



New Forest Water Forum – Wilder for Water

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Event Summary

A New Forest Catchment Partnership event to celebrate the outstanding freshwater wildlife of the New Forest, focusing on citizen science and clean water.

Another successful event focusing on the freshwater and coastal environments of the New Forest. Over 90 people attended this year, from volunteers, to professionals, to local interest groups.

Representatives from many organisations working across the New Forest also attended, including Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, Natural England, Wild New Forest, Environment Agency, Wessex Chalk Stream and Rivers Trust.

Feedback from the audience indicated that the event was a great success. The event was described as informative, inspirational, and current. Feedback highlighted that this event was not only an opportunity to increase understanding of the freshwater environment but to also gain an awareness of the threats which face these habitats. The audience appreciated the knowledge and expertise of the speakers, with an appetite to continue to learn more at the next event.

Chair: Jennifer Thomas (Natural England)

Speakers:

Debbie Tann (*Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust HIWWT*)

Naomi Ewald (*Freshwater Habitats Trust*)

Ian Barker (*New Forest National Park Authority*)

Sam Orchard (*Environment Agency*)

Georgina Samoluk (*Environment Agency*)

Kirsty Staunton (*Local resident*)

Paul Edgar (*Natural England*)

Russell Wynn (*Wild New Forest*)

Opening Remarks from Chair, Jennifer Thomas

The New Forest freshwater and coastline is one of the finest in Europe. The Catchment Partnership brings people together to look after our watery landscape

This event is our most adventurous yet and signifies our responsibility to further our understanding and protect this huge blue ecological network here in the New Forest.

Debbie Tann (*Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust*) - A Wilder Future



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Debbie highlighted the major concerns over species loss and the significant declines in wildlife over recent years. A way of assessing how damaged nature is across the world in the Biodiversity Intactness Index. Out of 2018 countries assessed we are ranked one of the worst at 189. Nature is in trouble, 8,000 species assessed. Of these, 15% are extinct or threatened with extinction. Only 8 % of the UK is fully protected (SSSI) for nature and of that only half is in good condition.

The HIWWT are forging forward with their new agenda 'Wilder' - more spaces for wildlife to thrive. This requires 1 in 4 people acting for nature, a third of our land and sea wilder, and the pressure on nature reduced everywhere else.

Recent mapping across Hampshire and the Isle of Wight shows that between 30% and 50% has the potential for recovery.

What do we mean by 'Wilder' - taking inspiration from the Knepp estate – what species can be brought back to the landscape – these species then have a biodiversity knock on effect by supporting other species. Creating new meadows and wetlands from damaged land provides a natural solution to nitrate pollution, rebuild soils and act as a carbon sink.

What this means for the New Forest – setting targets for restoring and expanding habitats, promote natural climate solutions, bring back missing species, safeguard rare and special wildlife, reduce pressure on nature, and reposition the economy to support nature's recovery.

Naomi Ewald (*Freshwater Habitats Trust*) - The New Forest's Wetland Wonderland

There is thought to be as many species in freshwater as in the sea which occupies 70% of the earth. The Environment Agency states rivers have never been cleaner, but when you look at the data fewer sites at Good status since 2009 and none at high status.

Big water bodies get all the attention – but we need to protect large and small. What do we know about the small water bodies - small waters are not included in Water Framework Directive (WFD)?

Here in the New Forest we have the small places that are extremely rich in biodiversity. Our 2 lakes - Hatchet and Sowley – incredibly ecologically rich. Both lakes are internationally recognised for their importance for biodiversity. The small streams in the New Forest are the most ecologically rich water courses in the country. For example, Crockford is a shallow stream with stoneworts growing. Stoneworts are an ancient group of plants and indicate very clean water quality. Southern damselfly also found here.

1000 ponds in the New Forest – 3 out of 4 remain undamaged and half of them support red data book species.

10,000 track way pools which are transient – formed on the edge of other water bodies – the species they support are only in New Forest because of the longevity of the management.



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Headwaters and flushes – internationally important areas of peat land habitats – we should be asking what can we do to make more. The type of habitat cannot be created anywhere else in the country.

Beauty of the forest is described in the green landscape. How do we promote the beauty and recognition that the New Forest blue network deserves?

We paint a rosy picture, however there is trouble in paradise. Penny Williamson (Technical Director at Freshwater Habitats Trust (FHT)) survey 150 ponds across the SSSI – deemed to be pristine condition. Penny went back recently as a volunteer as there was no funding available. National what she found was a worrying decline of 25 species per pond. Out of the 6 New Forest ponds from the NF, 3 have declined in quality in the past 25 years.

Ian Barker (*New Forest National Park Authority*) - Working with nature to support nature

Ian delved into the work of the Catchment Partnership, its aims and how we plan for a Wilder Landscape.

The Catchment Partnership communicate with people, the challenges we face and gather organisations to take action.

As 50% more species are attributed to the water bodies that are in outstanding condition compared to good condition it's vital, we protect the blue ecological networks of the New Forest. Species require corridors and stepping stones to move across the landscape. The work of the Catchment Partnership is to identify these obstructions within the landscape and remediate these issues.

However, in comparison the rest of lowland England, which is a bleak situation for freshwater, the New Forest, with its fantastic water quality, large scale landscape and long-standing traditional land management practices – species here have the opportunity to thrive.

As a partnership our key themes are to:

- **Protect (and improve) the best** - Raising awareness of the special nature of the New Forest's freshwater and coastal habitats and the need for sustainable strategies to mitigate stressors on these environments now and in the future.
- **Build out** - supporting local communities and businesses to reduce the number and frequency of direct and diffuse sources of nutrient pollution in the catchment, and, mitigating the impact of historic interventions which have caused freshwaters to become disconnected along their length, and disconnected from coastal and floodplain habitats.
- **Work in Partnership** - Making best use of limited resources and utilising the collective experience and expertise of individuals and organisations working in and around the New Forest.

Sam Orchard (*Environment Agency*) - Breaking barriers and connecting catchments for resilient rivers

Sam gave us an insight into the Water Framework Directive term 'Heavily Modified Water Bodies' and the impact these can have on ecology and how this can be exacerbated by climate change. It's difficult to ever revert these water bodies back to a total natural state however we can make changes to make enhancements to biodiversity. These are called 'Mitigation Measures'.



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There are 10 HMWB through the New Forest – they have been substantially changed by human activity, many there to prevent flooding using concrete structure. These water bodies can never achieve good ecological status. The only way to meet 'Good' status would be to take the concrete away but this is not always possible. Instead the target is to achieve Good Ecological Potential by finding innovative solutions for the benefit of species along these water bodies.

Reasons why water bodies have been modified and what mitigation measures can be introduced :

- **Flood protection** - this can cause a barrier to fish pass and decrease vegetation in channel and on riparian zones. Mitigation measure would be to use soft method, take away anything that isn't needed and install fish passes.
- **Land drainage**, for forestry and agriculture – puts huge pressure on ecology especially in extreme weather – higher flows with forceful energy moves unnatural amounts of sediment downstream creating damaging erosion and having negative impacts on freshwater animals. To create balance the reconnection of the streams and rivers with natural flood plains, adding meanders to expand the river that is available and reinstating the impoverished substrate with gravels has a significant benefit to the ecology of these habitats.
- **Recreation** can cause disturbance, erosion and additional chemicals, nitrates and phosphates to a water body. We can't take recreation away but we can manage those pressures through education and the creation of routes for fish and eel.
- **Urbanisation** – water bodies historically built on and culverted, leaving no substrate creating an ecological desert. Peoples gardens back on to streams and rivers where compost heaps and erosion are significant contributors to the decline in the diversity of the habitats.

A successful project in the New Forest delivered through the Living Waters Project due to failing water body is the work on fish and eel pass installations on the Hartford Stream on the Beaulieu River. This project has delivered those all-important Mitigation Measures using ramping with bristle brushes, and removal of obsolete structures which is now showing signs of great success with fish and eel using the new installations. This is the first stream in the South East England to have a status change in the right direction now delivering good ecological potential!

Afternoon talks – notes to be used as a prompt for presentations available online.

Georgina Samoluk (*Environment Agency*) - The Stingray Shore

Georgina, very kindly stood in for Dominic Longley today and did a wonderful job of introducing us to the fascinating species, stingray.

- The shoreline between the Lymington and the Beulieu River are mostly inaccessible to people as most of the land is privately owned. Wide ranging coastal habitats, salt marsh, mud, shingle, wide inter tidal zone which all makes perfect nursery habitats including shelter and food for the Stingray and their young.
- Sowley and Park Shore are food hot spots.
- The Stingray come in late spring and summer during high tide just after dark.
- They eat cuttle fish, baby squid, lug and rag worm - especially are fond of crabs.

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- Unfortunately, the stingray has been demonised. It's been present for centuries – records as early as 1553, perhaps the monks at Beaulieu Abbey used the sting ray as a food resource. Fire flare is the stingray's old English name
- The sting ray has a sharp sting – as a defensive tail. Coated in a venomous membrane.
- The largest caught locally was 67 lb from the Sowley shore
- Smooth hound is also found along this shoreline too.

Kirsty Staunton (*Local resident*) - Monitoring the New Forest's secret pond celebrities (Kirsty has provided notes on her presentation online)

Temporary ponds are generally small and shallow. They follow a cycle of drying up and re wetting. Of course, this pattern is weather dependent. These temporary ponds are an important habitat especially for rare species. In the New Forest these rare species are fairy and tadpole shrimp.

Paul Edgar (*Natural England*) - It's Not Just About Ponds

Amphibians have declined across the country. Paul is monitoring the Bartley water area as part of Hampshire and Isle of Wight Amphibian and Reptile Group (HIWARG). The landscape has plenty of suitable habitats including little pockets of water or pools. Toads forage on the lawns at night. In fact, heathlands, grazed and ungrazed habitats are also good for amphibians.

The Bartley Water/Woodlands area, 69 areas of frog spawn have been recorded. These are spread across many wet habitat types including puddles on the lawn, pools in the woodland, forestry ditches used for track drainage and damp puddles on track ways. As well as the habitats above small depressions created by the movement of cattle are also important for the survival of frogs.

Tadpoles never seen in the Bartley water but you do find frogs in there. Palmate newts have been found in 6 of the 69 pools. These newts can be found in the trees - particularly on the mossy branches - otherwise known as tree newts

Toads are found under bark and wood. Toads leave the area to breed but abundant in the Bartley woodland area. Use channels to move along.

New Forest is the best place in the country – crucial area for the common species. This is due to the mosaic of habitats and abundance of clean water.

Russell Wynn (*Wild New Forest*) - The New Forest Curlew Project: Conservation of a wild icon

Russell gave an introduction into the Wild New Forest and explained the ethos of the charity.

Recent monitoring indicates curlew species are in decline. The Wetlands of the New Forest support a regional important breeding landscape. Current monitoring is being carried out to assess the population.



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There are 40 territories – 2/3rds decline in last 20 years. Curlew can get used to people but as soon as people and their pets move away from the path this can cause disturbance. The nest fails due to predation.

Russell is working closely in partnership with Forestry England to erect signage to inform the public to keep dogs keep on tracks and if necessary, use a lead. There are huge efforts from the National Park and Forestry England Ranger teams and car park closures in sensitive areas. Peoples behaviors can have a positive impact by sticking to tracks, and walking in more robust areas.

Russell outlined objective going forward for Wild New Forest:

- Conveying messages about sensitive wild areas
- Continue monitoring curlew population
- Focus and mitigate some of the pressures
- Working with local stake holders
- Species with significant political weight.

End