

New Forest - Wetland Fact File

The New Forest includes some of the most **important** and **rare** wetlands in Europe. It has been designated a Natura 2000 site as it protects some of the most seriously threatened habitats, plants and animals in Europe.

There are several different types of wetland in the New Forest, each with their own characteristic wildlife. They include:

- **Rivers** and **streams** which flow through the Forest's shallow valleys. Woods of **alder**, **willows** and **ash** grow on some of the floodplains, a rare habitat these days. The rare **southern damselfly** is found along smaller streams.
- **Wet heath** forms where there is a shallow layer of peat and the water table is near the surface. Various mosses and rushes grow, as well as the **cross-leaved heath**.
- **Wet meadows** grow on peaty or silt-laden soils, where **purple moor-grass** dominates a rich community of plants. Some of these are grazed by ponies and cattle, with the resulting short turf known as "lawns".
- **Valley bogs** or **mires** are the wettest areas where the peat is deep. Some have areas of bog woodland where **pine** and **birch** trees grow.

Wading birds rely on the open wetland habitats where they feed by probing for worms and other invertebrates. They can only reach these if the soil remains soft throughout the summer.

Help us protect the New Forest wetland wildlife

All these wetlands have been threatened by over 200 years of human modification. If everyone who looks after, uses and visits the Forest works together, will can save them for the future.

Breeding waders nest and feed on the ground and are particularly susceptible to disturbance. Curlews and lapwings often breed on drier areas and have to lead their tiny flightless chicks to water. Please watch wetland birds from a distance, and keep dogs under close control.



LIFE3 Partnership

Wet Grassland in the New Forest

Sustainable Wetland Restoration in the New Forest

The New Forest LIFE3 project (2002-2006) is restoring the vulnerable wetland habitats of the Forest for the benefit of wildlife and people,

The project is part-funded by the European Union's (EU) LIFE-Nature programme and is being co-ordinated by **Hampshire County Council** (HCC) working with five other partner organisations: **English Nature** (EN), **Environment Agency** (EA), **Forestry Commission** (FC), **The National Trust** (NT) and **The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds** (RSPB).

The overall objective of the Life3 project is to restore:

- 261 ha of riverine woodland,
- 18 ha of bog woodland,
- 184 ha of valley mire,
- 141 ha of wet grassland.
- 10 km of damaged watercourse

If you would like more information about the New Forest LIFE3 project, and to see the full results of the Breeding Wader Survey, please visit

www.newforestlife.org.uk



Lapwing

M Lane (rspb-images.com)



Guide to Wading Birds in the New Forest

INSIDE

What to look for - When to Look - Where to Look



Curlew

N Blake (rspb-images.com)

The New Forest is well known for its woodlands and heathlands, and for all the rare wildlife that thrives here. It comes as a surprise to many people that the New Forest also contains some major wetlands, home to very important populations of breeding wading birds.

The RSPB coordinated a major survey of the Forest's populations of lapwing, curlew, snipe and redshank in 2004 as part of the *LIFE3 Sustainable Wetland Restoration in the New Forest* project. Although three of the four species appear to be declining, the New Forest continues to be a critical home for them.





Curlew

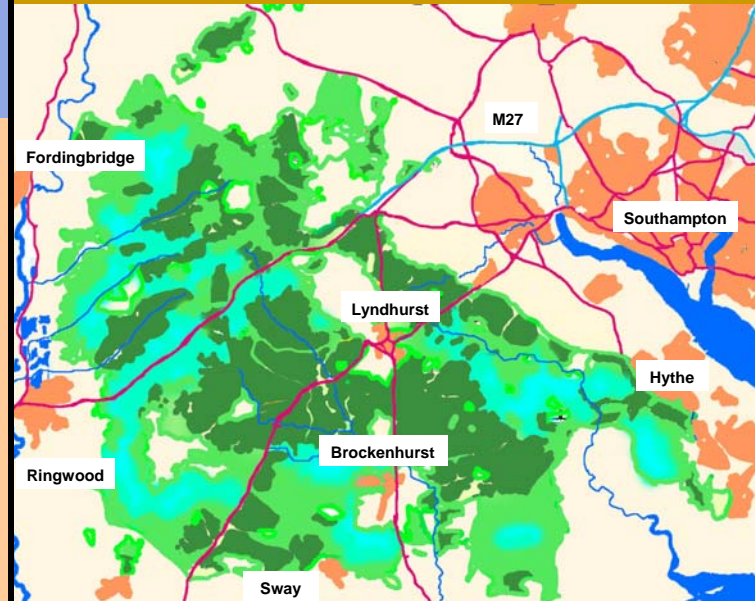
What to look for: crow-sized, the stately curlew's long down-curved bill is distinctive. The call is a highly evocative whistle 'coor-lee', and the display flight consists of a series of these notes as it flutters on quivering wings.

When to look: arrives in the Forest from coastal wintering grounds by March. Most have left again by midsummer.

Where to look: may breed in some of the drier open areas of heath, but reliant on the wetter areas as feeding sites for chicks.

2004 survey results: c.99 pairs, down 25% since 1994, but still 15% of the population of southern England.

The New Forest



The area in green shows the **New Forest Special Protection Area**, strictly protected under European law for its birdlife. In dark green are the wooded areas; in pale green are the grassy and heathy areas; and the blue areas are the wetter parts of the Forest where the wading birds can be found.

The reasons for the declines of curlews, redshank and snipe in the Forest are not fully understood, but encouragingly these declines are less than in other wetland habitats in southern England.

What to look for: the long red legs and straight red-based bill are apparent when the pigeon-sized redshank is on the ground. In flight, look for the white rear edge to the wing and the alarm call 'tew-pu-pu'. The display call is a liquid 'too lu-loo lu-loo...'. often in flight.

When to look: on the Forest wetlands mainly between April and July. Display in spring.

Where to look: very closely associated with the wettest mires.

2004 survey results: estimated number of pairs 42, down 24% from 1994, representing 1.5% of the southern English population.



Snipe

What to look for: usually secretive in the wettest areas, snipe are most noticeable when they are 'drumming' - males fly to a great height and then dive steeply, their outer tail feathers vibrating to make a distinctive throbbing noise.

When to look: 'drums' in April and May; may also be accidentally flushed from boggy ground in winter when they utter a sharp 'sneeze' alarm.

Where to look: watch over the wettest areas.

2004 survey results: c.111 pairs, down 29% but representing a vital 5% of the English population.



Lapwing



Redshank