“Because I love the forest, I love long summer evenings, I love nature, I wanted to meet new people and feel a part of something that matters.”*

Another: *“At work I sit in front of a computer all day. As I enjoy being outdoors, as soon as I heard that you did evening sessions that was perfect for me to get some exercise and fresh air.”*

## Extending into autumn and winter

Last year, we extended the programme beyond the summer months for the first time. Weekly sessions continued through October at our Binton tree nursery, where volunteers helped process seed and care for young trees under cover with the added comfort of lighting, a roof, and a kettle always on for tea and coffee.

From November through winter, we introduced a new series of indoor education sessions exploring topics from forest ecology to wildlife identification, along with informal coffee and catch-up gatherings to stay connected during the colder months.



Footpath maintenance session



A group of volunteers fixing tools

## Looking ahead to 2026

As we reflect on last year's achievements, plans are now underway for an even bigger and better Evening Volunteering Programme in 2026. With more sessions, more variety, and more opportunities to get involved, we hope to welcome both new and familiar faces back to the Forest this spring.

If you haven't yet joined us, why not make 2026 the year you do? Whether you are keen to learn practical conservation skills, meet others with a passion for nature, or simply spend more time outdoors, our evening sessions are the perfect place to start if you have a full schedule in the day. ●

## Interested?

Sign up to our volunteer newsletter and get the latest opportunities in your inbox: [heartofenglandforest.org/volunteer](http://heartofenglandforest.org/volunteer)

Already signed up? Keep an eye on our volunteering newsletter for the 2026 launch dates, upcoming induction sessions, and an online introduction to the Evening Programme in early spring.

We can't wait to see you again on those long, beautiful summer evenings.



# The power of partnership

When purpose aligns, impact follows. When businesses and charities come together with shared goals, the results extend far beyond what either could achieve alone. At the Heart of England Forest, our corporate partnerships are making this happen – not just through conservation funding, but through genuine connections between people, nature, and the landscape we are building together. Our Senior Corporate Partnerships Manager, Fran Bos, shares more.

## Collaboration for a greener, more resilient future

From teams planting trees to businesses investing in wetland restoration, corporate collaborations help us grow a resilient, biodiverse forest while giving employees the chance to make a tangible difference in their own region.

## A spotlight on corporate partner Gateley

Now in its third year, our partnership with Gateley – a leading professional services group headquartered in Birmingham – plays a pivotal role in creating meaningful environmental and social impact while supporting Gateley's commitment to being a responsible business.

## A shared vision for people and the planet

Our collaboration with Gateley has evolved beyond funding – it's a genuine partnership rooted in shared values and a drive to make a difference. From inspiring the next generation through outdoor learning to encouraging employee volunteering and wellbeing, it shows how business and environmental organisations can achieve lasting impact together.

Rebecca Sherwin, Partner and Birmingham Office Head, Gateley, said: *“Our partnership with the Heart of England Forest has been built on a shared desire to protect and restore our planet. As well as supporting the planting of trees and the protection of threatened species, we were*

particularly proud to have facilitated access to nature for Year 4 pupils from Ark Kings Academy in Birmingham.

Our responsible business ethos is built on having a positive impact on the communities we serve, and this is the perfect demonstration of how strategic partnerships can support this ambition.”

## Creating space to learn, play, and grow

A standout highlight of our partnership with Gateley is the funding of an after-school club in the Forest. Over the year, pupils from Ark Kings Academy in Kings Norton, an area of South Birmingham with high numbers of disadvantaged pupils and very little access to green space, visited weekly to explore, learn, and connect with nature.



Ark Kings Academy pupils at the after school club

*“They often find it difficult in the classroom, but out here they have the space to self-regulate. Being able to choose their own activities and being able to find their own space has been particularly important. This has helped them self-regulate back in the classroom.”*

Karen Simmonds, Teacher.

The results have been transformative for the pupils that participated, boosting confidence, wellbeing, social skills, and a lifelong connection with the natural world for young people who face significant challenges in their daily lives.

This year, the partnership will enable pupils from two Redditch schools – St Luke's and St George's, to take part in this valuable club.



Gateley employees on a corporate volunteering day in the Forest



Watch the video on YouTube

## From office to Forest: getting hands-on

Employees join us on four volunteer days each year to help with woodland creation and maintenance activities. Offering more than just a break from the office, these days strengthen teamwork, build new skills, and reconnect people with nature and purpose. Participants return re-energised and inspired, knowing they have made a genuine, lasting difference.

## Bringing the Forest to the workplace

We also brought the Forest to Gateley's head office, where our Biodiversity Officer, Avery, delivered an inspiring 'Lunchtime Learning' session on the insects that call the Forest home. The session sparked curiosity and conversation, helping employees see how even the smallest creatures play a vital role in creating healthy woodland ecosystems.

To build on this engagement, two podcasts were recorded with members of our tree nursery and biodiversity teams. These collaborations are fantastic examples of how Gateley and the Forest are working hand in hand to promote environmental awareness and a greener future.

## Growing the impact together

We are looking for more visionary partners like Gateley – organisations that see sustainability not just as a value, but as a responsibility. If your company is committed to ESG goals, driving tangible environmental change, and leaving a legacy that truly matters, we would love to collaborate. Contact: [corporate@heartofenglandforest.org](mailto:corporate@heartofenglandforest.org)

# Forest events for all

Step into the 2026 programme and explore the many ways to connect with the Forest – through its stories, its wildlife, and the people who bring it to life.



## Stories & Heritage

For those who love the Forest's past

### Your Forest & It's Founder

Saturday 21st February 2026

Every tree has a story, and this one begins with the remarkable vision of local landowner Felix Dennis. Walk in the footsteps of the Forest's founder and discover how one idea grew into a living legacy that continues to shape the landscape today.



## Family adventures

For outdoor explorers

### WildTribe Holiday Club

Various dates in school holidays

Let your little adventurers run free at a holiday club full of fresh air, laughter, and outdoor magic! Designed for ages 4-11, children can dive into den building, bug hunts, bushcraft, campfire cooking, and more, all guided by friendly forest experts. With sessions in two woodland sites and age groups 4-7 and 7-11, every child can explore, create, and discover the joy of the wild.



## Capturing the Forest

For photography enthusiasts

### Bluebell Wood Fundraiser Trail

Friday 24th & Saturday 25th April 2026



## Discovering wildlife

For nature lovers

### Aquatic Invertebrate virtual workshop

Tuesday 12th May 2026

It is easy to overlook the small things, but our ponds and streams are alive with movement. During this online workshop, you will learn how to spot the tiny creatures that keep the Forest's ecosystems healthy from the comfort of your own home.



## Step into nature

For walkers and wanderers

### Luddington Loop Ramble

June 2026

If you love discovering new paths, join us for a wander around the Forest at Luddington, which benefits from far reaching views and both public and newly created permissive footpaths. A relaxed walk through countryside and new woodland, ideal for clearing your head and reconnecting with nature.



## Family adventures

For outdoor explorers

### Mini Foresters Does Halloween

Saturday 24th October 2026

Muddy hands, bright smiles, and plenty of imagination, that's what Mini Foresters is all about. Families can play, create, and explore together, proving that the Forest is a place for adventure at every age.



Right: Felix Dennis, Founder of the Forest

**Discover more and book today.** This is just a snapshot of the exciting events planned for 2026. From wildlife to family adventures and heritage walks, there is something for everyone to enjoy.



Explore the full events programme on our website [heartofenglandforest.org/events](http://heartofenglandforest.org/events) or simply scan the QR code to find out more and book your next Forest adventure.



## Small guests, big impact: How to make a bug hotel



Insects may be small, but they're mighty. Vital for pollination, decomposition, pest control, and as a food source for many animals, they keep ecosystems in balance. Sadly, their numbers are falling, with flying insects down 63% since 2021\*.

Bug hotels offer these hardworking minibeasts shelter from predators and a safe place to raise their young, coming in all shapes and sizes – from grand resorts to cosy hideaways!

Our forestry team built this larger version (pictured above) using repurposed bamboo canes, hazel stakes, and a broken pallet, but you can easily make a smaller one to fit even the snuggest of outdoor spaces.

### Make your own bug hotel

Did you know that an average garden is home to more than 2,000 different species of insect?

You can use lots of different types of natural and repurposed materials to make a safe and interesting hideaway for lots of different kinds of bugs to enjoy in your garden.

#### What you'll need

- Dry grass • Bird feathers • Dry leaves •
- Pinecones • Duct tape • Dry sticks and twigs •
- The cardboard core of a used toilet/kitchen roll or old cans •



#### Instructions

- 1 If using an old can, wear gloves and cover sharp edges with duct tape to protect yourself and your insect guests.
- 2 Fill your can or toilet/kitchen roll with a mix of natural materials to create cosy tunnels and hiding spots.
- 3 Place your bug hotel in a shady, sheltered spot. Try different locations - you'll attract new visitors each time!

\* 2024 Bugs Matter citizen science survey April 2025 [www.buglife.org.uk](http://www.buglife.org.uk)



## *Restoring forests and our future*

– how they offer hope for a better tomorrow in the face of climate and biodiversity crisis

Rob MacKenzie, Professor of Atmospheric Science at the University of Birmingham, and Heart of England Forest Trustee.

#### Forests at the heart of who we are

Are we beginning to remember how important our arboreal origins are? Colleagues<sup>1</sup> at the University of Birmingham have conducted fascinating work suggesting that our walking upright (bipedalism) began while we were still in the trees. Maybe if we had retained an ancestral memory of tree-dwelling, we wouldn't need to link 'forests' and 'our future'; it would simply be obvious that a prosperous, secure future requires forests.

Forests and our future are linked at the core of

our being. When we engage with the Heart of England Forest – as volunteers, Friends, employees, or trustees – we engage our hearts with a forest. That may be the most important thing we do, even surpassing all our tremendous efforts in tree planting, coppicing, and habitat making.

#### From branches to burning fuels: how our relationship with forests changed

We've come a long way as a species since we walked along tree branches, and our relationship

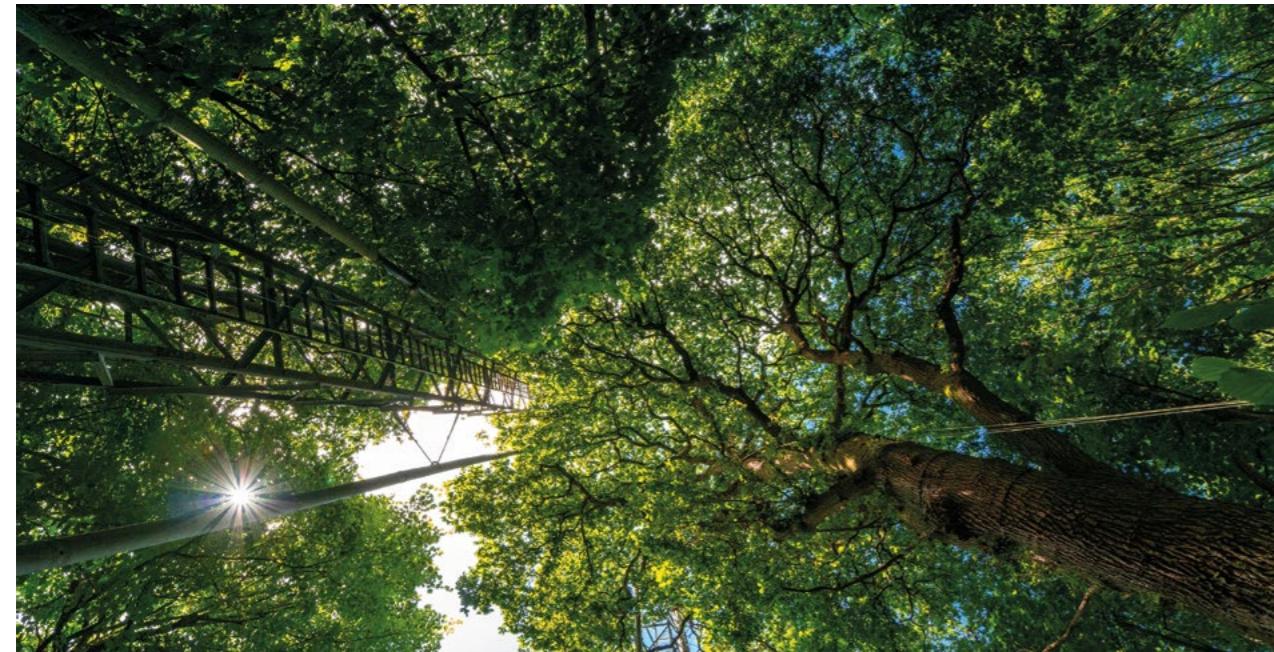
with forests has changed too. We discovered that the million-year-old remnants of plants and animals – coal, oil, and gas – are packed with energy that powers an incredibly sophisticated mode of living. A mode so abundant in material and culture that it can overflow into fascinating celebrations of human creativity and frailty like the Garden of Heroes and Villains<sup>2</sup>.

### The cost of progress: rising CO<sub>2</sub> and a changing climate

Unlocking the vast potential of fossil-fuel energy has rapidly increased<sup>3</sup> atmospheric carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>), changing our climate. The UK is not immune<sup>4</sup>: the early decades of the 21st century have been warmer, wetter, and sunnier than those of the 20th. Recent warmth in central England “has far exceeded any observed temperature in at least 300 years.” The warmest spring was 2024; 2025 was the warmest summer on record<sup>4</sup>. Every year brings another record – more certainty that we, and our forests, live in a rapidly changing world.

### Forests: nature’s climate partners

I became fascinated by forest science because of climate change. We get a tremendous ‘free gift’ from



Above: The BIFoR FACE facility. An intriguing blend of technology and nature. Image courtesy of Thomas Downes, Birmingham Institute of Forest Research.

forests: almost a third of the extra CO<sub>2</sub> from burning fossil fuels, deforestation, and draining swamps is taken up by vegetation, especially forests<sup>5</sup>. Without this ‘land carbon sink’, climate change would already be worse. Nevertheless, CO<sub>2</sub> is still rising; the climate is still changing. Will forests continue to deliver this gift in a warmer, high-CO<sub>2</sub> world that is sometimes wetter, other times drier?

### Bringing the future to the forest: the BIFoR FACE experiment

We can study future forest responses through seedlings in glasshouses<sup>6</sup> or sophisticated computer models<sup>7</sup>, but to study the forest as a forest, we must put some of it in the future atmosphere. That’s what happens at the University of Birmingham’s Institute of Forest Research Free-Air CO<sub>2</sub> Enrichment facility (BIFoR FACE<sup>8</sup>). Here, three patches of long-established oak forest are immersed in air with mid-century CO<sub>2</sub> levels – about 40% higher than today – while three neighbouring patches remain in today’s air as controls.

### What the trees are telling us

BIFoR FACE isn’t a perfect time machine: only



Aerial view of the Forest at Middle Sernal

CO<sub>2</sub> changes, not temperature or rainfall. Yet, over time, natural variability provides conditions to explore combined effects of CO<sub>2</sub>, temperature, flood, or drought.

So far<sup>9</sup>, the nearly 200-year-old trees under elevated CO<sub>2</sub> are growing about 10% more each year than their neighbours. Most of this growth is in the woody part of the tree – good news, since wood locks carbon away for decades or centuries.

### The hidden helpers beneath our feet

To maintain this extra growth, trees need more nutrients – like a bodybuilder needing protein as well as carbohydrates. That nutrition comes from the forest’s intricate web of plants, animals, and microbes. Trees in elevated CO<sub>2</sub> leak sugary goo from their roots<sup>10</sup>, fuelling microbes that recycle nitrogen from dead matter back into a usable form. The trees gain nutrients; the microbes get food. Everybody benefits.

### Hope rooted in the forest

So, all is well? CO<sub>2</sub> rises, trees grow, problem solved? Unfortunately not. Trees have not stopped climate change, and they can’t – but they can help

us manage its severity, while giving us biodiversity and joy as added bonuses. Forests offer tremendous hope for our future, but we must work to keep that hope alive: by building and maintaining forests and by ending fossil-fuel burning – or capturing the CO<sub>2</sub> it releases.

### From our past to our future: a call to reconnect

Our better tomorrows have always come hand-in-hand with forests and forest products (if we can call fossil fuels that). They will continue to come if we decarbonise our economies and reconnect with our forests – from the Heart of England out into the world. ●

<sup>1</sup>[birmingham.ac.uk/staff/profiles/biosciences/thorpe-susannah](http://birmingham.ac.uk/staff/profiles/biosciences/thorpe-susannah)

<sup>2</sup>[heartofenglandforest.org/garden-heroes-and-villains](http://heartofenglandforest.org/garden-heroes-and-villains)

<sup>3</sup>[gml.noaa.gov/ccgg/trends/history.html](http://gml.noaa.gov/ccgg/trends/history.html)  
<sup>4</sup>[metoffice.gov.uk/about-us/news-and-media/media-centre/weather-and-climate-news/2025/summer-2025-is-the-warmest-on-record-for-the-uk](http://metoffice.gov.uk/about-us/news-and-media/media-centre/weather-and-climate-news/2025/summer-2025-is-the-warmest-on-record-for-the-uk)

<sup>5</sup>[ukesm.ac.uk](http://ukesm.ac.uk)

<sup>6</sup>[ukesm.ac.uk](http://ukesm.ac.uk)

<sup>7</sup>[ukesm.ac.uk](http://ukesm.ac.uk)

<sup>8</sup>[birmingham.ac.uk/research/centres-institutes/birmingham-institute-of-forest-research/bifor-face](http://birmingham.ac.uk/research/centres-institutes/birmingham-institute-of-forest-research/bifor-face)

<sup>9</sup>[onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/gcb.70355](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/gcb.70355)

<sup>10</sup>[pnas.org/doi/10.1073/pnas.2503595122](http://pnas.org/doi/10.1073/pnas.2503595122)

# Looking to the future: Growing the Forest

Acquiring suitable land on which to grow the Forest is vital for us to achieve our long-term ambition of a 30,000 acre Forest which will be here to benefit the environment, wildlife, and people for hundreds of years to come. There is always an air of excitement at the charity when news of a land acquisition comes in, and we are delighted to share information about two recent land purchases with you.

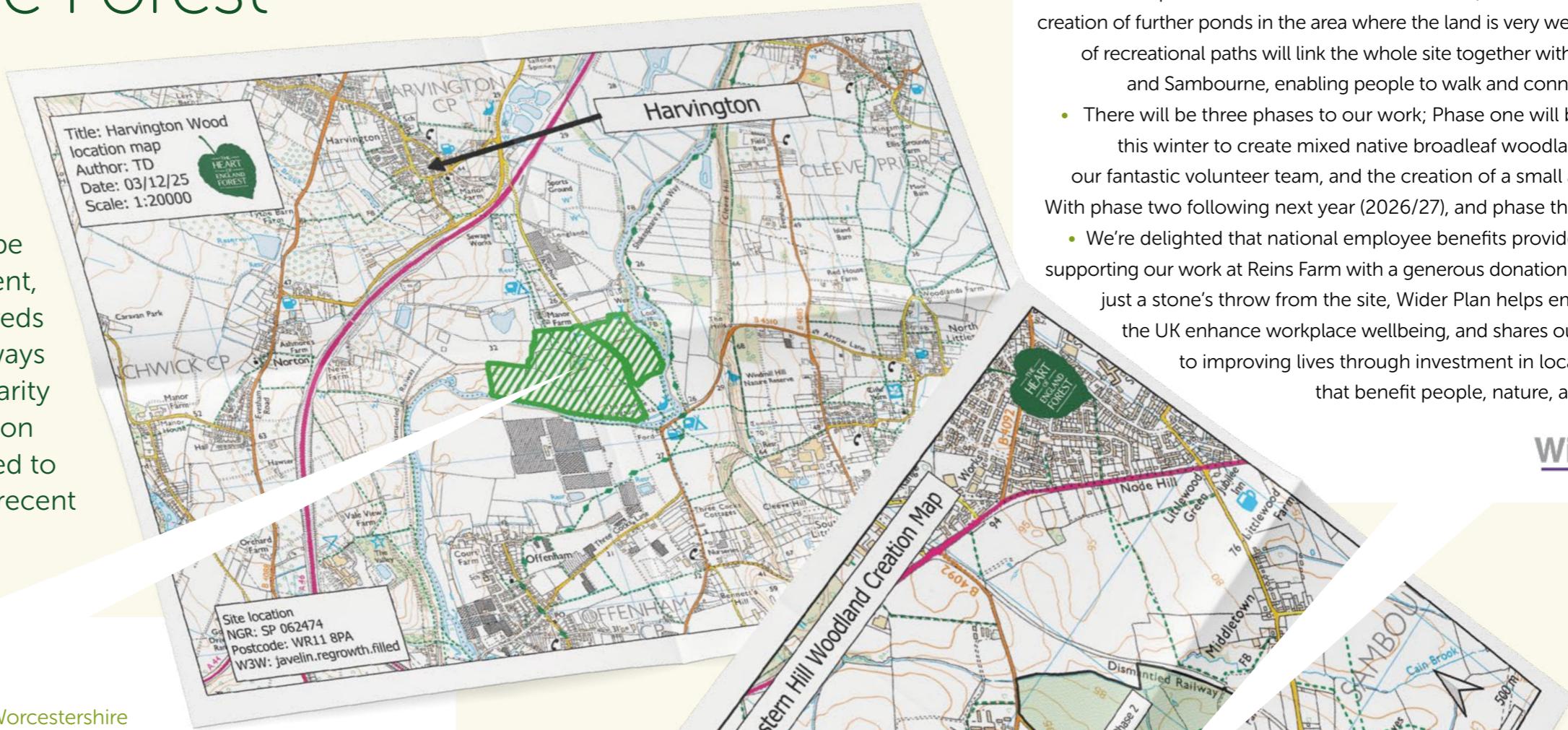
## ➤ Harvington Wood

116 acres (47 hectares) of woodland and recreational land in Harvington, Worcestershire



Above: Great burnet (*Sanguisorba officinalis*) in flower in the Forest at Sernal

- We are at the beginning of planning our work here, but know that we will be planting 26 hectares of new woodland to join the existing woodland which includes Riparian habitat along the river. The creation of woodland and restoration of both hay and flood plain water meadows as part of a mosaic of wetland habitats, will include ponds and scrapes to help with the flood alleviation in the local area.
- As with all sites, we are surveying to understand what the land contains to get a baseline. Severn Rivers Trust has been contracted to undertake the botanical/habitat surveys. Notable native flora found on site includes great burnet (a flood plain meadow indicator species), birds foot trefoil, and field madder. In addition, greater dodder, a notable and nationally scarce parasitic plant of nettle and hops, is present.



➤ Eastern Hill  
181 acres (73 hectares) of farmland and woodland near Sambourne, Warwickshire

- Our plans here are for woodland creation, restoration of ponds, and creation of further ponds in the area where the land is very wet. The provision of recreational paths will link the whole site together with Astwood Bank and Sambourne, enabling people to walk and connect with nature.
- There will be three phases to our work; Phase one will be tree planting this winter to create mixed native broadleaf woodland, mainly with our fantastic volunteer team, and the creation of a small area of grazing. With phase two following next year (2026/27), and phase three in 2028/29.
- We're delighted that national employee benefits provider Wider Plan is supporting our work at Reins Farm with a generous donation Headquartered just a stone's throw from the site, Wider Plan helps employers across the UK enhance workplace wellbeing, and shares our commitment to improving lives through investment in local green spaces that benefit people, nature, and community.

**WiderPlan**



**! HOT OFF  
THE PRESS !**

We have just completed on 137 acres (56 hectares) of land near Henley-in-Arden. More information coming soon!

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## Paws and peace: How to enjoy nature with your dog and protect it too

Dogs are our loyal friends, our adventure buddies, our daily joy. They connect us to nature in ways few other creatures can, encouraging us to lace up our boots, breathe fresh air, and explore the great outdoors. But as much as we love them, our dogs can unintentionally leave their own kind of footprint on the places we treasure most.

### The good news?

With just a few small changes, we can protect wildlife, conserve natural habitats, and still enjoy every muddy walk and tail wag. The Forest belongs to all: people, pets, and wildlife, and together, we can keep it thriving.

### When play turns precarious

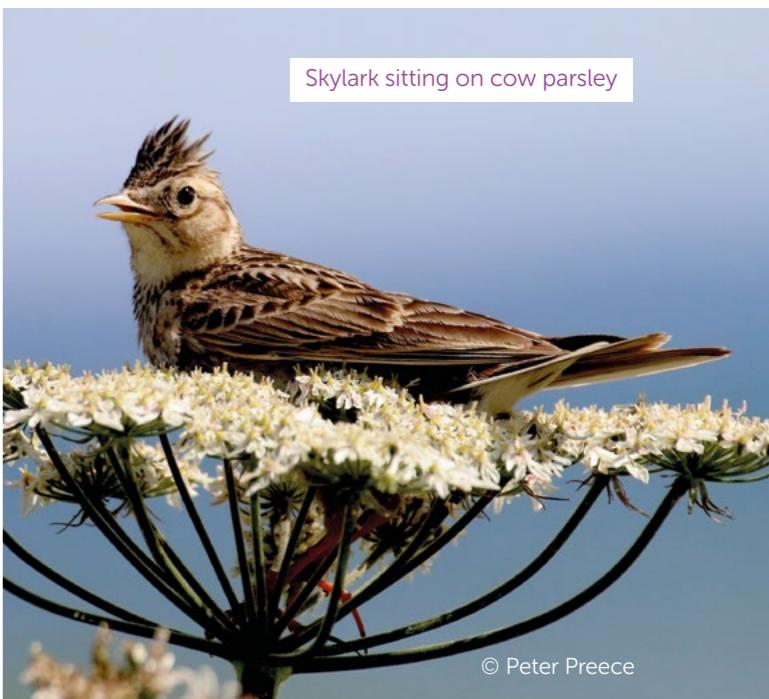
Even the gentlest dog can look like a predator to wildlife and livestock. A curious chase or a bounding bark might feel like fun to your pet, but for birds, mammals, and reptiles, it's a matter of survival. Each startled sprint burns precious energy, energy a creature may need for breeding, feeding, or hibernating.

Over time, repeated disturbances can have real consequences for many species, including farm animals. But the fix is simple and kind.

– **What you can do:** Keep your dog under close control or on a lead, especially in spring and early summer during breeding season or when young animals are most vulnerable. This small act of awareness keeps both wildlife and your four-legged companion safe.

### Ground-nesting birds: fragile lives at your feet

In the gentle hum of grasslands, hidden miracles unfold; skylarks, snipe, and woodcock raising their young in nests almost invisible to the naked eye. However, one joyful dash through long grass



Skylark sitting on cow parsley

© Peter Preece

from an enthusiastic photographer or an excitable puppy can spell disaster for these birds.

Skylarks, once abundant across the UK, have declined by nearly 70% since the 1970s. Their delicate eggs, just 17mm long, lie camouflaged among blades of grass unseen, unprotected from trampling.

– **What you can do:** Stick to marked paths during the nesting season. Even if you can't see or hear chicks, they may be close by. Keeping your dog on a lead in meadows or open grasslands ensures these treasured songbirds have the peace they need to thrive.



A family walking in the Forest  
with their dogs

Left: Bob and his dogs in the Forest

**Hidden havens: respecting wild habitats**  
To a dog's nose, a pile of deadwood logs where the scent of woodland mammals often scurry becomes irresistible, but these natural structures are more than playgrounds; they're vital homes for countless species. A log pile dismantled, or an eager dig, can displace wildlife or damage rare fungi.

And ponds? They may look like the perfect place for a cool splash, but many are delicate ecosystems centuries in the making. A single plunge can cloud the water, trample vegetation, and destroy habitats for newts, frogs, and water voles.

– **What you can do:** On warm days, walk during cooler hours and carry extra water for both you and your dog. Keep paws (and boots) out of ponds and wetlands. These watery worlds hold nearly 10% of the UK's biodiversity so let's protect these valuable habitats.

#### The poo predicament

Nobody likes stepping in it, but dog waste is more than unpleasant; it's a pollutant. Dog poo alters soil chemistry, damages wildflowers, and contaminates water sources. When left behind, it affects not only walkers but also the ecosystems beneath our feet.

– **What you can do:** Always pick it up and bin it properly. It's one of the simplest, most powerful ways to care for nature and to show respect for the people and wildlife who share the paths.

Forest Works Manager James' companion, Paddy the dog



Great crested newt in a pond

#### Chemicals and care

Few owners realise that flea treatments and tick repellents, once washed off in a stream, will harm aquatic life. These chemicals seep into waterways, affecting fish, invertebrates, amphibians, and even the birds that collect pet hair for their nests. Studies have shown that nests containing treated animal hair have a higher chance of unhatched eggs or chick mortality – heartbreak news for common, rare, and red-listed species.

– **What you can do:** Keep dogs out of ponds and rivers. Brush your dog at home and dispose of the fur in the bin instead of outdoors. Your grooming routine could save a generation of chicks.

#### A shared forest

Our forests are places of connection between people, pets, and wildlife. With just a little mindfulness, every walk can be both joyful and responsible. We can let tails wag, laughter echo, and still leave the wild world untouched for those who call it home.

Because loving dogs and loving nature don't have to be opposites. They can, and should, go hand in hand – paw in hand – in harmony. ●

# Butterflies in crisis

## How the Heart of England Forest is offering hope

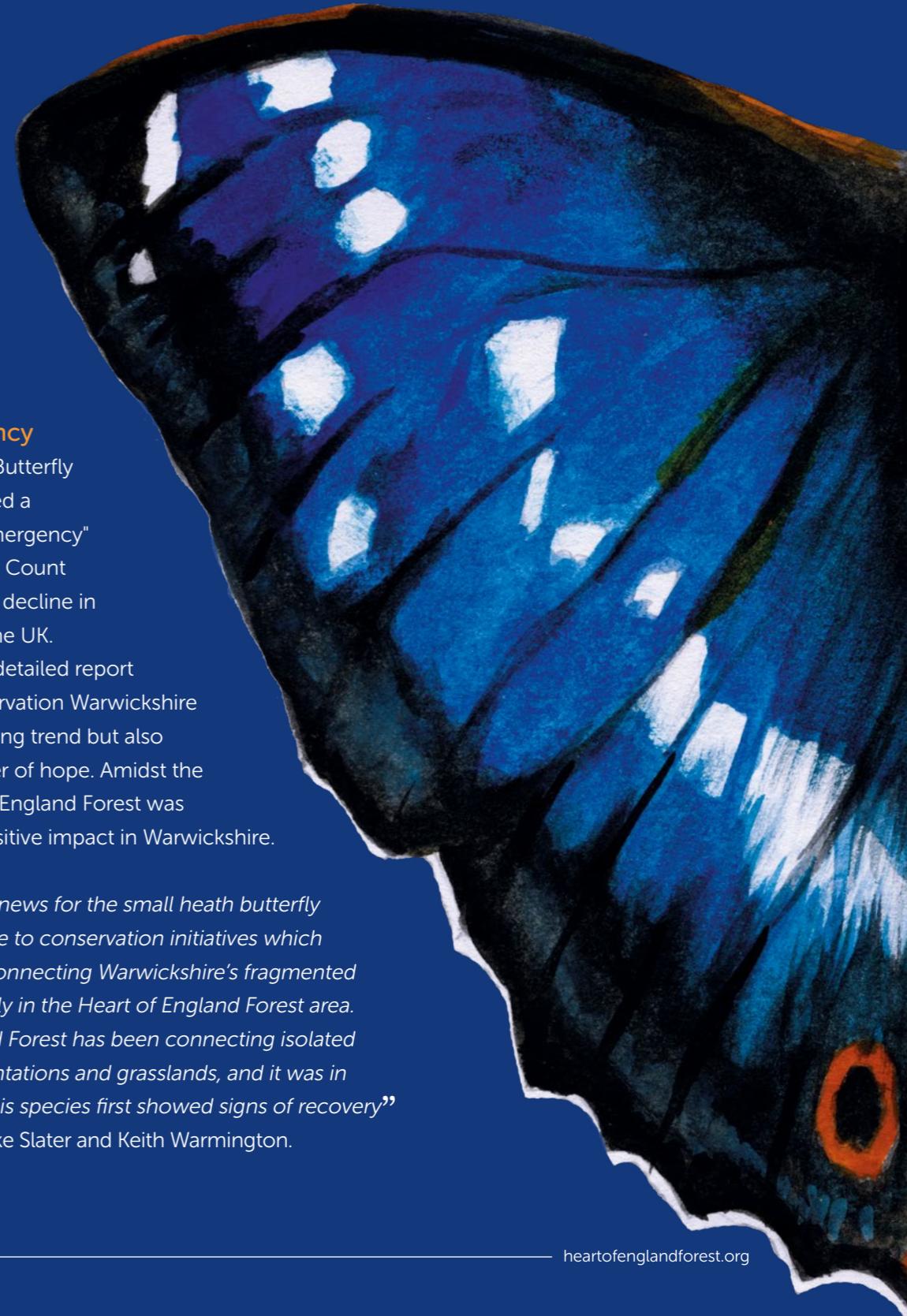
### A national butterfly emergency

In September 2024, Butterfly Conservation declared a national "Butterfly Emergency" after the Big Butterfly Count revealed an alarming decline in populations across the UK.

By Spring 2025, a detailed report from Butterfly Conservation Warwickshire confirmed the worrying trend but also highlighted a glimmer of hope. Amidst the decline, the Heart of England Forest was recognised for its positive impact in Warwickshire.

*"There is positive news for the small heath butterfly which was in part due to conservation initiatives which have focused on reconnecting Warwickshire's fragmented landscape, particularly in the Heart of England Forest area. The Heart of England Forest has been connecting isolated woods with new plantations and grasslands, and it was in these holdings that this species first showed signs of recovery"*

– WBC Magazine, Mike Slater and Keith Warmington.



### Wood white

**Latin Name:** *Leptidea sinapis*

**Description:** Their upper wings are white with rounded edges. The undersides of the wings are white, with indefinite grey markings. Males have black marks on the edges of the forewing. Their fluttery flight pattern makes them very distinguishable.



### Purple emperor

**Latin Name:** *Apatura iris*

**Description:** As the second largest butterfly in the UK, it stands out. They have large/ dark wings with white bands. Males have a purple sheen to their upper wings, while females are much more discreet with brown wings.



### White admiral

**Latin Name:** *Limenitis Camilla*

**Description:** This butterfly has predominantly black wings with striking white bands. It also has a distinctive flight pattern - watch out for its short intervals of wing flutters followed by long glides. Its underwing, white with rich hazel brown markings and bands, makes it a wonderful find in the Forest.



### Small heath

**Latin Name:** *Coenonympha pamphilus*

**Description:** Mostly brown and inconspicuous. An eyespot is present on the underside of their forewings at the tip. The wings are banded with brown, grey, and cream.



### Brown hairstreak

**Latin Name:** *Thecla betulae*

**Description:** When this butterfly rests with its wings closed, you can identify two small tails on the underwing. The underwing in orange-brown colour has two wavy white streaks. Upperwings are brown with an orange mark.



### Tracking change in the Forest

In the Forest, we run an intensive 26-week UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme (UKBMS) survey each year. This six-month effort helps our biodiversity team uncover important patterns, revealing both conservation successes and emerging concerns.

### Why are butterflies disappearing?

Butterflies are key indicator species: when they decline, it signals deeper trouble for the wider environment. Their rapid decline is being driven by:

- 1 Climate change
- 2 Habitat loss
- 3 The continued use of neonicotinoid pesticides

“Butterflies have a lot of colonies close to each other, which promotes an exchange of adults between them. The Heart of England Forest is an excellent example of providing connected landscapes.

Elsewhere in Warwickshire, small heath is struggling because once it goes extinct at a site, it doesn't recolonise easily. The small heath is ubiquitous across all the Forest's holdings. Proving a connected landscape works!

The brown hairstreak is really benefiting from this connected landscape. Since colonising the Forest, it is showing the most rapid spread in the country in Warwickshire, with new locations being found each year!” – Mike Slater

### Signs of hope

Although national data mirrors the decline seen in our Forest surveys for 2024 - 2025, there are still success stories. Vulnerable species such as the small heath, brown hairstreak, and white admiral are finding refuge here, proof that restoring and connecting habitats can make a real difference. ●



Saplings in a polytunnel at our Coughton Park tree nursery

# Rooted in resilience

## Adapting to protect the Forest

Across the UK, record heat, drought, and floods are reshaping our landscapes. The Heart of England Forest has felt these challenges too, with trees and wildlife under strain. But with your kindness and commitment behind us, we are meeting these changes head-on and nurturing a Forest that will stand strong for generations.

Thanks to the dedication of our staff and volunteers, we enter 2026 not only prepared, but actively adapting, learning, and building resilience into the very roots of this young, ambitious Forest.

### A changing climate, a shared responsibility

In 2025, like so many woodlands across the country, we saw the impact of climate change

first-hand, losing 50% of the saplings planted the previous winter. Under normal conditions, we expect only a 5 - 15% loss in new plantations, so this presents a genuine challenge both practically and financially. But caring for the Forest means doing what is needed today to secure tomorrow. And so, with optimism and determination, we have already replanted the young trees that did not survive.

Our tree nursery is at the heart of this work, offering not just hope, but solutions.

### Adapting with care: how we're protecting the Forest's future

At the Heart of England Forest, being responsive, responsible, and forward-thinking is essential to achieve our mission. One of the most important ways we are adapting is through expanded work in our on-site tree nurseries, where we grow much of our own planting stock.

Here, the journey from seed to sapling is carefully shaped to give every young tree the best chance of thriving in an unpredictable climate. A key focus is increasing the number of cell-grown saplings we grow. In our experience, trees nurtured in individual soil cells have greater rates of survival once planted out, particularly in dry, hot periods.

The process begins with thoughtful seed selection. By prioritising local provenance,

we choose seed that is naturally suited to our region's conditions, giving our future Forest the greatest genetic advantage.

Once germinated, these young saplings grow in protective polytunnels. Shielded from weather extremes, we can give them precisely what they need to flourish. And because cell-grown trees are planted still held within their little soil "cells" they avoid the stress of exposed roots, setting them up for a healthier, more resilient start.

We replaced the trees we lost using these more robust cell-grown saplings wherever possible. They are more expensive and heavier to carry – but their higher survival rate makes them a vital investment in the long-term health of the Forest.

### The people who help make it possible

While supporters like you fuel this essential work, our volunteers play a treasured role in turning preparation into action. The move to cell-grown stock means the nursery is alive with activity



Polytunnels at the Coughton Park tree nursery

© Jill Jennings WTM



year-round, providing meaningful ways for people to lend a hand.

From preparing seed trays and watering seedlings to "potting on" young saplings as they grow, volunteers help nurture each tree through its most vulnerable stages. Their time, care, and patience ripple outwards - shaping the future canopy of a Forest they can feel proud to be part of.

And in return, the nursery offers a calming, sociable, and deeply fulfilling experience.

Volunteers gain new horticultural skills, see the whole life cycle of a tree, and become part of a warm, welcoming community dedicated to helping the Forest flourish.

### Together, we are growing a resilient Forest

Thanks to all who lend their time and heart to this cause, we are giving our future Forest the strength it needs to weather the challenges ahead. Every seed planted and every sapling tended is a step towards a thriving, resilient landscape for wildlife, people, and future generations. ●

If you would like to get involved in caring for tomorrow's trees, there are opportunities throughout the year.

Visit our website to find out more, we'd love to welcome you into the polytunnels soon:

[heartofenglandforest.org/volunteer](http://heartofenglandforest.org/volunteer)



A beloved son... We'll always miss you... Our dear friend... At peace...

# Creating a place to remember

Losing someone close to you can be incredibly difficult.

We hope you can find some comfort in, and celebrate their life through, the Forest.

For some, the Forest can serve as a place of solace and reflection. To honour their love of nature, or to create a tribute that you can watch grow. Dedicating a tree in the Forest is a wonderful way to pay tribute to precious memories of someone special to you.

### A tree just for them, in the heart of the Forest

#### Tag a Tree

Create a personalised tag bearing your dedication, and we'll hang it from the boughs of one of our young but established trees.



#### Plant a Tree

Plant your own tree with one of our rangers and place a plaque alongside your newly planted sapling bearing your own dedication.



Pick from this year's species list:

- English Oak
- Field Maple
- Rowan
- Alder
- Hornbeam
- Wild Pear
- Silver Birch
- Willow
- Small Leaved Lime

Remembered with love... In loving memory... For mum... Always in our hearts... Always remembered...

To dedicate a tree in the Heart of the England Forest, visit: [heartofenglandforest.org/donate/dedicate-tree](http://heartofenglandforest.org/donate/dedicate-tree)





**“Running the London Marathon for the environment...This is what I can do.”**

Graham and Olly are running London Marathon 2026 for the Forest. It's not a first marathon for either of them and there's lots of training still to do. But they're both excited to experience the unique atmosphere, run for a cause they believe in, and shine a light on our little-known charity along the way.

#### Nature helps us

“How to maintain and stabilise the lifecycle of the planet... it's such a big subject. It seems so difficult. People think "how can I help?" But it's about everyone doing something. This is what I can do.” – Graham

“I've always loved being outside, trees and adventures. Growing up I spent most of my time building dens and exploring. In the Forest you get away from hustle and bustle – it's so good for your mental health. But you have to put something back in.” – Olly

“As a teenager I watched it on TV every year, so I've had a long-standing interest and always wanted to do it for charity. My employer Vectric is a corporate partner of the Heart of England Forest and are matching any money I raise – which is amazing. When the chance came up, I thought just go for it!” – Olly

“The earth we have is amazing. I run out on the hills, and locally we have a nice blend of greenery. The Forest helps takes the stress out of things and builds our quality of life. We need to keep the Forest available for people to enjoy.” – Graham

It's important that we 'help nature'

“This charity helps you understand how things work in nature, and you start to understand the impact of your actions and how it all fits together. Then when you're out and about you can ensure you're not doing anything detrimental. Like staying on authorised walking routes so the environment can sustain itself.” – Graham

“We are all becoming more aware of how valuable trees are – the benefit for us and for hundreds of years. It's not just a short-term thing.” – Olly

“I hope people see us running and feel inspired to do something themselves. We can all make the best use of our environment and look after it along the way.” – Graham

Wish them luck

“I'm not too worried about finishing in a certain time, I just can't wait to experience the atmosphere. It'll be nice if I see my wife around 20 miles - to get a gee up to get through the wall.” – Graham

“London Marathon - it's the big one! And it's great to have a bit of competition and/or mutual support with Graham.” – Olly

#### Show them your support

Both Graham and Olly hope to raise £2,500 for the Forest. You can support them here:



Olly Manton's Fundraising Page  
<https://bit.ly/OllyMarathon>



Graham's London Marathon Page  
<https://bit.ly/GrahamMarathon>



#### We have 3 places for London Marathon 2027 up for grabs

Think you have what it takes and want to help the Forest thrive? Email [info@heartofenglandforest.org](mailto:info@heartofenglandforest.org), tell us what makes you want to take on the challenge, and how you'd go about raising the £2,500 minimum sponsorship required to take part.

“Go for it, don't be scared of the training, or it being a long way. It focuses you on exercise and gets you out and about which has its own benefits. Ask yourself, why not...?” – Olly