



BUDDY SOUTH FOREST FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Why are you cutting trees down?

In short, it is because we want to have the right trees in the right place. Compared to the wild forested landscape of centuries ago we've got a much smaller area to provide the widest variety of conditions for all our wildlife. We need to maintain a balance which can be managed sustainably for many generations within this restricted space.

This means making sure we have different ages of seedlings, saplings, scrub, mature and ancient trees at any one time to make sure the next age class is always on the way through. We also want those types of trees to be in the right composition, so not too much young scrub and not too few standards (individual trees).

How is this helping wildlife?

The Sherwood Forest landscape contains many areas of ancient forest; a predominantly open heath and grass habitat with scattered trees and scrub. To give wildlife a home in Sherwood we need to continually provide conditions, and sometimes very niche ones for our rarest species.

They can range from bare sandy ground in the heathland to heart rot in ancient oak trees. Greater diversity in structure, age, composition and species of plants and trees means greater diversity of wildlife, and a more resilient environment for us all.

Some trees threaten the balance of habitats found across the landscape. Scrub will always want to encroach on the heath, so to keep it open we cut some back and let some grow up somewhere else each year.

There will always scrub, but we won't let it take over the heath and push out the specialist heath species which have very few places left to go now. Some individual trees will benefit from 'haloing', where we remove trees in the immediate area which are crowding it out.

We identify the trees with the most ecological value – normally the nobbliest, gnarliest specimens with open grown branches – and try to make sure they can grow and thrive for as long as possible.

Why are you creating more open spaces in a woodland?

Having permanent open glades and rides are also ways to encourage woodland edge species. Woodland flora will cover the floor if sunlight can reach it, which is perfect for pollinators and animals looking for fruits and nectar.

Bats and birds use the transitional zone between open habitat and woodland to hunt for the insects and fruits that are often far more abundant in the wood edge.

Shouldn't you just let the reserve develop naturally?

Woodlands have been managed for centuries, and some wildlife has come to rely on the cycles created and sustained by man-made interventions. Coppicing is one such practice, where broadleaved trees are cut down on rotations as a yield of timber. Small areas of trees are cleared on an annual cycle and left to regrow until they reach the right size again. This means that there is always an open area, plus different ages of scrub and mature trees for wildlife to move into.

Some areas of woodland don't need intervention and are best left alone to reach 'high forest' conditions. Our aim is never to remove trees (or any other type of habitat feature) completely, just make sure it is in the right state, place and abundance to provide the most benefit to our Sherwood species.

Why are you digging up the heath?

Heathland habitats are made up of various micro-habitats and one of the most important of these is bare sandy ground.

Bare earth provides homes for more species than heather! A lot of lowland heathland is always under threat of seral succession – the order in which communities of plants replace each other. It wants to return to woodland and can do so easily if we don't intervene. In some areas, this is fine, because scrub and trees form a vital ingredient in the perfect heathland mix. However, left unmanaged, it means the open habitat will gradually be lost along with the wildlife that depends on it.

Centuries ago, this wouldn't have mattered so much because the scrub would have crept in much more slowly, and the next area of woodland would have been cleared by settlers or commoners. Now, succession happens quickly and there aren't many spaces to create the next area of heathland. So, we protect what we have and manage it as the dynamic, ever shifting mosaic that it is, just on a smaller scale.

Why is bare ground so important?

One of the best ways to ensure we have all the ingredients in the best balance is to have a lot of bare ground, upon which new heather and acid grasses and heathland plants like sheep's sorrel and heath bedstraw can colonise.

Heathland flora depends on impoverished soils to have the best chance at out-growing more competitive species. A build-up of nutrient rich material over the Sherwood sandstone means that these slower growing, acid loving plants are dominated and pushed out by quicker growing plants which ultimately start the transition back to woodland.

The work on this project aims to strip away the nutrient rich layer lying over the sandy soils and use it to create different features across the heath which will benefit different species.

The bare ground micro-habitat can be broken down even further to different types – vertical, sloped or horizontal aspects; loose rubble or heavily compacted; plain, sparsely or heavily vegetated; shaded or unshaded... all creating slightly different conditions into which certain species have carved their niche lifecycles.

Natural England have given us a target to increase the bare ground component of this SSSI heathland, to get it into favourable condition.

Without this work we may lose specialist wildlife and the heathland condition will further deteriorate.

What about access for visitors?

This project has also focused on some of the major paths through the heath, improving access for visitors while providing sandy homes for nature.

It will eventually mean a much more accessible site for visitors and management vehicles, but a better heathland base line to work from in future, saving money and effort as our management becomes more sustainable and effective.

What about archaeology?

Birklands and Bilhaugh – as this particular area of Nottinghamshire has also been known – is a place that already has a lot of historic land use mapped and interpreted, so it is fair to assume that Budby may well be hiding important features.

We have worked with archaeologists to gather data about the past land uses of the area.

Before the work began, Mercian Archaeology, and independent archaeological research company, pulled together much of the known information on the history of the site, including maps, written records, photos and LiDAR (Light Detecting and Ranging) imagery.

Any potential features identified within all this information was then 'ground truthed' by carrying out site surveys to find evidence on the ground.

To make sure we weren't causing any further damage to these potential features (because some of them have been disturbed by previous military use, which has also created modern archaeology), we designed our work to avoid them.

We have continued to work with the archaeologists to help interpret the landscape and develop the understanding of the Sherwood landscape.

Aren't you damaging the site and the wildlife already there?

We survey the reserve annually to understand what is nesting and feeding here. But we've only been collecting data here since 2015 so we work with some excellent naturalists to gain their input.

Some of them have been studying the wildlife here for decades and were generous enough to share their valuable species records and expertise in interpreting them to create the right conditions for all types of flora and fauna to thrive, not just survive.

We have only ever carried out work outside the breeding season, when things are less likely to be disturbed. We also worked in a phased approach to make sure only part of the reserve changed at one time, giving plenty of opportunity for dispersal.

Why are you putting up higher fences?

Grazing is an integral management tool for heathland and wood pasture habitats.

It keeps scrub encroachment at bay, creates different structures within the dwarf shrubs and grasses, sustains bare ground and provides a resource required by dung beetles! It does need to be in the right intensity, at the right time of year to have beneficial results though.

Conservation grazing has proven to work best by having a mix of livestock in low numbers over a large area for a long time. The old fencing was already beyond its expected life span and has now been removed.

It was originally designed to only hold sheep, so can't contain the English Longhorn cattle very well.

New, more robust and taller fencing will be pony and cattle proof and will give us more opportunity to try different grazing regimes as the habitat changes in the coming years.

When this new fence line nears the end of its life, we will look to see if we can reduce the number of fences across the heath. Extensive grazing is the ideal goal, but there is a lot of work to do before that will be an effective way to graze.

Why are you changing things?

If we had the whole countryside and infinite time with no man-made pressures, we probably would never need to intervene to save species from extinction; they would keep evolving to adapt to the conditions that slowly changed around them.

We simply don't have the luxury of scale within the landscape anymore. When the ancient woodlands and heathlands have been pushed out by other types of land use, it can't be replaced for decades if not centuries.

In that time, many less adaptable species will die out because they will have nowhere to live, breed and feed. Making space for nature isn't the only way to safeguard our wildlife, but it is one of the ways we can help create a resilient environment for everyone.

Quite honestly, if we do nothing and carry on putting the same pressures on the environment, many of our ecosystems will collapse.

Why are you making such a mess?!

Large scale conservation work can look a little raw at first and you are advised to wear your wellies when visiting Budby South Forest.

But some pioneer species see the initial stages of disturbance as an invitation to set up a new home. Birds like woodlarks love freshly turned over land to forage in, and often nest in or near recently cleared areas. Large red belted clearwing moths love freshly cut birch stumps to feed and lay their eggs. Green tiger beetles like freshly exposed compacted sand to dig their nest burrows.

In the following few years, it becomes more pleasant to human eyes as the edges soften and vegetation begins to show. These early stages of regrowth are another invitation to different species. Black oil beetles and their parasitic hosts, Ashy mining bees, like horizontal bare ground with short vegetation.

Heather seeds will burst into life after being buried and restricted by dense thatch. Stumps of oak, birch and willow will have regrown into low dense bushes, perfect for warblers.

After five or so years, you'd think it would have always been that way! The wildlife will have responded, and full ecosystems will have developed again, bringing a vibrant diversity to the area. By then we'll have created new areas of bare ground in the meantime to start the cycle again somewhere else.

In fifty years' time we'll hopefully have a wonderful, thriving and resilient landscape; a perfectly balanced mosaic of conditions to give nature a home for generations, meaning we won't have to intervene in the same way.

How long will the work take?

All the different stages of this three year project should be completed by Spring 2022

The reserve will still be open to visitors, but everyone should adhere to closures, cordons, diversions and safety advice given by the workers.

Who is paying for this?

We have been granted funding for the forestry works this year through Severn Trent's Great Big Nature Boost. It has allowed us to complete this larger than usual intervention in terms of tree management and really allow us to make the change needed by some of our heathland species.

Minor2Major (the National Lottery Heritage Funded-project covering north Nottinghamshire) has funded the bare ground and fencing work, after a competitive round of bidding.

Previously Biffa Award, Viridor Credits and Natural England have all contributed to this vital restoration work.

External funding for this kind of larger scale 'intervention' work to change the habitat means that the RSPB can continue to maintain the habitat.