

HLS AGM 2018

Today

I hope you have all had an opportunity to visit the open day and enjoy the new format. Do please give us your feed back on what you thought worked and on any areas where you think we could have done things better or differently.

As we have had an open day there are no speakers or presentations this evening apart from me. In the next few minutes I propose to run over some of the highlights of the past year.

Education

I would like to start by mentioning the educational aspect of the HLS. It is vital that we do as much as we can to educate our school children about the special qualities of the Forest.

2136 pupils from 47 schools were able to take part in educational visits this year, thanks to HLS education access funding. The slight decrease in numbers is due to curriculum changes at GCSE level. Schools visited all through the year. Human impacts and activities, and investigation of the special qualities of the Forest have remained the most requested teaching sessions. HLS funding ensures that the schoolchildren visiting the Forest not only enjoy their visit, but leave with a much greater understanding of its heritage and landscape.

Lost Lawns Restoration - Tree and scrub management

Consultation site visits took place in March to view the following lost lawn locations: Bramshaw, Brook Wood, Broomy/Splash Bridge and Milking Pound Bottom. Following the issue of a felling licence in September works commenced at 2 out of 4 sites - Splash Bridge/Broomy (Dockens Water) and Milking Pound Bottom. At Elkham's Grave, Trenley Lawn, Red Rise tree and scrub felling took place as agreed with consultees. At Bolderwood hollies habitat restoration and pine clearance of some mature trees was carried out. Slender Cotton Grass habitat at Holmsley bog was cleared of willow and birch encroachment. A total area of 66 Ha was achieved.

Wetland Restoration

In Summary the following wetland restoration areas were achieved:-

- 2532m of meanders were restored.
- 1078m of drain was in-filled
- 1079m of channel was bed-level raised

Two planning application sites were part completed:

Wootton Riverine Woodland Phase 1 was completed following the work that was undertaken last year.

Pondhead (Parkhill Lawn, Matley) was part completed. Weather and seasonal constraints limited full completion in 2017.

Noads Mire This site has been re-programmed into the summer 2018 wetland restoration works and will be completed by George Farwell.

Ferny Crofts South was also partially completed this year. However due to the weather delays experienced on site through August and September 2017 it was decided that the completion of this site should be delayed until August/September 2018.

Coxlease Lawn. The site was subject to wet weather delays for seven days. The site became too wet to continue work within the 2017 wetland restoration season and it is proposed that this work will be completed in 2018.

The short wetland restoration season was curtailed further by wet weather causing many of the sites being too wet to work for large periods of the summer. Work was not possible due to wet ground conditions on approximately 45 days out of a possible 105.

Bracken Management

This was carried out by two local contractors MJ Hoare and Dan Shutler. 33 days of bracken forage harvesting was carried out between them covering a total area of 69 Ha.

The bracken sprayer covered an area of 134Ha over the following sites: Bolderwood, Turfhill, Sloden and Milkham.

Control of Non native species

Non-native plant management was carried out across the Forest, thanks to the hard work and dedication of Catherine Chatters and her hardworking team of volunteers. This involves control of Pitcher Plants, monitoring and controlling Cotoneaster, Control of Parrot's Feather, Japanese knotweed, Pickerel weed, Yellow Azalea and Golden Club.

Rhododendron. Cut & burn areas were tackled in January on the beat of Patrick Cook, site locations covered include the following SSSI units: Busketts, Ironshill, Rhinefield, Bolderwood, Burley through to Anderwood, Knightwood, Gritnam, Allum Green, Acres Down & Lucy Hill. Total time spent equivalent to 80 man days. Rhododendron spraying was carried out at Acres Down, Burley, Minstead and Allum Green, Bolderwood.

Riverfly Partnership

Volunteer rangers have been carrying out surveying of specific wetland restoration stream sites for riverflies, since 2015. All of their collected data has been input into the National riverfly database, and used locally to see abundance scores of riverflies and how they have re-acted before and after restoration. I would like to express particular thanks to those volunteers for participating in what is an extremely valuable but painstaking process.

Programme of Data Processing and Ground Surveys for Historical Features

2017 saw a successful survey season with the target coverage of 2,013 hectares reached. This work involved 131 volunteer days. Again I would like to express my thanks to the volunteers. During these days the volunteers helped to record archaeological sites, undertake detailed geophysical surveys of specific sites identified during the Lidar surveys and clear vegetation from scheduled monuments. During 2017, work also continued to clean survey data and submit records to the County Historic Environment Records Office. All the above work continued to feed into wetland restoration, lost lawn, verge restoration and ridge and furrow proposed schemes. Of the 20,130 hectares to be surveyed during the HLS scheme, only 3,342 hectares remain to be surveyed. This leaves 1,671 hectares to be surveyed during 2018. This work started in January. Work will also continue to identify monuments that require restoration works and collaboration between the appropriate parties to ensure the best results for the monuments and the habitats they are found in.

Grazing Management

The HLS supports a wide variety of activities in order to maintain and improve grazing management.

494 Commoners received grazing payments

The HLS makes funds available to improve and develop Infrastructure for Livestock Management by means of a Small grant scheme. The HLS delivered 39 grants in 2017 for contributions towards stock handling systems. 15 grants are still to be claimed for 2017

The HLS also makes funds available to improve and develop infrastructure for livestock management by improving sightline fencing and drift fencing

Projects delivered were Boltens Bench: 120m Drift style fence, Pilley Allotment : 210m of wire fence, Hatchet Mill : replacement of oak split rails, Burbush : 85m of oak sightline fencing.

Sloden & Trim Holly Pounds were rebuilt in 2017.

Improvements to the welfare standard for ponies are achieved through the pony welfare scheme. The number of ponies entering the welfare scheme has increased this year as commoners are becoming more aware of the scheme. The scheme does appear

to be reducing the older mares on the Forest as we are having less welfare issues over the winter.

Improvements to the value and diversity of the New Forest Pony Breed is achieved through the New Forest Livestock Society

The New Forest Livestock Society receives VGS funding towards the cost of marketing in order to increase sales at Beaulieu Road. The aim is to provide known potential buyers with regular reminders about sale dates, and to advertise the sales as widely as possible to attract new customers.

Looking ahead

This year the HLS is funding ridge and furrow restoration and stump removal in areas that have been felled. I think these are particularly exciting projects as they will not only improve the habitat but also improve the restored areas for stock and making drifting over those areas possible. I would encourage you to visit the area recently restored at Dur Hill as an excellent example of what can be achieved.

We have now completed 8 years of the Verderers HLS. The current scheme expires in February 2020. The Forest Farming Group, under the energetic chairmanship of Oliver Crosthwaite Eyre, is actively engaging with Government both at the political level and with the relevant civil servants. Our strong preference is for a bespoke, flexible scheme that suits the needs of the Forest. It is too early to say what the future holds but I am confident that the public and environmental benefits delivered by the Forest make it a strong candidate for future support.

Finally a thank you to the many people who work so hard to deliver the benefits of the HLS, they are too numerous to mention but they know who they are and they are due thanks not just from me but from all of us.

Lord Manners
Official Verderer
25 April 2018