

Acorns of Lyndhurst

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The New Forest National Park

The New Forest is Britain's newest and also smallest national park in the UK . It was created 1st March 2005, and it's located between Southampton & Bournemouth in the county of Hampshire, in the south of England.

It's not actually a new forest at all, at over 900 years old, it was created in 1079 by William I (William the Conqueror) as an area in which to hunt deer and it was originally named Nova Foresta, hence the name today of New Forest.

The Forest covers some 93,000 acres (145 square miles) in area and is the largest unenclosed area in Southern England. The New Forest consists of a mixture of native deciduous and coniferous woodland, heaths, bogs, streams and estuaries. Many people live in the New Forest but its most famous inhabitants are 3,000 four-legged locals known as the New Forest Ponies. These animals are free to roam where they will, as they have for centuries, but they are actually owned by commoners with rights of pasture in the park. This unique pony breed traces its lineage back nearly a thousand years.

The deer of the New Forest are the very reason why the area was designated as a royal hunting ground back in 1079 by King William I. There are five different species in the New Forest, only two of which are native to Britain. These are the [red deer](#) and much smaller [roe deer](#). The three other species are the [fallow deer](#), [sika deer](#) and the [muntjac deer](#). These latter two species are found in just a few selective areas of the Forest and extremely elusive; their small physical size and the fact that there aren't many of them make spotting these animals very difficult indeed.



Red deer of the New Forest, though the biggest of all British deer species, are also elusive and comparatively few in number (numbers are kept to about 100, with an annual cull carried out by the Forestry Commission).

The open heathland around the Burley area and Ober Heath, near Brockenhurst, are good places to see these majestic animals that are more associated with the highlands of Scotland than southern England. The deer are most active at dawn and dusk. A very distinctive characteristic of the red deer is its bark – the loud and throaty bellow is a privilege to hear!

Fallow deer, pictured right, are the most common of the New Forest deer species and have distinctive markings during certain times of the year - the classic 'Bambi' spots can be seen on the flanks of the deer during the summer months, along with distinctive black stripes around the tail area. The bucks (males) can grow impressive antlers, the span of which can be up to 4 or 5 times the width of the animal's head.

These deer are widespread throughout the New Forest and, although shy, are numerous enough to be easily seen during a quiet [forest walk](#).

A place to see fallow deer is the [Bolderwood Deer Sanctuary](#).



Roe deer are also numerous but their smaller size makes them harder to see, especially amongst the thicker undergrowth. Roe deer have distinctive black noses and for much of the year they have a uniform gingery-brown coat. A roe buck's antlers are small with few branches, unlike the fallow's.



The Forestry Commission cull around 800 deer annually; this is a necessary action to protect the vegetation of the New Forest, as there are no natural predators to control deer numbers.

Reptiles

Because of its southerly location and relatively warmer climate, the New Forest is home to all of Britain's species of snakes and lizards.

The most notorious of these is the [adder](#), (shown right) Britain's only venomous snake. The distinctive 'zig-zag' pattern running the entire length of the snake's body makes it very easily identifiable, and during the warmer summer months adders are likely to be seen basking in the sunshine on the edge of pathways and tracks.



Like most snakes, adders are easily scared and will disappear into the undergrowth at the slightest sign of an approaching human or dog. Other snakes found in the New Forest are [grass snakes](#) and [smooth snakes](#), the latter being the rarest of Britain's snakes.



Both species of British lizard, the common lizard and the [sand lizard](#), can also be seen in the Forest although you have to have sharp eyes!

The unmistakable sand lizard is Britain's rarest reptile and only survives in certain areas of the New Forest now thanks to a successful breeding and re-release program. The sandy open heathlands are this animal's preferred habitat, with the coarse heather providing excellent protection from natural predators.

As well as snakes and lizards, the New Forest is also home to toads, frogs and three different species of newt which can be seen in many of the Forest's smaller temporary ponds during the spring months.

A fine place to try and see all of the New Forest's reptiles is the [New Forest Reptile Centre](#), near Lyndhurst.

Wild With Flowers

The park is home to some 700 wildflower species, about a third of Britain's total, and 2,700 different fungi.

Did you realise though that the National Park also has a coastline?

The coast is a mix of wildlife-rich shingle, saltmarsh, lagoons and mudflats, and has a strong maritime heritage. The New Forest District has a coastline of some forty miles long with 26 miles of that being inside the National Park. Around 90% of it has some form of nature conservation designation and it is host to many important habitats and species. It is also part of the wider Solent and one of the world's most famous locations for sailing. With traditional fishing and water based industries it is a fascinating mix of varied interests.

Shipbuilding Legacy

The forest is also home to Buckler's Hard, an 18th-century shipbuilding village on the Beaulieu River where local oaks were crafted into ships that served in the fleet Admiral Lord Nelson led to victory at Trafalgar. Some Middle Eastern countries once imported New Forest conifers to become masts for their traditional dhows.

Lyndhurst is the largest village in the New Forest and became the natural 'capital' of the area when William the Conqueror established his hunting grounds here. For centuries, Lyndhurst was the haunt of royalty, nobility and commoner alike. Kings and Queens regularly visited Lyndhurst's own manor house. Now known as Queens House, the former manor is still home to Verderers' Hall, the meeting place of the ancient Verderers' Court whose history stretches back to at least the 13th century.

A must for any visitor is the New Forest Centre which is home to the New Forest Museum, Gift Shop, Reference Library and Visitor Information Centre. The museum gives a unique insight into the Forest's history and heritage.

Alice Liddell (later Hargreaves), the inspiration for Alice in Lewis Carroll's Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, lived in Lyndhurst and is buried in the graveyard of the church of St. Michael and All Angels. With an impressive 49 metre spire, this magnificent Gothic church is worth a visit.