



# *Verderers of the New Forest*

THE QUEEN'S HOUSE  
LYNDHURST  
HAMPSHIRE  
SO43 7NH

Official Verderer  
Oliver Crosthwaite Eyre

Telephone: 023 8028 3134  
Fax: 023 8028 3101

## NEW FOREST COUNTRYSIDE STEWARDSHIP SCHEME ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2008

1. **Introduction.** Of the 595 commoners who turned out stock this year, 426 took part in the Scheme. That figure includes 47 new members who became eligible to join for the first time. The number of animals which were entered once again exceeded the total of 5,000 to which the Scheme is limited, rising this year to just over 5,400. Payments have therefore been reduced proportionally to £55.00 [from the original figure of £60.00 per animal]. Significantly, the total number of animals recorded on the Marking Fee Register stayed below 7,000 for most of the Scheme year (6,992 as at 18 August) – eventually rising to just over the 7,000 mark in the latter half of September. On the welfare front, the very wet Spring caused some problems and more animals than usual were removed from the Forest because of a loss of condition – a total of 442 were removed at the request of the Agisters for this reason. That figure does not include others which were removed by their owners without prompting. Fortunately, the weather improved during April and the sudden growth of grass allowed the remaining animals to pick up condition quickly. The regular Winter and Spring welfare tours were well attended as always and, despite the problems in the second half of the Winter, the Verderers were again complimented on the condition of the animals on the Forest.

2. **Details Of Grazing Activities On The Open Forest 1 October 2007 – 30 September 2008.** Grazing activities followed a similar pattern to last year. Restrictions due to Blue Tongue and TB did not cause any significant problems, although a number of holdings were placed on an annual testing cycle for TB following a confirmed case outside the Forest in the late Summer. Concerns raised during the Winter over reported poaching of wet areas in parts of the Forest resulted in a number of site visits led by Diana Westerhoff of Natural England. Although some poaching by cattle was observed, this was not deemed to be excessive. In one area, where it was slightly more of a concern, it is hoped that the commoner may be persuaded to adjust his cattle feeding and turn out arrangements to reduce the potential for any damage caused by his cattle this coming Winter.

a. **Total numbers.** The total number of cattle, ponies, and donkeys on the Forest, up to the end of September 2008, rose to 7,108. The table below shows the number of each, and their relative percentage of the total, together with comparative figures for last year:

Stock	Number 2007	Percentage (of total) 2007	Number 2008	Percentage (of total) 2008
Ponies	4,470	63%	4,419	62%
Donkeys	118	2%	123	2%
Cattle	2,513	35%	2,566	36%
Total	7,101		7,108	

b. **New Members.** A total of 47 new members joined this year but, because of concerns over the number of animals on the Forest, restrictions have now been placed on further new membership. As a result, with the exception of commoners becoming eligible to join the

Scheme for the first time in 2008/9 (having turned out stock for 2 years), the Scheme is now closed to new members. This will be kept under review.

c. **Percentage of animals in the Scheme (On which payment for 2008/9 will be based).** The table below shows the total number of animals entered in the Scheme this year and the total number eligible.

<b>Stock</b>	<b>Total Entered in Scheme in 2008</b>	<b>Total Eligible</b>	<b>Percentage of Eligible Stock in Scheme</b>
Ponies	3,477	4,038	
Donkeys	71	86	
Cattle	1,890	2,175	
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,438</b>	<b>6,299</b>	<b>86.33%</b>

## **ASSESSMENT BY NATURAL ENGLAND**

3. **Statement on the Condition of Heathland and Pasture Woodland Managed under Countryside Stewardship.** Monitoring by Natural England in 2007/8 has shown that of the 6,300ha surveyed on the Crownland they are all in favourable condition. This is good news and reflects the value of continued grazing by commoners' stock. The maintenance of condition is also dependant on the continued management by the Forestry Commission and their management of bracken, and the removal of birch and Scot's pine where they are spreading on to open heathland habitats.(We will continue to monitor areas known to be used by high numbers of stock, often in relation to adjacent areas where they are fed, where these may compromise the condition of the wider area.. These areas will continue to be monitored on a separate basis.)

4. **Statement on any Areas of Land Defined by English Nature as Being in Unfavourable Condition, with Proposed Actions.** Last year we mentioned an area of approximately 3,500ha of wet heath and bog habitats which will remain unfavourable without measures to restore them being agreed. In 2008 the Forestry Commission, the New Forest National Park and Natural England signed a Memorandum of Agreement which provides a commitment on the part of those bodies to restore the areas to favourable condition. The work will be subject to consultation with the Verderers and commoners and some areas have already been agreed with works taking place this winter.

## **ADVISORY GROUP/COMMITTEE MEETINGS**

5. **Synopsis of the Activities of the Scheme Advisory Committee, Its Views and Opinions and the Response of the Verderers.**

- a. **Advisory Group.** The Advisory Group has met three times since the publication of my last report; meetings were held on 15 November 2007, and 15 April and 4 November 2008. The Group endorsed the decisions of the Sub Committee.
- b. **Verderers Sub Committee.** The Verderers' Sub Committee has also met three times since my last report – on 5 November 2007, and 9 April and 21 October 2008. The following new items have been approved:
  - The introduction of a £15.00 premium for cattle and registered pure bred New Forest ponies – to be paid in addition to the standard payment.
  - A revised form of wording for the inclusion of pigs in the Scheme.

- A reduced qualifying period of 21 days for pigs entered in the Scheme in the 2007 pannage season, due to the sparse fall of acorns last year.
- Members to be allowed to reduce the number of animals they turn out by up to 25% without any loss of premium – this measure to be introduced in next (2008/9) Scheme Year. Its purpose is to assist in reducing the number of animals turned out, by removing the financial incentive for members to maintain their stock levels at their maximum entitlement).
- A moratorium on new membership – except that commoners who are eligible for entry to the Scheme for the first time in 2008/9, having turned out stock for 2 years, will be allowed to join (*this is intended to avoid providing an incentive for new commoners to add to the number of animals on the Forest, and will be kept under review*).
- An annual contribution towards the cost of the Stallion Scheme – of up to £18,000.
- The exclusion of a member for the duration of the 2007/8 Scheme year, for failing to meet acceptable welfare standards.
- An annual grant of £4,000 towards the cost of the Forest Friendly Farming Post.
- A grant of £1,000.00 towards the administrative costs of the Young Commoners Group.
- A grant of £7,000.00 towards the cost of reflective collars.
- An annual payment of £40,000 to assist with the increasing payroll costs of the Agisters. This payment is in recognition of the contribution made by the Agisters to the management of the stock which is entered in the Scheme, and is also intended to benefit the commoners by avoiding the necessity for an increase in Marking Fees.
- Agreement in principle for the Verderers to enter into individual ‘grazing’ agreements with the owners of adjacent commons in support of their HLS agreements – subject to the owners remaining responsible for over/under grazing concerns/damage attributable to stock, on the commons concerned (this item has yet to be confirmed, and has been referred back to the Sub Committee for approval, following further discussion by the Advisory Group).

## SCHEME AREA

6. **Inclusion of Former Inclosures.** Following approval in 2006 for the former inclosures, which are now open to stock (and being grazed), to be added to the Scheme area, an RLE 1 application was submitted for a total of 2,227.34 hectares (853.82 ha LH4 [lowland grassland and heathland mosaic] and 1373.52 ha P1 [grazed woodland]). That has now been processed and the additional land has been added to the original Scheme area.

## ACTION PLAN

6. **Brief Proposals on Future Tasks and Activities.** An updated copy of the Scheme ‘Action Plan’ is attached at Annex A.

C F R DRAPER  
Scheme Manager

**ACTION PLAN**

Serial	Action	Target Date	Comment
1	Monitor pony/cattle ratios	Biannually	Satisfactory
2	Review annual payment and incentive payment levels	Biannually	See Report
3	Monitor impact of Single Payment Scheme on animal numbers depastured on the Forest	Biannually	Satisfactory
4	Formulate policy on encouraging/supporting depasturing of native breeds	May 06	Premium introduced for Registered New Forest Ponies
5	Monitor condition of supplementary feeding sites	Biannually	Satisfactory
6	Continue to support research into availability of back-up grazing	On-going	On going
7	Investigate inclusion of the Adjacent Commons within the Verderers' Countryside Stewardship Scheme	2006	Approved in principle, subject to confirmation, under individual HLS agreements with owners