

Biodiversity, Forestry and Wood

Confor's latest report highlights that UK wood production done right benefits biodiversity in all types of forest, and protects global forests.



Enclosed with this edition of FTN is Confor's new report on Biodiversity, Forestry and Wood. The importance of forests in the UK as biodiversity habitat has been rising up the political agenda. This report seeks to explore how the forestry industry, through wood production, also sustains and improves places for nature.

The report answers three key questions:

- 1 How do forests that are created and managed for wood production, mainly conifer forests, support biodiversity?
- 2 What role can wood production play in increasing the habitat value of broadleaf woodlands?
- 3 In a global context, how will wood production in the UK help reduce global threats to biodiversity by supplying a low-carbon resource and taking pressure off valuable natural forests around the world?

Why is this report important for our sector?

The benefits of forestry in the context of climate change have been increasingly highlighted in the general media. However, there is always a backlash to sudden, positive media attention; in the case of forestry, environmental organisations have argued that commercial forests will exacerbate the nature emergency, and that native woodland should be planted instead.

Confor has never denied the value of native woodlands as habitats for wildlife; however, it was important to come up with evidence that productive forests can also deliver for biodiversity, and that managing native or broadleaved forests for timber can have a positive effect on wildlife habitats.

We realised that there was no comprehensive study to provide an evidence-based argument that would hold up in discussions with opponents of productive forestry.



The report is a tool to communicate to policy-makers and beyond what you, our members, are doing for biodiversity.

Key messages

- 1 Forests planted in the UK for wood production have significant biodiversity value
- 2 Wood production can help improve the condition of native woodlands
- 3 Home-grown wood is important for biodiversity beyond the local forest
- 4 We already possess the knowledge, tools and frameworks to deliver wood production and biodiversity benefits simultaneously
- 5 Further research is needed!

The report is aimed primarily at policymakers, who are making key decisions about planting targets, wood use, environmental support, woodland approval processes, which will shape our forests for decades and centuries to come.

We went beyond research - we listened. Environmental NGOs have not only received the report but some of them have been actively involved in its creation. This engagement will be especially important for our future relationship with environmental lobbying groups.

Eleanor M Harris, the author of the report, has not only gathered the most relevant evidence to show that commercial conifer forests can indeed represent valuable habitats for wildlife. She has done so in constant dialogue with researchers and environmentalists, taking on board all the comments and constructive criticisms she has received.

The resulting document offers a resounding demonstration that biodiversity, forestry and wood can go together, and is a great tool to communicate what the forestry and timber sector is doing well to policy makers and the wider public.





Managing a forest for timber?

Six simple measures to boost biodiversity in your forest

- 1 **Put up bird boxes.** Many UK forests, native or commercial, are simply too young to have veteran trees, so hole nesting opportunities are limited. Boxes for birds that usually nest in them, such as barn owl or pied flycatcher, can enable these often threatened species to re-colonise forest habitat. Invite local wildlife group and school children to do the work for you!
- 2 **Identify future veterans and old-growth areas.** If you are going above-and-beyond one UKWAS requirement, make it this. We don't have nearly enough old trees in our forests and woodlands, but you can change that for the future.
- 3 **Deadwood is dead good.** Stumps, fallen trees and standing deadwood are one of the richest habitats for fungi, invertebrates, mosses and other wildlife which underpin the food chain. Make best use of your harvest – but be strategic about what you leave behind as well, it's not waste, it's wildlife wealth.
- 4 **Bring in recorders.** If your forest is doing great things for wildlife but no-one knows it, no-one will follow your good practice or support your management. Get the local wildlife group or other interested groups to run a recording project in your wood or new woodland creation project and demonstrate the value of what you're doing.
- 5 **Thin and coppice.** Bringing an old coppice back into management, or thinning a young spruce plantation, are both great for wildlife by bringing light down to the forest floor, creating deadwood and diversifying the woodland structure. Even if you are 'only' producing firewood, it's firewood with a local conservation story that can sell at a premium.
- 6 **Manage non-woodland habitats.** Grassland, heathland, peatland and wetland habitats are all part of the forest ecosystem and add to ecological diversity 'ecosystem services'. Consider improving non-woodland habitats by a programme of ditch blocking on drained peatlands.



Why is this report important for our members?

The Confor report is a tool to communicate to policy makers and beyond what you, our members, are doing for biodiversity.

You know you're doing a great job – but did you know just how much?

This report can give you detailed insight into the biodiversity benefits of the work you are doing every day, whether you

are creating a productive woodland on bare land or whether you are managing an existing woodland. You will feel proud after reading it!

Communication 'ammunition' – be prepared when challenged.

The report gives you the communication tools and arguments to explain why productive forestry can deliver for

biodiversity, and how you and your business contribute to it.

Whether you get challenged in a stakeholder conversation, have to defend your position in a pub chat or simply want to talk to dog walkers or local communities – you'll be glad to know the facts and background story.