

A green lifeline
Changing young lives

Bats uncovered
Nature's hidden guardians

Nature connected
Helping the region recover



Your Forest

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Welcome

I was thrilled to join the Forest family in January this year, heading up the fundraising, communications, outdoor learning, and community and heritage teams. Bringing these strands of our work together feels like an exciting opportunity and I hope to build a real sense of togetherness for all our supporters who care for the Forest, and the work we do together.

I have worked in the charity sector for 17 years and have never felt more determined to make a positive difference for the natural environment, nature, and people. To me, they are so closely linked, and I would like to thank you for your part in creating this incredible new forest.

Thank you.

Ian Nutt
Director of Fundraising and Engagement



As we emerged from a planting season shaped by challenging weather conditions, the arrival of the Forest's brighter months felt especially welcome this year. Thanks to the dedication of our team and volunteers, an incredible 116,000 trees were planted across the Forest.

In this issue, we share highlights from one of our biggest planting seasons yet on pages 5-8. We also celebrate the creation and restoration of three orchards, bringing the Forest's total to 15. On pages 12-14, discover how more than 1,800 species – including us – benefit from these rich and valuable habitats.

As the Forest grows, so does our responsibility to care for it for generations to come. Long after the last tree is planted, the challenge of protecting and nurturing the Forest will remain. On pages 24-27, our Director of Land Use Policy and Planning explores some of the innovative ways we are working to secure the Forest's future forever.

We hope this issue helps you feel connected to the Forest and proud of the difference your support is making.

Andy Parsons
Chief Executive, The Heart of England Forest

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Summer/Autumn 2026 Edition. Many thanks to all the contributors who made this issue possible.

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Small but Mighty

A big thank you to everyone who supported our match funding appeal this spring. Thanks to you, and our Big Give Champion, we raised over £20,000 to help create and protect Forest homes for pollinators.

Cover image: © Caroline Byrne
Design: Rebecca Jezzard
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Caring for the Forest, one step at a time

By Ben Toney, Volunteer and Access Lead

At the heart of our mission are the volunteers who give their time to the Forest in every season. People like you and I, each contributing in their own way, helping to create a landscape that will outlast us all.

Meet our Woodland Wardens

Developed as part of our rewarding volunteering programme, Woodland Wardens play a vital role in caring for the Forest, day to day. During regular walks, they check young saplings, inspect guards and stakes, and report any signs of damage or disease.

They also help monitor paths, fallen branches, and anything that could affect visitors enjoying the woodland. Many record wildlife sightings and seasonal changes, helping us build a clearer picture of the Forest as it grows and evolves.

Walking with purpose

Wardens give their time whenever it suits them – an early morning stroll, a weekend wander, or a walk with the dog. Just as importantly, they help create a welcoming experience for everyone who visits, their presence helping to keep the Forest safe, cared for, and connected.

Becoming a Woodland Warden means becoming part of the life of the Forest itself – protecting the landscape while deepening your own connection to nature, one walk at a time.

Above: Woodland Wardens Heather, Matthew and Victoria

Big Forest Plant: A winter to remember

This winter has marked an extraordinary chapter in the story of the Heart of England Forest. Between October 2025 and March 2026, **over 116,000 trees** were planted across the Forest, often in challenging conditions, transforming open land into thriving new woodland.

116,547 trees planted,
creating **129 acres of**
new woodland

A carefully curated mix of **over 30 native and naturalised species**, selected for their ability to flourish in local conditions and adapt to a changing climate.

66% of all saplings planted
were from our own tree nursery

17 tree planting
projects across the Forest.

Above: Newly planted trees at Eastern Hill
Right: Forestry team member planting tree saplings

New woodland creation at Naunton
Beauchamp – **64,200 trees**

New woodland creation at Eastern Hill – **12,884 trees**. The first tree was planted here by staff from Wider Plan, marking the start of a five-year partnership that will create thriving havens for wildlife, community, and learning at this site.

Replacement planting
across previously
established sites
– **37,918 trees**

Three orchards created
/enhanced – **175 trees**





Above: Members of our forestry team planting at Naunton Beauchamp



Above: Wider Plan employees and members of the Forest team by the first tree planted at Eastern Hill

**BIG
FOREST
PLANT**

Look out for your opportunity to support the Big Forest Plant 2026/27

Come September, planting will start all over again, and **we will need your help**. Might you volunteer to plant trees with us, or donate to support our busiest time of year out in the woodland?



Two volunteers at Eastern Hill during a tree planting session

Our fantastic forestry team braved the elements and **planted 93,400 trees**

Volunteers contributed an extraordinary **2,733 hours** and planted **23,141 trees**

This included volunteering days with employees from our corporate partners and network organisations:

- Wider Plan
- National Grid Electricity Distribution
- Vectric
- NFU Mutual
- Gateley
- National Gas Transmission
- Mercedes Benz UK
- Sustainability West Midlands

Our wonderful supporters **donated just over £13,000** during our first Big Forest Plant appeal. Every donation received has played a part in bringing this season's achievements to life.



Newly planted trees and orchard at Naunton Beauchamp



Brothers planting trees in memory of their mum

Winter also sees us plant dedicated trees for our supporters. **100 trees** were planted with us by two brothers in memory of their mother Gwen who “*loved the countryside and the changing seasons*”. Afterwards the brothers told us: “*It was a special and memorable day, and Gwen would approve of the result.*”

Discover 3 different ways you can dedicate a tree at:
heartofenglandforest.org/donate/dedicate-tree

A huge **thank you** to everyone, we couldn't have done it without you.

The Forest's story is still being written and you can be a part of it



Our Friends of the Forest support the trees of the Forest through the seasons, helping us put planting plans in place with confidence. Knowing we have Friends standing with us, allows us to commit to work that would otherwise not be possible.

Talk to other nature lovers local to the Forest about Friendship. It's easy to sign up at donate.heartofenglandforest.org



Green hay and wildflower meadow management

Across the UK, wildflower meadows have vanished at an alarming rate. Once alive with colour, pollinators, and birdsong, these vital habitats now survive only in small, fragmented patches – making their protection and restoration in the Forest more important than ever. Tasha Cain, Principal Biodiversity Officer, explains.



Within the Forest, we manage beautiful lowland meadows that, in the spring and summer, burst into vibrant colour. The bright yellows and purples of wildflowers ripple across the landscape, creating a striking patchwork. These magnificent meadows support a wide range of insects, birds, reptiles, and mammals, largely thanks to their diverse plant life. They are important habitats for our native wildlife, grazing farmers, and local ecosystems.

Gorcott Hill

The Local Wildlife Site (LWS) meadow at Gorcott Hill supports a notably species-rich wildflower assemblage, with a diverse range of characteristic species recorded, including adder 's-tongue fern, green-winged orchid, bird's-foot trefoil, common knapweed, field wood-rush, yellow rattle, and, later in the season sneezewort, along with a variety of waxcap fungi. In contrast, the two adjacent fields exhibited lower botanical diversity

97% of the UK's wildflower meadows have disappeared since the 1930s, leaving only small, fragmented areas, many of which are still in poor or declining condition
– State of Nature Report 2023



Wildflower meadow featuring field scabious and knapweed

and abundance, likely reflecting past management practices.

To enhance these fields, a restoration plan was developed in line with best practice, using green hay harvested from our species-rich LWS meadow. The three-year programme is now complete, and early results indicate a measurable increase in species diversity and abundance.

Naunton Beauchamp

Naunton Court Meadows SSSI has been managed for decades as a traditional hay meadow – although past lapses in management may have contributed to the loss of species such as the green-winged orchid. Since acquiring the land, a mid-July hay cut followed by aftermath grazing has been re-established to maintain and enhance the meadows' structure and species diversity.

What is green hay?

Green hay is produced by harvesting wildflowers and grasses just before they shed their seeds. The freshly cut material is baled and transferred from a species-rich donor site to a recipient site with low species diversity and/or abundance, where it is spread as soon as possible.

How it is done

Green hay is cut and baled from a donor site, transported, and spread across the recipient site. However, this requires careful planning; initial surveys to identify recipient and donor sites, and soil sampling is conducted for compatibility.

Preparing the recipient site involves cutting and

removing the grass, and checking the weather before cutting and baling hay from the donor site, as conditions need to be dry with minimal wind.

Spreading the hay promptly to the recipient site is key to the success of the survival of the seed. Completing this on a three-year cycle, monitoring, and ongoing surveys, allow for continual management.

Why is it important?

Using green hay for grassland restoration and enhancement is a cost-effective method with relatively low environmental impact, resulting in a more species-rich and biodiverse landscape.

The plants in the donor meadow are already adapted to local soil and climatic conditions, so when their seeds are transferred via green hay, they are more likely to establish successfully than commercially sourced or non-local native seed.

Working on a three-year cycle encourages species diversity. Wildflowers do not all grow and set seed at the same time, so varying the timing of hay cuts across three years allows us to target different species in different stages of their life cycles.

A brighter future for meadows

Through careful planning and long-term management, green hay strewing offers a simple yet powerful way to restore wildflower meadows and reconnect fragmented habitats. By transferring native seeds from thriving meadows to new sites, we can help bring colour, biodiversity, and life back to the landscape for pollinators and people alike. ●

Left: A meadow with knapweed

Flying out of the shadows and into the spotlight: Bats in the Forest

Bats are quietly playing an important part in supporting healthy ecosystems all over the world. Often misunderstood and seen as something to fear, Lauren French, Supporter Engagement Officer, encourages us to look a little closer to discover what truly remarkable creatures they are.



Globally, there are around **1,500 species of bats**, making up a fifth of all mammal species. **In the UK, 18 species have been recorded, 17 of which are known to breed.** Bats are nocturnal and are the only mammals capable of sustained flight – a unique evolutionary achievement that sets them apart from all others.*

Nine bat species have been recorded so far at the Heart of England Forest: Common pipistrelle, soprano pipistrelle, noctule, Natterer's, brown long-eared, Daubenton's, Leisler's, whiskered, and more recently, the lesser horseshoe, which was confirmed in May 2023 following the discovery of a maternity roost – a very exciting find.

The Forest provides a rich mosaic of habitats that support bats throughout their lifecycle:

- Open grasslands make ideal foraging grounds
- Wetlands and ponds offer drinking sources and feeding hotspots
- Hedgerows act as navigational aids, guiding bats safely between roosting and feeding sites
- Woodlands provide crucial shelter. Mature trees with hollows, cracks, and peeling bark offer ideal roosting conditions. These same trees also support abundant insect life – providing bats with breakfast in bed!
- We use endoscopes under licence when

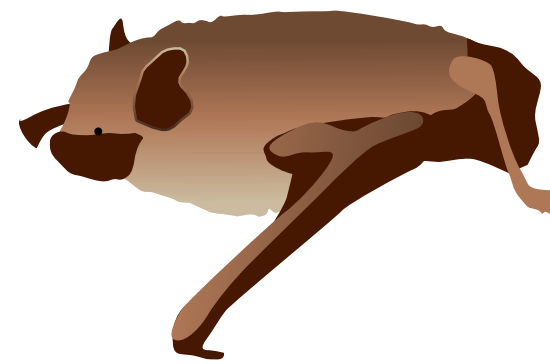
checking natural tree features to help inform conservation and management plans.

In turn, bats help control insect populations, supporting a healthy ecosystem. Alongside this natural habitat, more than 20 bat boxes have been installed across the Forest, with plans to install 50 new boxes this year.

When monitoring bats, we also use handheld and static detectors to record echolocation calls (high-frequency sounds bats emit and interpret through returning echoes) during transect and emergence surveys, helping us tune in to what would otherwise go unheard. These efforts help us to better understand local bat populations. Take a closer look at some of the bats you might spot in the Forest this summer:



Principal Biodiversity Officer Tasha using an endoscope



Common pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pipistrellus*)

The UK's smallest and most widespread bat, and a familiar presence in the Forest. With dark brown fur and a slightly paler underside, it emerges early – often around 20 minutes after sunset. It roosts in buildings, trees and bat boxes, and forages along woodland edges, hedgerows, grassland and farmland, twisting and turning through the air to catch insects on the wing.



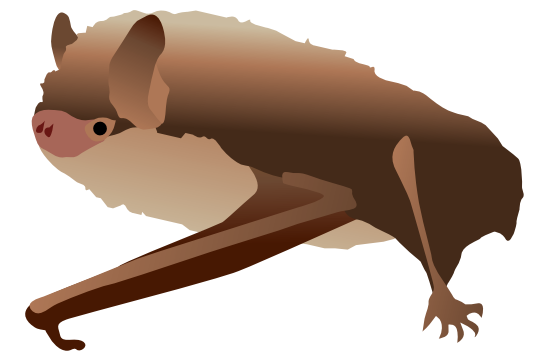
Noctule (*Nyctalus noctula*)

The UK's largest bat. It is a powerful flier with a dark face and golden-brown fur. It roosts mainly in tree cavities and bat boxes, occasionally in buildings, and forages high over woodland, hedgerows, farmland, and open grassland.



Brown long-eared (*Plecotus auritus*)

Easily recognised by its exceptionally long ears, this species is a slow, highly manoeuvrable flier. It roosts in older buildings, barns, trees and bat boxes, and hunts in woodland, parkland, and orchards, often gleaning insects from leaves and bark, hovering delicately among foliage.



Daubenton's (*Myotis daubentonii*)

Also known as the 'water bat.' This small-to-medium sized bat has a pale underside and a distinctive pinkish face. It is most often seen at dusk, flying low over ponds and rivers, expertly scooping insects from the surface with its tail membrane. It roosts in bridges and tunnels, and in nearby woodland in trees and bat boxes.

All bats in the UK, along with their roosts, are legally protected, and it is an offence to disturb or handle bats without appropriate licensing. One of the biggest threats to bats is the loss and fragmentation of habitat. ●

*www.bats.org.uk

Really love bats? Mark your calendar for International Bat Night on 30th August.

The perfect excuse to enjoy the quiet beauty of a summer night. Take a stroll through your local green space, sit in your garden, or visit a local wetland and see what bats you can spot. You can also donate to our work supporting habitats for our very own caped crusaders.

Habitat Spotlight: Orchards

The Heart of England Forest has 15 orchards, offering an array of benefits to wildlife throughout the year. Claire Craige, Biodiversity Officer, explains how a thriving orchard across the season can support over 1,800 species!*

On entering the orchard, I feel a sense of calm wash over me, even though I know there's a day of hard graft (pun intended) ahead. It's like the feeling that many of us get on entering woodland. There is a stillness, a sensory connection with the rhythm of the seasons. The hum of insects feeding on blossom, the smell of ripe fruit, the cooling shade of a large old apple tree.

What is an orchard?

It is important to make the distinction between commercial and traditional orchards. A commercial orchard tends to be rows of smaller fruit trees or bushes closely spaced for ease of care and harvesting. Great to meet the needs of human consumers, but not so perfect for wildlife.

A traditional orchard is, as it sounds, managed using low-intensity, traditional methods. Tree varieties are grafted onto more vigorous rootstocks, meaning they will grow larger and live longer. They are great habitats for wildlife!

Orchards in the Heart of England Forest

We have 15 orchards in the Forest. As well as the usual apple, pear, and stone fruit species, we plant traditional fruits like quince and medlar. An increased variety of trees supports a greater range of species. They will all flower and fruit at slightly different times. This means a continued supply of food for pollinators and other species, including us!

*Natural England Research Report NERR025: Biodiversity studies of six traditional orchards in England. Sheffield, Natural England.

Right: Red apples on trees in the Forest

Some of the orchards in the Forest have received valuable funding. Our thanks go to:

- The Coronation Living Heritage Fund/Warwickshire County Council
- The Tree Council's Trees Outside Woodland Fund
- Trees in the Landscape Grant/Worcestershire County Council

An orchard through the seasons

A year in the life of one of our orchards helps to demonstrate how over 1,800 species, including us, benefit from traditional orchards.

Spring

The blossom sequence begins in the hedgerows and spreads throughout the orchard. Damsons, pears, apples, and cherries unfurl petals in varying shades of white and pink, inviting in pollinators. Recently metamorphosed solitary bees munch their way out of their cells, and a queen buff-tail bumblebee emerges from under a pile of dead leaves as she exits her hibernation burrow. At dawn, a little owl is seen returning to a tree cavity with a mouth full of glistening beetles. A spotted flycatcher, recently returned from Africa, hops from tree to tree, examining potential nest holes. It's the start of a busy year for all.



Autumn

Bracket fungi sprout from some of the veteran trees fed on by a pleasing fungus beetle. Fruit continues to ripen, becoming a valuable source of sugar as nectar and protein sources deplete. To maintain tree health, stone fruit trees are pruned before the cold weather sets in and puts them at risk from silver leaf. Blackbirds look on as an apple day is held.



Summer

Wildflowers like lady's bedstraw, meadow sweet, and tufted vetch add splashes of colour, and they become the next vital nectar source as the tree flowers have started their transformation into fruit. Ant hills form as the yellow meadow ants increase their nests, aerating the soil and providing a microclimate for basking small copper butterflies. Once most of the flowers and grasses have set seed, the grass is mown and raked off by the volunteers. This management will increase diversity, allowing less competitive annual species to spread. A grass snake, which has been hunting in the pond, lays its eggs in the compost heap made from last year's hay.



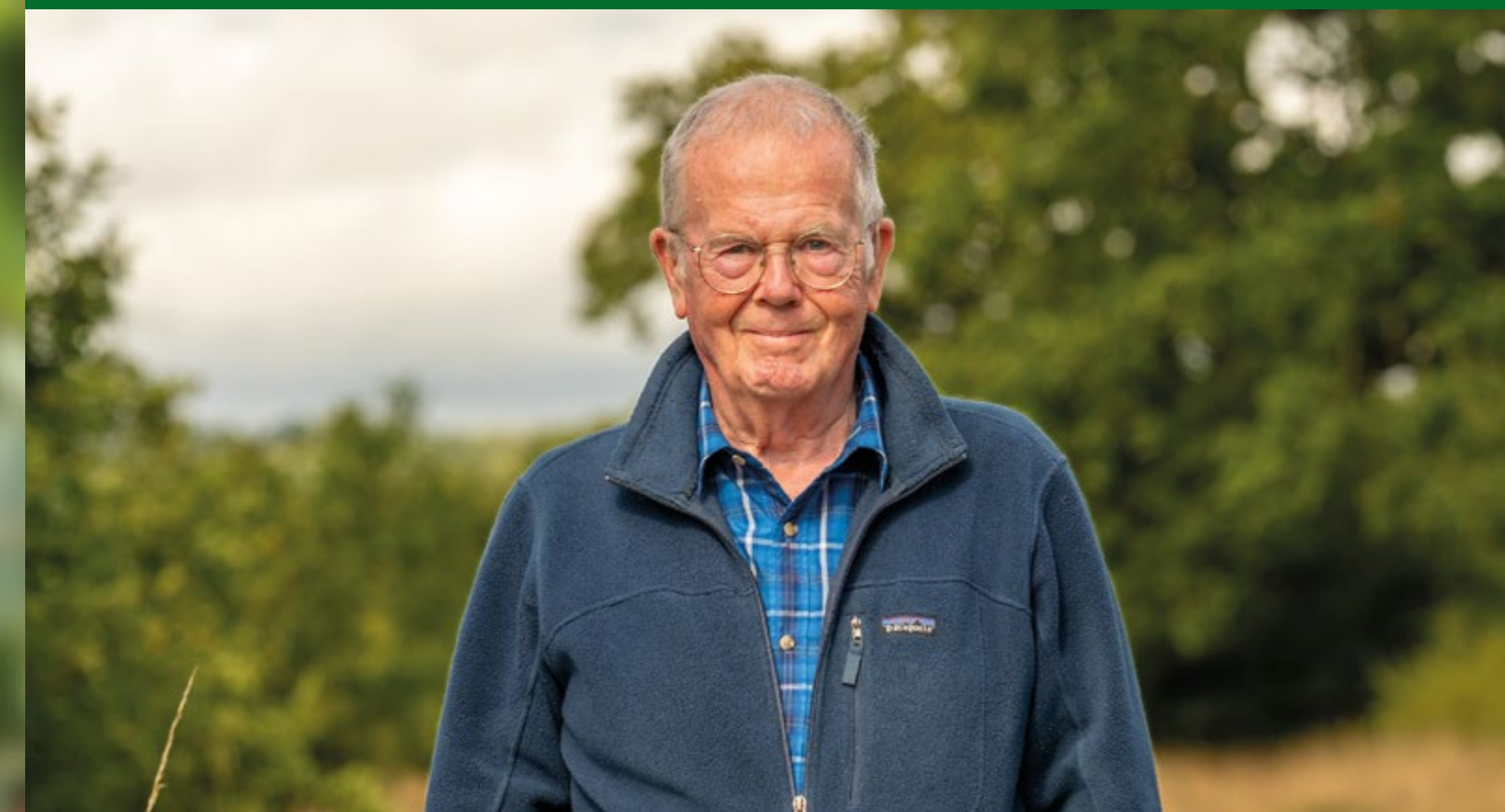
Winter

A robin follows us as we prune the apple and pear trees. We do this to prolong the life of the tree, allowing light and air into the tree canopy; fruit production is a bonus. Mistletoe berries are snapped up by redwings. Mistletoe loves to grow on fruit trees, a keystone species providing specialist habitat that many other species rely on.



References and useful info:

- <https://ptes.org/campaigns/traditional-orchard-project/>
- Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, c. 16. Available at: www.legislation.gov.uk
- Lush, M., Robertson, H. J., Alexander, K., Giavarini, E., Hewins, E., Melling, J., Stevenson, C. R., Storey, M. and Whitehead, P. F. Natural England Research Report NERR025: Biodiversity studies of six traditional orchards in England. Sheffield, Natural England.



“By being a Friend of the Forest, I am doing something however small.”

“The Heart of England Forest is an incredibly good charity doing exactly the sort of things I'm interested in. We have lost way too many trees and need to put some back.

The charity allows people to get out into Forest who might not have done before, so they can get exercise, know what a forest is like, and find out about wildlife through some of the guided walks and talks. 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.

All four of my grandchildren have a tree in Dorothy's Wood. They can see their tree growing. They can see what changes every year and every season. Having a tree dedicated to them gets them out into a wood. It's a great excuse to find the tree and check on it! They can be hard to find, but not impossible, and that's part of the fun.

Getting people involved is important. I talk endlessly to people about being a Friend of the Forest. There are thousands of charities, but if you live near here, it just makes sense because it is local and important – and you can join in and see the difference.

I have learned a lot through being a supporter. The information they share is helpful, interesting, and not too technical. Some conservationists can get too highbrow! Everything is pitched just right – so you are encouraged to take a look. I have learned how trees develop and what a tree needs to germinate and grow. People think that you just plant trees and then they grow – but there is much more than that.”

**– David,
Friend of the Forest**

Shared purpose, lasting impact: Vectric's journey with the Forest

For five years, Vectric Ltd has been a valued corporate partner of the Heart of England Forest, helping to grow and protect woodland for future generations. In this Q&A, Managing Director Edward Powell reflects on their partnership, the milestone they have achieved, and why supporting the environment remains central to the company's values and vision.



“Think long term rather than treating it as a one-off initiative, because sustained partnerships create deeper impact and stronger relationships. The greatest partnerships are those with a natural connection to your business and where your support feels authentic.” – Edward, Managing Director

Q Since our partnership began, you have donated a fantastic £125,000. What does this milestone mean to you and your team?

A Reaching £125,000 is a proud moment for us. It represents more than a financial contribution – it reflects years of shared commitment from our team, customers, and wider business community. Knowing this support has helped create and maintain woodland for future generations gives everyone a strong sense of purpose. It's rewarding to see how, together, we can make a tangible and lasting difference.

Q How does this partnership align with your company's core values and long-term vision?

A This partnership closely reflects our values of responsibility, sustainability and investing in the future. As a company whose software is widely used by CNC owners working with wood, supporting tree planting and woodland restoration feels especially meaningful. It's our way of giving back and helping replenish natural resources. Long term, we aim to grow thoughtfully as a business, and supporting environmental initiatives is a key part of that vision.

“One of the best parts of the volunteering day was working with people from across the company in a completely different setting. Everyone just got stuck in, had a laugh, and worked together. It was fantastic for team spirit.”

– Beki, Digital Marketing Executive

Q In an increasingly digital workplace, how valuable are opportunities for teams to connect outdoors and in person?

A They are hugely valuable. While technology keeps us efficient and globally connected, nothing fully replaces time spent together in person. Being outdoors and out of our usual routines encourages natural conversations, teamwork, and shared experiences. It also supports wellbeing – helping people reset and recharge. These moments strengthen relationships on a human level, which ultimately benefits collaboration back in the office.

Left: Oliver Manton, Edward Powell and Nick Williams from Vectric Ltd by their tree in the Forest



Vectric team members during a volunteering day in the Forest

Q What role do you think businesses should play in supporting environmental charities?

A Businesses have both an opportunity and a responsibility to drive positive change. They can contribute funding, volunteer time, skills, and long-term advocacy to help charities expand their impact. For industries connected to natural resources, there is an added responsibility to help protect and restore them. Environmental challenges affect everyone, so it makes sense for businesses to be part of the solution. Partnerships like this show that commercial success and social responsibility can go hand in hand.

Q On a personal level, what has this partnership meant to you as a leader?

A It has been immensely rewarding. It reinforces my belief that businesses should aim to leave a positive legacy, not just generate profit. Seeing our team engage so positively – while contributing to replanting and restoration – has been one of the most satisfying aspects of this journey.

Q If you had to sum up your relationship with the Forest in a few words, what would they be?

A Proud partnership, shared purpose, giving back.

“As someone who works closely with customers who use wood in their craft, it felt especially important to be involved in replanting and maintaining woodland. It felt like a genuine way of giving something back.”

– David, Technical Support

Huge thanks to Vectric employee Olly Manton for running the recent London Marathon for the Forest and to Vectric for match funding his donations.

Garden of Heroes and Villains Fundraising open days in 2026



Only open for a limited number of dates each year, a visit to the Garden of Heroes and Villains in Dorsington is not to be missed.

With over 50 amazing bronze sculptures to see, guided woodland walks, a children's quiz, maze, and refreshments, there's something for everyone.

Dogs on leads are welcome.



2026 OPEN DAYS

Open 10am-5pm on the following Saturdays:
27th June / 18th July / 22nd August



Adults: from £14 Children under 16: Free
Tickets must be booked online in advance.
Scan the code to find out more and book, or visit
heartofenglandforest.org/garden



Working together to protect nature

Since 2024, the Heart of England Forest has played an active role in shaping the Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) for Warwickshire and Worcestershire. Sophie Leszczynska, Climate and Nature Partnerships Lead, explains how our work to make the Forest more diverse, better connected, and more resilient is helping to position it as a key contributor to nature recovery across the region.



LNRSs are a legal requirement of the Environment Act (2021) with the main purpose of identifying locations to create, restore, or improve habitats most likely to provide the greatest benefits for nature and the wider environment. 48 Responsible Authorities across England were appointed to lead on the preparation of LNRS. Together, the LNRSs aim to help shape a national 'Nature Recovery Network'.

Both Worcestershire and Warwickshire have now published their LNRS, which include:

- A Statement of Biodiversity Priorities with agreed local priorities for nature's recovery
- A Local Habitat Map showing the most valuable existing areas for nature
- Specific proposals and actions for creating or improving habitat for nature and delivery of wider environmental goals, which can be seen visually on the interactive map and links to where further guidance can be sourced.

Above: Wetlands created at Netherstead



Wildflower meadow of lady's bedstraw and knapweed

Working in partnership

Each Local Nature Recovery Strategy has been a locally led plan across each county. We have worked in partnership with local authorities, the DEFRA family of Natural England, Forestry Commission and Environment Agency, local county Wildlife Trusts, other environmental Non-Governmental Organisations (eNGOs) and specialist interest groups.

We have shared information on the Forest and the priority habitats and species it supports. This has provided background to where new habitats can be created including native broadleaved woodland, wet woodland, floodplain grassland, wetlands, hay meadows, traditional orchards and hedgerows.

Where habitats can be restored or improved plays an important role because nature recovery needs to help vulnerable and at-risk animal and plant species such as black poplar, the brown hairstreak butterfly, and aspen leaf-rolling weevil, to name but a few.

Traditional hay meadows can support a wealth of rare plants, and at Gorcott Hill over the last three years we've been improving the floristic diversity of a Local Wildlife Site (LWS) meadow by setting out conservation objectives in our grazing agreement to enable wildflowers to set seed before the fields are cut for hay. The green hay from the LWS has then been spread on the neighbouring field to improve the botanical diversity of these grasslands too. And the results have been fantastic with rare plants such as green-winged orchid and adder's tongue fern now recorded.



Newly planted orchard trees at Naunton Beauchamp

Why does it matter?

Nature is in decline and Great Britain is one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world with almost 1,500 species at risk of extinction*. Our habitats and species are under threat from many pressures including development, pollution, pests and diseases, and the changing climate.

Wildlife is not confined to land ownership boundaries or county borders and so collective action is needed if nature is to recover across England.

Each local LNRS is expected to contribute to National Environmental targets and below are two examples which we are contributing to:

Restore or create in excess of 500,000 hectares of wildlife-rich habitat outside protected sites by 2042.

The LNRSs have identified opportunities to create or improve habitat in locations where it would have the greatest benefit to biodiversity and the wider environment.

At Harvington in Worcestershire, we plan to transform an old golf course into a space for nature by creating new broadleaf and riparian wet woodland, combined with the restoration of hay and floodplain meadows, and new wetland habitats, all of which are contributing to this national target.

Increase total tree and woodland cover from 14.5% of land area now to 16.5% by 2050.

The Heart of England Forest is taking a leading role in delivering native broadleaved woodland creation at scale. And the LNRSs help us to identifying opportunities for creating new woodland, expand existing areas of woodland and trees outside of woodland where this will benefit biodiversity and other environmental outcomes.

On Forest land near Langley in Warwickshire, we are reconnecting the existing mature and ancient semi-natural woodlands by planting new woodlands and encouraging natural regeneration.



Our continued involvement in steering the delivery of nature recovery within the region, working in partnership with our neighbours and like-minded organisations, can only support the drive to stop the decline in nature and aid its recovery. ●



© Patrick Taylor

*State of Nature 2023
Above top: Aerial photo of land at Harvington
Above: Close up of a green-winged orchid at Gorcott Hill



A group of pupils from St Luke's First School enjoying being in nature

Opening the door to nature: A project changing young lives

In an age where stress, anxiety, and depression are at an all-time high, the solution to better mental health might be just a few steps outside your front door. As modern life accelerates and digital demands mount, reconnecting with green spaces isn't just a luxury – it's becoming a lifeline. Thanks to funding from the Duckworth Worcestershire Trust, that lifeline is now reaching children local to the Forest.



Mounting global research now shows that spending time in nature doesn't just feel good – it is good for us, physically and emotionally. From calming a racing mind to supporting children with special educational needs, the natural world offers powerful tools for emotional regulation and wellbeing.

The Worcestershire Nature Connectedness Project

At its heart, the Worcestershire Nature Connectedness Project is about fostering deep, lasting relationships with nature among young people. Through a carefully designed programme, it moves beyond simply spending time outdoors.

Nature connectedness is about how we think about, feel about, and truly experience the natural world.

When young people feel connected to nature, the impact can be profound. They are more likely to care for the environment, embrace sustainable behaviours, and experience meaningful wellbeing benefits: reduced stress, improved mood, and a greater sense of belonging.

As David Attenborough so powerfully reminds us: *“No one will protect what they don't care about, and no one will care about what they have never experienced.”*

“When the first group were “released into the forest” they wandered around unsure of what to do/how to act but within an hour their confidence and connection with nature had evidently grown.”

Learning through nature

That journey of connection begins with the five pathways to nature connectedness, simple yet powerful ways of engaging with the world around us. Our schools programme offers immersive, repeated experiences in the Forest, where young people can explore, discover, and build a genuine relationship with nature.

Here, the Forest becomes both classroom and sanctuary. Young people learn about the vital role forests play for wildlife and communities, while developing a deeper understanding of their own place within them. In nurturing this connection, the project is helping to cultivate a generation of guardians – young people inspired to protect the environment, take meaningful climate action, and live more sustainably.

“All children were fully engaged in the activities all day. They displayed great teamwork, behaviour, and a sense of belonging.”

The impact (to date)

9 visits from 5 Redditch schools
195 individual children
363 learning days



Senior Outdoor Learning Officer Ellie preparing a fire for roasting marshmallows



Outdoor Learning Officer Elly with a pupil from St Luke's First School

Behind these numbers are stories of opportunity, many of them firsts. This funding has opened the door for children who might never otherwise have access to such experiences.

St George's First School school – 71% of pupils English as an additional language.

Arrow Valley First School – 27.6% of pupils are entitled to Free School Meals and **26%** of pupils receive Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) support.

These figures highlight not only the reach of the project, but its importance. Access to nature is still too often shaped by circumstance, yet its benefits should belong to everyone.

“A child who can feel overwhelmed indoors found it very calming and was observed sitting quietly in the tree and observing his surroundings.”

The Worcestershire Nature Connectedness Project is helping to close that gap, bringing green spaces within reach and ensuring that nature can be enjoyed, treasured, and appreciated by all.

“The project has been brilliant to be involved in. We can't thank the Duckworth Worcestershire Trust enough for making it possible. The most powerful thing has been giving young people who may not normally experience the countryside access to our amazing Forest. The fact that these children are from Redditch, the largest population centre on the doorstep of the Forest, is just amazing.”

– Phil Stickley, Senior Outdoor Teacher ●



Funding the Forest forever

If you have read Your Forest before, you will know that the Heart of England Forest is forever. We are not simply planting trees; we are creating and caring for a diverse landscape that must endure for generations. Land must be bought, trees planted, habitats restored, trails maintained, visitors welcomed, and skilled people employed year after year to make it all possible.

Planting may one day slow, but stewardship never ends. This raises one of the greatest challenges we face: how do you fund nature in the long term?

Above: Aerial view showing the scale of the Forest at Middle Spenal

A growing responsibility

by Nick Simms,
Director of Land Use Policy and Planning

For many years, the Forest has grown through extraordinary generosity. Donations, Friendship, philanthropy, grants, corporate partnerships, and Government support have all helped shape the landscape we see today. Every one of those contributions remains vital. Yet as the Forest grows, so too does the responsibility of caring for it.

Understanding natural capital

Across society, we increasingly recognise the many benefits nature provides. Woodlands absorb carbon, reduce flooding, improve water quality, support wildlife, and create beautiful places for people to visit and enjoy. These benefits are often described as “natural capital”: the idea that nature provides essential services on which both our wellbeing and the economy depend.

For decades, conservationists argued that nature was being overlooked because these benefits were rarely recognised in financial terms. That conversation is now changing. The landmark Dasgupta Review in 2021 helped bring the economics of biodiversity into mainstream discussion, and businesses, investors and governments are paying far greater attention to the value of healthy natural systems.

What is green finance?

This has led to the emergence of what is known as green finance or nature markets: new funding mechanisms that reward organisations for creating and caring for habitats.

Some of these systems are already becoming familiar. Under the Woodland Carbon Code, organisations can invest in woodland creation by purchasing verified carbon units generated by trees absorbing carbon dioxide over time. Biodiversity Net Gain, introduced through the



Environment Act 2021, requires many developments in England to leave biodiversity in a measurably better state. Where this cannot be fully achieved on-site, developers can purchase biodiversity units from organisations restoring habitats elsewhere.

Other approaches are also developing. Schemes linked to cleaner rivers, flood resilience and water management are beginning to reward good land stewardship in practical and measurable ways. What all these approaches share is a growing recognition that nature has real value, that it has been chronically undervalued, and that society has a stake in making its stewardship financially viable for those who deliver it.



Land acquired at Cutlers Farm
– one of our BNG sites

Why trust matters

Of course, these markets are not perfect. Nature cannot simply be reduced to numbers on a spreadsheet. One woodland is not

interchangeable with another, and restoring habitats requires long-term commitment, scientific rigour, and careful oversight. Questions around standards, accountability, and permanence are important and entirely legitimate.

That is why trust matters so much. Environmental charities have decades of experience restoring landscapes for the right reasons. Organisations like the Heart of England Forest bring something beyond the units themselves: public access, volunteering, education, community engagement, and a commitment to protecting nature for the long term.

The Forest's first steps

At the Heart of England Forest, we are approaching these opportunities carefully and responsibly. We are learning, testing, and building our understanding of what works best for the Forest. Funding considerations are now becoming

part of how we design and manage sites from the very beginning, helping ensure that the woodland and habitats we create can also be sustained far into the future.

We have already taken our first steps. The Forest has recently entered its first agreement under the Woodland Carbon Code, allowing us to generate verified woodland carbon units from our own land for the first time. We are also developing our first dedicated Biodiversity Net Gain site and working closely with trusted national organisations to guide us through these emerging markets.

Support still matters

Donations remain essential to the life of the Forest, funding everything from ranger teams and volunteers to education work, public access, and the protection of ancient habitats. Green finance works alongside our supporter's



Oak trees along a footpath
in Roberts Wood

generosity; it is another tool that can help secure the Forest's future.

Twenty years ago, woodland carbon markets barely existed. Twenty years from now, the way nature is funded may look entirely different again. Some ideas will flourish, others may fade, and new approaches will emerge that we cannot

yet imagine.

What will not change is our responsibility to care for this landscape forever.

Every acre planted is a promise: not just to create woodland, but to protect and nurture it for generations to come. Growing the Forest requires imagination, and funding it will too. ●

A gift of a lifetime

The future of nature recovery will depend on finding diverse, resilient ways to support landscapes like ours – so that the Forest can continue to grow in root, branch, and possibility. And you can play your part.

Tools like green finance, work alongside the commitment of our supporters to protect our precious green spaces for years to come. Your legacy can fund the future heartbeat of the Forest. You can help secure the Forest forever.

**Leaving a gift in your will,
is one of the most powerful ways
you can support the Forest.**

*“If you ever look at the sky in the morning and think “aren't I lucky” then supporting the environment long-term is translating that into action.”**

Our mission is long term: to plant 12 million trees and create a huge, resilient Forest. While we have investment funding in place restricted to land purchase, we rely heavily on public generosity to support everything else – planning, planting, and nurturing what will become the largest new connected forest in England.

Of course, we hope any gift you add to your will, will not be received by us for years to come – and that is right when the Forest will need it. Afterall, an oak tree can stand tall for up to 100 years after it has been planted.

Gifts in wills constitute an average of 30% of fundraising income for UK charities, with conservation charities being more reliant on them than other causes.*

“I want there to be a Forest in the future.

We live in a beautiful part of the world. Creating a Forest could protect this, along with loved and important leisure space for people and spaces that support biodiversity...

And I thought about moments I have had in the Forest – Mum's tree is in the Forest, I walk my dog in the Forest, I've made big life decisions in the Forest, had picnics with kids, walked there with my dad when I lost my mum. I feel safe there, I know my route. It's like an old friend. I wanted to honour that...

*If you can't justify the donation you want to give today, leaving a gift in your will feels like a lovely way to contribute to something you care about. Updating my will wasn't expensive, and I'm really glad I did it.”** – Legacy Pledger Anon

As a nature lover, it is a wonderful way to leave your mark on the world.

Our first legacy donation

One of our wonderful Friends of the Forest passed away last year and, to our surprise, had left us a gift in his will. It is the first gift we have ever received of this kind, and we are enormously grateful. We would have loved to have thanked him in his lifetime.



Supporting your wishes

If you are considering leaving a gift in your will, we'd be glad to hear from you. We

understand this is a personal matter, and any conversation will of course be treated in confidence. But we're here to answer your questions and would be pleased to talk with you about the Forest's future. Email: charlotte.maytum@heartofenglandforest.org
Phone: 07754 800258