

Wyre Forest Nature Reserve is largest native woodland in England

Wyre Forest has today become the largest woodland National Nature Reserve (NNR) in England. NNRs are designated by Natural England and are rare, precious areas which protect some of our country's most important places for wildlife and geology.

The Wyre Forest reserve, which dates back to at least the year 900, has been extended by almost 900 hectares so that it now spreads over 1,455 hectares. This equivalent to 1700 football pitches. The forest, which straddles the Worcestershire and Shropshire border is managed by Natural England and Forestry England and includes Worcestershire Wildlife Trust land.

The nation's forests play a vital role in tackling climate change and biodiversity loss as well as providing a source of sustainable, home-grown timber; carbon capture and places for people to enjoy. This extension recognises the importance of managing forests sustainably, so they have long-term, positive benefits for wildlife, people and the climate.

The Wyre Forest NNR features a diverse array of habitats from forest to open grassland meadows, old orchards and areas of scrub, to steep-sided valleys, created by geological faults. It is home to a vast array of wildlife including protected mammals, reptiles and birds. Its butterfly and moth populations are significant, with 58% of the UK's butterfly species recorded here.

Natural England Chair Tony Juniper said:

This very significant expansion of the Wyre Forest National Nature Reserve marks another important step toward Nature recovery in England. These reserves protect some of the finest examples of our natural environment, and by expanding their size we not only protect more wildlife but also help different species cope as the effects of climate change take hold.

Wyre Forest is a mosaic of woodlands, ravines, grasslands and scrub, and it is exactly this kind of varied habitat that we must create more of if we are to improve the prospects for some of our most beautiful and interesting wild species, including butterflies such as the White Admiral and Wood White.

This is now England's largest native forest nature reserve, presenting a fine example of the kinds of woodlands we should strive to create more of into the future, not only catching carbon, but providing a variety of additional benefits. With Birmingham nearby, improved health and wellbeing for people will be one of those.

Kevin Stannard, Forest Management Director, Forestry England's West District, said:

Our nation's forests play a critical role in tackling the climate crisis and biodiversity loss that we are seeing globally. Resilient woodlands, well-adapted to the changing climate conditions we now expect, help us capture carbon, improve air quality, create beautiful places for wildlife to flourish and opportunities for people to connect with the natural world.

As the country's largest land manager, Forestry England is working to grow our future by carefully planning and expertly managing world-class forests for future generations. Becoming the largest woodland National Nature Reserve in England is a recognition of the unique features that make Wyre Forest so special and the vital role this landscape plays in providing valuable habitats, a sustainable source of timber and a place for people to explore and enjoy.

Colin Raven, Director, Worcestershire Wildlife Trust, said:

The Wyre Forest is home to amazing and rare wildlife, and we're delighted that the National Nature Reserve is being expanded. As well as the wonders of wildflowers, fungi, reptiles and mammals, there are a number of bird species that are very sensitive to disturbance so having more protected land should help to give them a real boost. Wildlife doesn't recognise borders, so we need more, bigger, better, and connected landscapes for nature.

Nature's recovery isn't just about protected areas; we need more nature everywhere if we are to halt its decline. This expansion is a great start in helping to reach our target of 30% of land managed for the benefit of nature by 2030 and we hope that it will inspire residents throughout the Wyre Forest and beyond to think about how they can also provide space for nature.

Wyre Forest is a rare example of an ecologically diverse woodland situated close to a large population centre with Birmingham 20 miles from the site. The visitor centre welcomes around 350,000 people each year, and gives people access to explore the wider forest. Visitor numbers have risen during the COVID-19 pandemic, as more people have recognised that getting outside and exploring local green spaces can have great benefits on their health and wellbeing.