



Official Verderer
Lord Manners

Verderers of the New Forest

THE QUEEN'S HOUSE
LYNDHURST
HAMPSHIRE
SO43 7NH

Telephone: Lyndhurst (023) 8028 2052

Fax: Lyndhurst (023) 8028 3101

VERDERERS OF THE NEW FOREST

STATEMENT FOLLOWING INSIDE OUT PROGRAMME - 28th January 2019

It is a great shame that Mr Packham declines to talk to the organisations which manage the New Forest. Some of his statements are, unfortunately, quite wrong. For example, he assumes that every animal for which the Verderers receive marking fees is actually turned out on the Forest for the entire year. We know that is not correct. Commoners generally turn their cattle out in summer but take them home for the winter. Some cattle are never turned out onto the forest.

Some ponies spend most of their lives on the Forest but others are also taken home for the winter. The animal population varies throughout the year.

An excellent indicator of the grazing pressure is the condition of stock. There has been no deterioration in the condition of the stock overall. The Verderers, through the Agisters, monitor the welfare of the stock closely. The Agisters report regularly to the Verderers on the condition of the stock out in the Forest. Any report to the Verderers' Office of an animal in poor condition is promptly investigated by an Agister. Any animal found to be in poor condition is removed from the Forest.

The Verderers host two Welfare Tours every year which are attended by a number of organisations including the RSPCA, World Horse Welfare, the Donkey Sanctuary, British Horse Society, Blue Cross, Defra and Animal Health/Trading Standards in order that the condition of the stock can be independently monitored and assessed.

In 2016, a small number of ponies were found to be stripping trees of their bark in Mark Ash Wood. Other ponies in the area were not touching the trees. All the ponies in the area were in excellent condition. Ponies do sometimes eat woody material but it is not an indication of hunger. Because it can be a learnt behaviour, the animals responsible were identified and removed from the Forest. We and the Forestry Commission are continuing to monitor the situation.

Over the last eight years, the Verderers of the New Forest Higher Level Stewardship Scheme (a partnership between the Forestry Commission, the New Forest National Park Authority and the Verderers working with Natural England) has restored over 10 miles of drainage channels, which were artificially straightened by the Victorians. The work has resulted in more natural wetland systems which help to support the unique biodiversity of the New Forest.

In 2017 the Wootton stream restoration was shortlisted for the Royal Town Planning Institute's (RTPI) Awards for Planning Excellence award - the Natural Environment category. It's a credit to the team and Mott MacDonald who were involved in the planning to restore Wootton Riverine back to its natural meandering route. It's a truly collaborative project between many partner organisations, who are working towards conserving the New Forest's unique natural environment.

The Forestry Commission burns about 250 hectares – which is only 2% of the total heathland area across the Crown lands. Even though this is a relatively small proportion of the heath, it ensures we have a healthy and vigorous range of heather heights and ages, which as well as providing diversity also provides us with effective firebreaks to protect large areas of heathland, woodland and private property from wildfire.

There are a number of very rare species in the New Forest whose very existence is due entirely to the hard grazing and the poaching by animals that occurs in some parts of the Forest.

The present high number of animals for which marking fees have been received is, we believe, due wholly to the present farming subsidy scheme. We hope the Basic Payment Scheme, which we do agree with Mr Packham, is not appropriate to the Forest, will change after BREXIT, and we are calling for a bespoke subsidy scheme for the New Forest run by the Verderers, the Forestry Commission and the National Park Authority with the invaluable input from Natural England. These are the organisations which, together with the commoners, have managed and protected the Forest and will continue to do so for many years to come.

The Forest is facing ever more pressures, especially from increasing recreational use. The best way to ensure its survival is for the organisations responsible for its management to continue to work in partnership. Those who disagree with their management should engage constructively with them.

30th January 2019

End