

RAPC 588-26

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

RESOURCES, AUDIT AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE MEETING –2 March 2026

Species Survival Fund – Brief Project Completion Update

Report by: John Stride, Net Zero with Nature Programme Manager and Fiona Wynne, Grants Officer

Summary:

The £1.3m New Forest Species Survival Fund project ran from April 2024 to February 2026. The project delivered 321 hectares of improvements for nature against an initial target of 250 hectares as well as 165 engagement events for over 25,000 attendees.

Recommendation:

Members are requested to note the outcomes of the project.

1 Introduction

- 1.1. Members will be aware of the successful bid submission to the Species Survival Fund following approval to submit by the Authority in September 2023. (AM 656/23) Permission to start was granted in April 2024 with all capital delivery to be completed by 31 December 2025. The project ended on 28 February and this paper provides a brief summary of the work achieved by the project partners.
- 1.2. The Species Survival Fund, a partnership between Defra and the National Lottery Heritage Fund, saw the investment of around £1.3 million to deliver improvements for nature and to engage landowners and communities in nature recovery.
- 1.3. The New Forest National Park Authority was the lead partner, along with Amphibian & Reptile Conservation Trust, Freshwater Habitats Trust, Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, New Forest Commoners Defence Association, and Wild New Forest.
- 1.4. Nature improvements focused on creating, restoring and enhancing habitats to support species abundance. Our target was to deliver up to 250ha with an aim of achieving 300ha. The project included a total of 48 individual interventions across 31 landholdings.
- 1.5. Connection to nature activities focused on targeted engagement with landowners, professional development days, volunteering, and training opportunities.
- 1.6. Funding also supported 14 jobs across the partnership and enabled an independent project evaluation (available in due course).

2. Nature improvements

2.1. During the project 321 hectares of interventions were delivered including:

- 243 hectares of restoration interventions (improving an existing habitat)
- 21 hectares of creation interventions (e.g. new ponds and hedgerows)
- 45 hectares of advice and site survey/data analysis to inform future interventions, 10 hectares of which have the potential for green finance investment in the coming months.
- 11 hectares where the impact area of works undertaken by different partners overlapped.

2.2. In terms of habitat areas impacted:

- 135 hectares of heathlands
- 112 hectares of wetlands
- 65 hectares of woodlands
- 19 hectares of meadows

2.3. Across all sites a total of:

- 5063 trees were planted as hedgerows and woodland improvements.
- 1069 metres of hedgerow restored
- 648 metres of new hedgerow created
- 14 existing ponds and waterbodies restored
- 24 new ponds created
- 12 meadows seeded with site-specific wildflower mixes

2.4. Of the 265 hectares of habitat restoration or creation, 107 hectares was outside of Protected Sites (SSSI). This 107 Hectares can contribute to our Protected Landscape Target¹ of 4,000 hectares of wildlife rich habitat created or restored within Protected Landscapes, outside of protected sites by 2042.

2.5. New hedgerows will also contribute to the target¹ for increased tree and woodland cover by 2050.

3. Species surveys

3.1 Baseline ecological surveys were carried out at several sites to inform management actions with return visits to sites where management actions had recently been delivered.

3.2 A total of 80 days surveying was included within the project which were undertaken across 15 sites selected as survey priorities.

¹ [Targets and outcomes - New Forest National Park Authority](#)

- 3.3 There is a particular focus on ‘priority’ species of high conservation concern, i.e. species that are nationally red listed and/or nationally rare or scarce, based on the most recent assessments.
- 3.4 A total of 1160 species of animal, plant, and fungus was recorded over the two years of SSF survey including 28 mammal species, 97 different birds, 7 reptile and amphibians, 431 invertebrates, 320 plants and 267 species of fungi.
- 3.5 88 of these species, around 7.5% of all recorded, are priority species.
- 3.6 Particular species to note were: pine marten, brown hare, otter, barbastelle, serotine and greater horseshoe bat, sand lizard, 13-spot ladybird, pondweed leafhopper, ivy leaved crowfoot, marsh marigold, candelabra coral fungi and ashen woodax fungi.
- 3.7 Further monitoring will be carried out by Wild New Forest and Freshwater Habitats Trust across a range of sites and habitat types to enhance learning from the project and inform future nature improvement opportunities.

4. Connection to nature activities

- 4.1 A total of 165 events took place involving 27,912 attendees. Some highlights include:
- 17 large scale festivals and events during 2024 and 2025 including New Forest Show, New Forest Thrive Festival, New Forest Biodiversity Conference and at the New Forest Reptile Centre.
 - 34 training events aimed at sharing knowledge amongst the partnership as well as with landowners and the Green Careers Network. This included activities such as plant and animal species identification across the range of habitats.
 - 546 volunteers took part including 225 volunteering for the first time.
- 4.2 More than 125 posts were curated for social media, gaining almost 670,000 impressions and engagements almost reaching 40,000. The top performing posts were about pine marten, an eel pass and the creation of wildflower meadows and hedgerows.
- 4.3 A new nature toolkit was developed to help people understand why the National Park is so special, some of the big issues it is facing, and how people are already taking action to ensure nature and communities thrive into the future.
- 4.4 Engagement activities delivered will contribute to achievement of the Protected Landscape target¹ for increased number of volunteer days by 2042 with capital items also procured which will contribute to the target for an increase in the number of volunteer days facilitated by new equipment by 2042.

5. Financial information

- 5.1 The total cost of the project was £1,298,967 made up of a project grant of £1,042,298 with £256,670 in match funding.

- 5.2 The funder required us to work within a 2:1 capital to revenue ratio so around £865k supported capital works and activities while £433k supported revenue expenditure.
- 5.3 While the funded elements of the project ended on 28 February 2026, the capital works will continue to be monitored for a further three years with results available on an interim basis. This work will be carried out by Freshwater Habitats Trust and Wild New Forest and forms part of our match funding for the project.

RECOMMENDATION

Members are requested to note the outcomes of the project.

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Papers: RAPC 588-26

Previous papers:

[AM 656/23 Application to the Species Survival Fund](#)
[RAPC 568/25 Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework](#)