

Caring for Formby's woodlands

THE STORY SO FAR....

The woodlands at Formby are an iconic and important habitat for many nationally rare species, including red squirrels. They form part of a wider Sefton Coast woodland corridor and have been managed within the Sefton Coast Woodland Forest Plan since 2003.

Formby's nature haven boasts a mosaic of wildlife habitats from grasslands, heathlands and plantation woodlands to some of Europe's best sands dunes. We're working on an updated plan to care for Formby's woodlands. Our aim is to create healthier woodland habitats, so that wildlife and people can thrive.

CHALLENGES

- * Formby's pine trees aren't native to the coast, some were planted over 100 years ago.
- * Plantation woodlands are much denser and regimented than nature intended.
- * Formby's woodlands are dominated by mature trees leaving little space for saplings to grow.
- * Dense, old trees create a dark and over-shaded environment limiting wildlife.
- * Natural coastal change squeezes the dune habitat against the woodlands, called 'coastal squeeze'.
- * This squeeze is limiting space and restricting the movement of the dunes.
- * Sand dunes need to be free to move; this creates the habitats rare species like sand lizards need.
- * Trees adjacent to the mobile dunes are being suffocated by the sand and dying.



Trees suffocated by sand



Dense mature trees blocking light



Two special habitats colliding

OPPORTUNITIES

- * Giving nature a helping hand so that these special habitats can co-exist.
- * Restoring Formby's woodland habitats by creating space for wildlife to thrive.
- * Allowing more light through the canopies to encourage new growth of wildflowers and saplings.
- * Improving the red squirrels food source – healthier trees with space to grow produce more pine cones.
- * Creating a more natural woodland with a varying age structure and greater mix of species.
- * Providing more dead wood habitat for small mammals, reptiles and insects to hunt or hide in.
- * Attracting more insects, butterflies and nesting birds to live here by creating more space and light.
- * Improving access for people to connect with nature.



Red squirrel foraging for food



Pyramidal orchid



Speckled wood

Creating space for wildlife to thrive

Formby's woodlands provide homes for thousands of species of plants, animals and fungi. Through the updated 10 year woodland management plan we'll be giving nature a helping hand, restoring and nurturing these precious habitats. We'll be using tried and tested woodland management conservation techniques including;

- Thinning many of the young and adolescent plantations which are densely packed and lack sufficient sunlight to grow and mature, allowing more sunlight to reach favoured trees.
- Thinning out mature stands of conifer in order to allow more light to the woodland floor to provide suitable habitats for rare ground flora such as dune helleborine and smooth cat's ear.
- Controlling and removing invasive plant species, including Himalayan balsam, Japanese knotweed and rhododendron.
- Leaving dead standing timber and fallen timber in situ, to act as good habitat for insects (where appropriate in terms of tree and fire safety).
- Creating dune corridors and glades to enhance the suitability of woodland for foraging and commuting bats.
- Felling and restocking areas of mature pine trees with a mixture of young pine species.
- Retaining woodland corridors across site to allow red squirrels to move and adapt.
- Encouraging a mixture of native broadleaf species to develop where appropriate.
- Establishing and re-establishing compartments which are appropriate, or historically have been coppiced (cutting back to ground level to stimulate growth).
- Removing old and redundant plantation fencing and tree guards.
- Investigating opportunities to offset and create woodlands outside of the Formby property.
- Removing mature undesirable poplar in the Ravenmeols area restoring the dune grasslands.
- Restoring Larkhill Heath to a dune heath through felling work and scrub control.
- Re-wetting Brook's Fen through felling and coppicing of alder, willow and birch.



Red squirrel in the canopies



Dune helleborine



Trees shaped by coastal winds

FASCINATING FACTS

- * Formby has 112 hectares of woodlands, the majority being plantation Corsican and Scots pine.
- * The first area of woodland to be planted was by the Formby Family in 1784 and is known as 'Firwood' in Albert Road.
- * Much of Formby's woodlands is protected as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).
- * Red squirrels lead solitary lives and tend to roam in individual territories of around 1 km.
- * When the plantation was first created, access was heavily restricted and permission needed.
- * In WW2 German bombers mistook the woodland at night for darkened Liverpool and dropped bombs, causing extensive fires.

Connecting people with nature

We're committed to involving the local community and those who love to visit in our conservation work by providing regular updates and opportunities to connect with nature. We'll do this in and around the woodlands by:

- Sharing information on our website and social media around our conservation work to care for Formby's woodlands.
- Organising walk and talk tours and drop in sessions for those interested in finding out more.
- Exploring opportunities to create 'woodland walks' to share information and educate people about the woodlands at Formby and the species which live here.
- Collaborating with local groups to create community woodland opportunities on site, in particular at Wicks Lake.
- Providing opportunities for educational groups to benefit from the woodlands through self-led visits, including a potential new educational area in Kirklake woodlands.
- Maintaining and improving the current well-established and accessible path networks across the woodlands.



WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

- * The updated woodland management plan outlines conservation work to be carried out over the next 10 years from 2021-2031.
- * Some of the work will be carried out by the ranger team at Formby but we will also be working with specialist contractors.
- * We've also created a dedicated volunteer group who are supporting our work to care for Formby's woodlands.
- * Much of this conservation work will be ongoing throughout the 10 years including tasks such as tree guard and old fencing removal, access improvements, invasive species removal, and scrub control.
- * Any felling work will take place only in the winter months.
- * The thinning work will be spread out during the course of the 10-year cycle, to minimise disruption to woodland species and visitors.
- * We'll be providing regular updates on our social media and website highlighting specific work as and when it happens.
- * If you would like to find out more about our plans to care for Formby's woodlands and register your interest in a walk and talk tour with a ranger, please email formby@nationaltrust.org.uk.

Together we can care for and protect Formby's precious woodlands
so that they are here for everyone to enjoy, for ever.