Working Together for Water and Wildlife
New Forest Wildlife Forum Event

28th September 2017, 11:00 – 15:15

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.

The event was the first of its kind in the New Forest to focus solely on the freshwater environment. The existing interest and passion was only too clear as the venue filled. Over 85 people attended. This included volunteers, professionals, enthusiasts and nature experts. Representatives from many organisation working across the New Forest also attended, this including; the Wildlife Trust, the New Forest Association, the Verderers, the Avon Catchment Partnership, and Southern Water.

Feedback from the audience indicated that the event was a success. That it had great value to share news, disseminate projects findings and bring everyone together with the freshwater environment at the top of the agenda. There was interest in another event next year – with requests for more information on toxicology, stream reconfiguration and coastal impacts.

Chair: Jennifer Thomas (Natural England)

Speakers:

- *Ian Barker – New Forest National Park Authority*
- *Catherine Patel – The Environment Agency, EA*
- *Dr Naomi Ewald – Freshwater Habitats Trust*
- *Catherine Chatters – Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust*
- *Hannah Worker – Freshwater Habitats Trust*
- *Dr Pascale Nicolet – Freshwater Habitats Trust*
- *Gemma Stride – Forestry Commission*

The event was attended by a range of different people, including volunteers, professionals, enthusiasts and nature experts.

Opening Remarks from Chair, Jennifer Thomas (Natural England).

- Welcome and introductions to this New Forest Wildlife Forum Event is hosted by the New Forest Catchment Partnership.
- Objectives of the day:
  - Celebrate the outstanding freshwater plants and animals of the New Forest.
  - Showcase some of the great work of the partnership to engage local communities in citizen science, and to help to protect the freshwaters of the New Forest.
  - Share and discuss the findings of these projects and identify what we can take forward into the future.

An introduction to the New Forest Catchment Partnership – Ian Barker (New Forest National Park Authority)

- The New Forest Catchment Partnership is led and coordinated by the New Forest National Park Authority and Freshwater Habitats Trust, who are working alongside organisations and communities in the New Forest to protect and improve the special freshwater habitats of the New Forest.

- The New Forest Catchment Partnership formed out of the Catchment Based Approach (CaBA) from the Defra 2012 pilot. For more information on the Catchment Based Approach please visit: www.catchmentbasedapproach.org
- In the New Forest we have the opportunity to protect and restore freshwater and coastal habitats to the very highest standards. The Partnership's vision is to go further than the Water Framework Directive by including ponds, small lakes, headwaters and mires and aiming to improve to the Water Framework Directive's 'High' ecological status, rather than the 'Good' status required by legislation.
- The aims of the Partnership are to:
    - Identify and protect the best.
    - Bring together existing information and collect additional information to complement, fill gaps and monitor issues.
    - Recognise and monitor the value of smaller water bodies (e.g. headwater streams and ponds).
    - Build out from the best areas to strengthen important populations of declining plants and animals, and improve connectivity between water habitats.
- The Partnership has been working to achieve these aims by collecting evidence (specialist and citizen science), using evidence to engage stakeholders and the wider community, and delivering practical projects to tackle issues. It works collaboratively with shared priorities, delivery and resources between partners.
    - For more information please visit: www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/info/20095/habitats_and_wildlife/244/new_forest_catchment_partnership

Water - Catherine Patel (Environment Agency, EA)

- EA vision: Protect and improve environment by
    - Reducing impacts from climate change
    - Reducing risk to people from flooding
    - Protect and improve quality of water
    - Help people to enjoy freshwater environment
    - Promote sustainable land management
    - Enhance wildlife habitats
    - Help people to comply with environmental regulations
- EA objective for water: Our water will be cleaner and healthier and managed in a way that is more resilient to floods or drought to support people, wildlife and the economy. This will be achieved through:
    - Monitoring
    - Assessing compliance
    - Determining reasons for failure
    - Defining actions
- Improvements:
    - Last 20 years have seen significant improvements in point sources of pollution. Billions invested and legislation improved. Diffuse sources of pollution are still an issues, and they are always more of a challenge to address.
- Partnership working is key to delivering these objectives for the freshwater environment.

Catherine Patel highlighted the EA's main aims and objectives

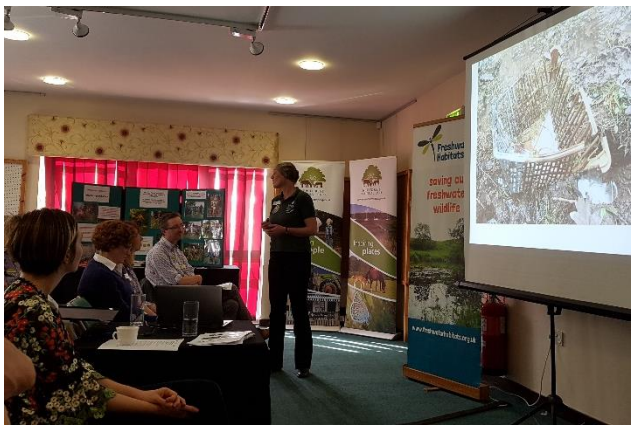
People, Ponds & Water – Naomi Ewald (Freshwater Habitats Trust)

Dr Naomi Ewald talked about the special species and ponds that make the New Forest so extraordinary.

- A national project to:
  - Engage many thousands of people with activities that help them to learn about and enjoy their freshwater heritage.
  - Make a nationally significant difference to the protection of freshwater biodiversity in the UK.
- People, Ponds & Water has three main strands:
  1. Clean Water for Wildlife – covered in later a presentation.
  2. PondNet – National volunteer monitoring network to collect information on important ponds and freshwater species. Because of availability of clean water and traditional grazing management, the New Forest is a stronghold for many now rare freshwater species.
  3. Flagship Ponds – protecting the best of the best ponds and pond landscapes. These sites are known to support rare species and would benefit from further funding to undertake management or monitoring. New Forest has 4 out of 70 flagship ponds across country – but there are *many* more pond sites of national significance that could be designated as Flagship pond sites in the forest!
  - For more information please visit: www.freshwaterhabitats.org.uk/projects/people-ponds-water/

New Forest Non-Native Plants Project – Catherine Chatters (Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust)

- Project aims to stop the spread of invasive non-native plants in the New Forest's freshwater habitats by surveying for invasive species, offering advice and practical help to landowners (with the help of volunteers and by commissioning professional contractors), undertaking research into effective control methods and, finally, by raising awareness of the problems caused by invasive non-native plants.
- Invasive non-native plants are mainly dispersed by people and are a major problem in wetland habitats in the New Forest.
- Project originally focused on:
  - Himalayan Balsam
  - New Zealand Pigmyweed
  - Japanese Knotweed
  - American Skunk Cabbage
  - Giant Hogweed
- Project has now tackled over 20 species including *inter alia* Parrot's Feather, Floating Pennywort, Creeping Water Primrose, Bog Arum, Pitcher Plant.
- The project is now in its eighth year and has significantly reduced the populations of Himalayan balsam from sections of the Lymington and Beaulieu Rivers but ongoing vigilance is needed to prevent re-establishment of invasive species.



Catherine Chatters showed photos of garden plant pots found in ponds in the open forest.

Q&A discussion points

Q: Is the catchment project only taking place in the South New Forest?

A: There are over 100 CaBA groups throughout the UK. Neighbouring catchments include the Avon to the west and the Test and Itchen to the east. For other catchment contact details please see the Catchment Based Approach website (www.catchmentbasedapproach.org).

Q: Are there impacts from the herbicides, used to control invasive species, on the native flora?

A: The herbicide, Glyphosate, which is used in the Non-Native Invasive Plant Project is approved by the Environment Agency. It does affect all plants but becomes denatured when it comes in contact with water or soil, and so should have no lasting effect on the native wildlife.

Q: It is useful to understand success stories as well as problems in practical species conservation projects. Would you consider presenting the results of the People, Ponds & Water project as factsheets with pros & cons?

A: The successes and lessons learned from the species conservation work will be available in the end of project write up in 2018.

Q: Nitrate and Phosphate has increased, but work has been done to improve this in the Lymington River. Will this spread to larger areas?

A: Yes, work to tackle nutrient pollution is taking place elsewhere in the New Forest, including projects by the New Forest Catchment Partnership and partners.

Q: Are there plans in this area to test pesticide runoff or microplastics?

A: Pesticide runoff is tested for drinking water and Microplastics are being looked at a national level by the Environment Agency.

Q: Is there a link between pesticides in animal dung and the decline in medicinal leech?

A: Historic use of Ivermectin was likely to be one of the reasons why medicinal leech has declined. However the ponies are now removed from the Forest when they are wormed to prevent worming treatment in their dung impacting wildlife.

- Point raised from audience that this may not apply to riding horses.

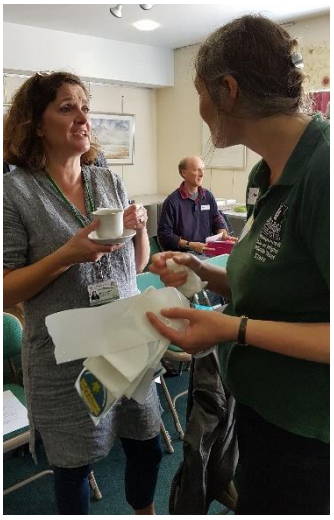
Clean Water for Wildlife - Hannah Worker (Freshwater Habitats Trust)

- Clean Water for Wildlife is a citizen science project that aims to:
  - Discover freshwater habitats free from pollution.
  - Uncover the true extent of nutrient pollution effecting freshwater life today.
- It is one of three initiatives in the People, Ponds & Water project.
- Through the survey volunteers used quick kits to measure the levels of nitrate and phosphate across the New Forest in two water blitz events (spring 2016 and summer 2017). The results from 2016 were shared in this presentation. The 2017 result will be available in the coming months.
- Results show the New Forest is a clean water gem, with 74% of the waterbodies holding clean and unpolluted water. Many of its ponds, streams and rivers are in much better shape than the majority of the country. We need to champion small waters – ponds, small streams - where majority of clean water is held at the catchment scale.

- To view the 2016 results please visit: www.freshwaterhabitats.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/CWW-Case-Study-The-New-Forest-Catchment-FINAL1.pdf
- For more information on the project please visit: www.freshwaterhabitats.org.uk/projects/clean-water/

Living Waters – Pascale Nicolet (Freshwater Habitats Trust)

- One of 21 projects of the New Forest National Park Authority's 'Our Past, Our Future'.
- The project's aim is to use an integrated approach to tackle land management and water issues in the River Beaulieu Catchment – engaging stakeholders and local communities.
- The projects objectives are to:
    - Restore habitats and connectivity for freshwater plants and animals
    - Reduce diffuse pollution to improve water quality
    - Increase knowledge of our biological and historic heritage
    - Raise awareness of the importance all freshwaters in the landscape, including small water bodies like ponds, small steams and ditches.
- Currently working with several landowners to reduce nutrient levels through nutrient management and rainwater harvesting.
- The effectiveness of the project is being monitored by a network of volunteer testing the water bodies across the landscape, and professional and biological surveys. Preliminary results show that the Beaulieu catchment is an outstanding for freshwater wildlife – both in the open forest and on the Beaulieu Estate.



The event was a big success and tapped into the vast well of existing passion and interest in the community.

Monitoring Wetland Restoration – Gemma Stride (Forestry Commission)

- Through the Higher Level Stewardship Scheme the Forestry Commission has been protecting and restoring valuable freshwater habitats of the forest, with a focus on river and mire restoration.
- Gemma Stride as the monitoring officer, has been setting up a monitoring programme to track changes to freshwater biodiversity following restoration. . She has been drawing on local expertise to development a suitable method so that volunteers can participate in the monitoring work, based on MORPH (www.modularriversurvey.org/).
- For more information please visit: http://www.hlsnewforest.org.uk/hls/news/article/29/vlog_monitoring_wetland_restoration

Looking Towards the Future – Ian Barker (New Forest National Park Authority)

- A discussion of the New Forest Catchment Partnership successes and the lessons learned, and of the challenges facing the freshwater environment.
- Successes:
    - Harnessing the existing passion and interest of stakeholders
    - Pushing the water environment up the agenda of local and national organisations in the New Forest
    - Increasing understanding and evidence of the state of the New Forest's freshwaters
    - Establishing new partnerships and ways of working
    - Bringing in new resources
    - Engaging a wider audience (i.e. through citizen science)

  - Delivering action on the ground
- Challenges:
  - Sustaining momentum for partnership and action of delivery partners
  - Uncertain government commitments to supporting and financing the CaBA partnerships
  - Uncertain regulatory future due to Brexit
  - Increasing human pressures due to development, recreation and land use practices
  - Climate change

Q&A discussion points

Q: Does the catchment partnership have any links to Network Rail?

A: Catherine Chatters (HIWWT) has been in contact in 2009 regarding clearance of Himalayan Balsam from river bank next to tracks. Liaison with large organisations can be difficult due to their internal management systems and high staff turnover.

Q: When using the Clean Water for Wildlife Kits, how do you avoid duplication of sites?

A: There is a small level of duplication but this is insignificant compared to the large number of waterbodies that are being tested. In the case of duplication it is very unlikely that two volunteers will have visited on the same day and so having two data points could add further depth to knowledge about the water quality of a particular water body.

Q: How far does the Forestry Commission river monitoring extend downstream of restoration work? Sedimentation could be having a detrimental impact many miles downstream that may not be picked up.

A: At the planning stage, the likely impact of the restoration work is assessed and during restoration, controls are put in place to minimise sediment being released downstream, e.g. sediment mats. There may still be a short-term release of sediment during the restoration work itself, but this is out weighted by the fact that much restoration work aims to prevent ongoing erosion and sediment release in the longer term.

Q: Is there any more information about other pollutants that are put down the sink?

A: Southern Water are involved or initiating a range of projects to address misconnections, domestic sewage and pipe blockages and toxic substances released in storm drain which can lead to fish kill (e.g. Yellow Fish https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/avoiding-pollution-yellow-fish-scheme)

Q: Projects in the Forest can sometimes conflict and create further issues for each other. Is there a way these projects can be brought together?

A: This is the role of the Catchment Partnership are aiming to achieve. However sometimes particular projects and situations can be missed. The Catchment Partnership welcomes any news and updates from the New Forest community regarding the freshwater environment to help it achieve this goal.

Q: Are flee and other treatments on dogs having a detrimental impact on invertebrates in the water environment?

A: Currently there is little research into this. This is something of interest for a future Catchment Partnership project.