Selected press articles

The Times, 2018

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News

Saturday De

Rivers straightened by Victorians given their natural curves back

Jerome Starkey
Countryside Correspondent

For centuries it was seen as improving the land as man stamped his will on nature by straightening streams to drain the bogs for the sake of lusher pasture.

Now conservationists in the New Forest are righting what they see as the wrongs of their Victorian forebears by re-bending the brooks and rivulets that formerly snaked through Hampshire. It is part of a ten-year project to improve wildlife habitat and reduce the risk of flooding downstream.

The Victorians thought that draining the land would make grass grow better for their livestock. It is a practice that many farmers still follow, as waterlogged fields are unsuitable for cattle.

Ecologists have argued that in many places drainage went too far, with unforeseen consequences for wildlife. Straightening the rivers increased the speed at which the water flowed, which meant it formed deeper channels with steeper banks and carried away nutrients from the surrounding area. The faster flow also eroded the boggy banks that are important wetland habitats.

Slowing the flow by reintroducing meanders means the rivers can hold more water for longer during periods of heavy rainfall, while banks will become shallower and easier for people and wildlife to cross.

Nick Wardlaw, who manages the project on behalf of the Forestry Commission, said that resetting the land would improve grazing. He said wetter fields supported more biodiversity and slower streams were easier for cattle to drink from.

"Higher banks mean that water cannot escape from the channels into the surrounding habitats, which then dry out and fail to support the vast number of plant life and wildlife that depend on this," Mr Wardlaw said.

Among species likely to benefit are the large marsh grasshoppers, which in England is found only in three locations, and the ground-nesting curlew, which is endangered.

"Allowing water to flow naturally and meander through the landscape slows it down during periods of high rainfall, limiting erosion and reducing the risk of flooding further downstream and in built-up areas," Mr Wardlaw said. Last year engineers completed four miles of restoration on streams at Wootton, near Burley, and Pondhead, near Lyndhurst. There were smaller restoration projects in Deadman Bottom, in the north of the New Forest, and at Ferny Crofts in the south.

The original courses are identified with the help of old maps and laser mapping. The meanders are then excavated and filled with local gravel and material from the existing riverbed to reduce disruption to wildlife in the waterway. Water is then diverted into the newly dug channel.

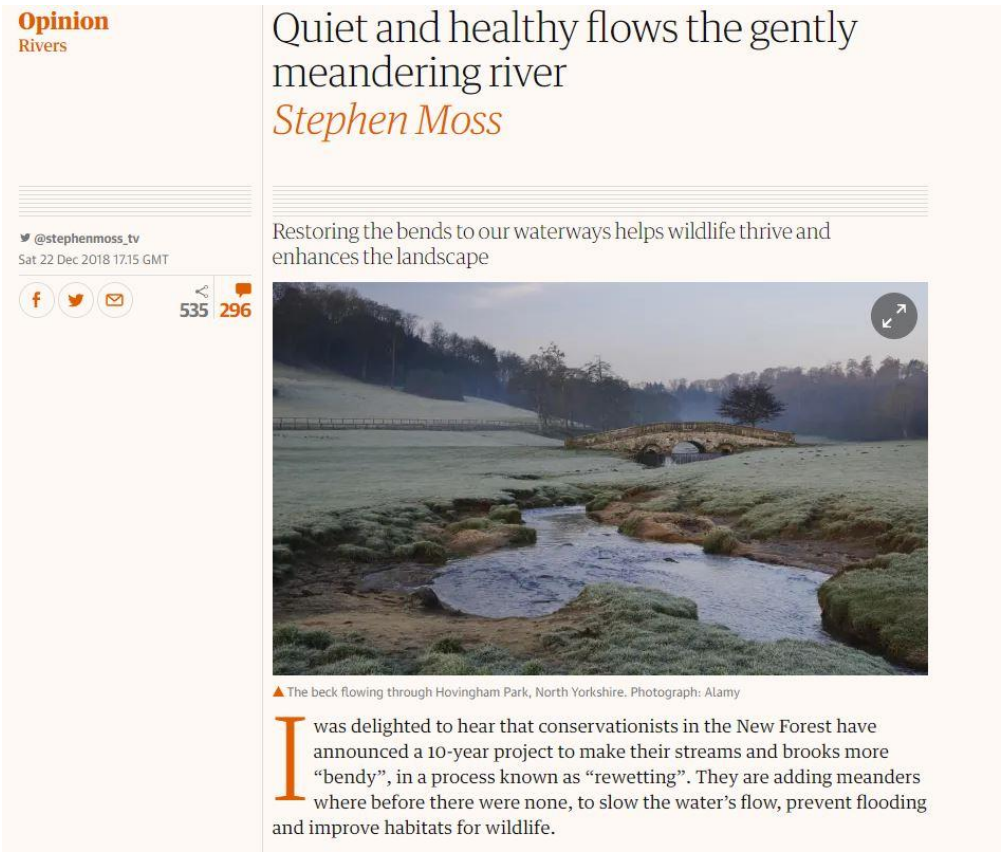
The project is a collaboration between Natural England, the national park authority, the Verderers of the New Forest and the Forestry Commission. It has been funded by a stewardship scheme that rewards landowners for environmental improvements.

"The focus is to protect the very special nature of this forest and the unique habitat it provides for rare and endangered wildlife," Mr Wardlaw said.

Similar "rewetting" projects are under way across Britain, including in parts of the Norfolk fens and on Dartmoor. Mr Wardlaw said the New Forest project would take "many years" to see the benefits. "We hope it will have a real impact on helping these areas and the habitats they support to thrive long into the future," he said.

The

Guardian, 2018



Opinion
Rivers

Quiet and healthy flows the gently meandering river

Stephen Moss

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Sat 22 Dec 2018 17.15 GMT

535 296

Restoring the bends to our waterways helps wildlife thrive and enhances the landscape

▲ The beck flowing through Hovingham Park, North Yorkshire. Photograph: Alamy

I was delighted to hear that conservationists in the New Forest have announced a 10-year project to make their streams and brooks more "bendy", in a process known as "rewetting". They are adding meanders where before there were none, to slow the water's flow, prevent flooding and improve habitats for wildlife.

Daily Mail, 2018

Rivers straightened by Victorians to 'improve the land' are now being given their natural curves back under a 10-year project aimed at enhancing wildlife habitat

- **Victorians straightened the rivers due to beliefs that it would improve the land**
- **Conservationists in the New Forest are putting bends back into its streams**
- **Their meddling caused the water to run much faster through the channels**
- **It will preserve wildlife that have been damaged by the straightened rivers**

By CHARLOTTE DEAN FOR MAILONLINE
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Rivers which were straightened during Victorian times due to the belief that it would improve the land are now being given their natural curves back.

Conservationists in the New Forest are righting a wrong made by their Victorian counterparts by putting bends back into its streams to help preserve wildlife.

New Forest Post, 2018

Bringing the New Forest's rivers back to life

Sarah Oakley
Higher Level Stewardship Ecologist

NATURAL streams transport water through the lowest point in the floodplain, which if you think about it, is the path of least resistance – and as a result, natural channels have many twists and turns as they meander through the landscape, creating pools here and faster flowing riffles there.

I'm part of a small team in the New Forest that has more than 40 years of experience in re-instating these natural curves in Forest streams, infilling deep man-made drains, and reducing damaging erosion in our fragile mires. So far, more than ten miles of historical drainage channels have been successfully restored to naturally meandering streams, and this summer we completed another one-and-a-half miles at Wootton.

The Wootton riverine woodlands follow the course of Avon Water across the open Forest, starting about 750m downstream of the A35 and continuing to the edge of Sway village. The work that has been done here will slow the water flow, allowing time for the wetland habitats to absorb the rainfall and helping to prevent flash floods that can pose a risk to local properties downstream. By restoring the natural watercourses we are helping to make sure the Avon Water and the surrounding habitats are more resilient in both winter floods and summer droughts.

At Wootton, the artificial channel was restored to its original meandering flow path, reconnecting it with the forested floodplain and so reducing the speed of the water moving through the area during heavy rain. In addition, a series of riffle and pool sequences were created to provide flow diversity within the channel. These features allow a much greater mixture of both plants and animals to thrive, living in lots of varied micro-habitats and supporting all stages of their life cycles, from dragonfly nymphs hunting in the river weed, to sea trout spawning on the gravels of the stream bed.

The New Forest has many designations that highlight why we need to undertake this restoration. It's a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), a Special Area of Conservation (SAC), Special Protection Area for Birds (SPA) and also a Ramsar site (a wetland of international importance).

This project is funded by the New Forest Higher Level Stewardship scheme, which is drawn from European and central government to spend on environmental restoration projects. It's part of a ten-year scheme, administered by Natural England, which is held by the Verderers and managed by them in partnership with the Forestry Commission and the New Forest National Park Authority.

Although the re-creation of the old meanders is now complete on the upstream half of the site (as far as Wootton Bridge) and the channel has been reconnected, there is still work to be done downstream. The next step begins in May 2018, when we will continue the work on the stretch of river downstream of Wootton Bridge car park.

We'll also continue to collect post-restoration fish, invertebrate and vegetation data to help gather an even greater range of scientifically robust evidence about the effectiveness of restoration techniques.

Walkers and riders will be pleased to know that stock crossings and passageways have been re-done as part of the work. The end result will help to protect the SSSI habitats of the New Forest, and prevent fast flows eroding away chunks of river bank and flooding land and properties downstream.

We'd like to reassure New Forest users that the final phase of the work in this area will cause as little disruption as possible to footpaths and cycle tracks. We'd like to thank all the local residents and businesses that have worked with us, supported this project and helped us to safeguard these habitats for future generations.

For more information about the HLS Scheme visit: hlsnewforest.org.uk/

Lymington Times, 2017

Lapwings return as wetland restoration gives extra habitat

RARE lapwing chicks have been spotted in a recently restored New Forest wetland habitat.

Seen feeding at a stream near Stoney Cross, which was restored to its naturally shallow, winding state in 2014, the wading species has declined by 48% in the last 25 years.

Juvenile lapwings are now an uncommon sight in the south of England as they are often disturbed by people, attacked by predators or suffer from loss of habitat, putting them on the RSPB's red list of threatened species.

The two young chicks have now flown the nest after benefiting from the Forestry Commission's restoration work to improve the streamside, which involved raising the bed levels and reinstating its natural meanders.

Andy Page, head of wildlife management at the FC, said: "Lapwing and other breeding waders need wetland habitats to provide feeding areas for their chicks at this time of year."

Since 2010, more than nine miles of waterways have been restored, improving the damage caused by artificial straightening of streams since the Victorian era. This work is funded by the New Forest Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) scheme.

He continued: "It's so rewarding to see these chicks using the natural streams and wet margins that we have restored under the HLS scheme, which is vital habitat for ground-nesting birds in the New Forest.

"Numbers of lapwing have been falling locally over recent years, so it's encouraging to see these chicks as a sign that our hard work may be paying off, although we still have some way to go to restore waterways and improve the number of ground-nesting bird numbers in the area."

Birds such as lapwing, curlew and redshank head to the Forest's wetlands between March and the end of July as wet and open areas are perfect for them to breed.

For years these habitats have been disappearing across the south of England, but wetland restoration schemes are working to reverse this trend.

Research has found that HLS work on "maintaining and, where possible, enhancing the water-holding ability of the various mire systems within the New Forest is crucial to maintaining viable populations of breeding waders".

The 10 year HLS agreement with Natural England is held by the verderers of the New Forest. The scheme is managed by them in partnership with the Forestry Commission and the New Forest National Park Authority.