

The Charnwood Forest Living Landscape Project aims to conserve and enhance the unique wildlife, geology and character of Charnwood Forest.

The project, led by the Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust and supported by Aggregate Industries, will work alongside farmers, landowners, businesses and local communities to:

- Protect and enhance the best sites for wildlife
- Create new habitats and reconnect fragmented areas
- Maintain important geological features
- Allow space for natural processes to operate
- Encourage less intensive land use and management
- Support a sustainable local economy
- Promote greater recognition, understanding and enjoyment of Charnwood Forest’s natural assets

The Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust and local naturalists have long been involved in the Charnwood Forest. Managing 800 acres of land and with many local members, the Trust has a lasting commitment to Charnwood Forest.



What can the project offer?

- Free wildlife surveys and advice on positive and practical management
- Input to grant applications, such as agri-environment schemes
- Guidance on other sources of funding
- A small grant scheme for habitat management work
- Support for tourism businesses with wildlife related activities, such as farm trails
- Free talks to local groups and organisations

History of Charnwood Forest

Covering around 16,600 hectares the landscape of the Charnwood Forest is strikingly different to anywhere else in the East Midlands. Craggy hilltops, dry stone walls, fast flowing streams, ancient woodlands and open views define this unique area. The volcanic geology, comprising some of England’s oldest rocks, combined with the dynamic relationship between people and natural forces is the key to this landscape and its diverse wildlife.

Volcanoes and ice

The story of Charnwood Forest began in Precambrian times 600 million years ago. Violent volcanic eruptions formed mountains which, over vast periods of time, have worn away into low craggy hills. Deserts and ice sheets have come and gone and, since the ice last retreated in Britain about 11,000 years ago, people have settled in increasingly large numbers, transforming the land themselves.

Our vision is for a Charnwood Forest that has a healthy environment, rich in geology, wildlife and wild places. There will be opportunities for people to learn about and enjoy the beautiful and exceptional landscape, set in a working environment. It will be a place where wildlife can move freely and not be confined to a few special sites, and natural processes are allowed to function - in other words a living landscape.

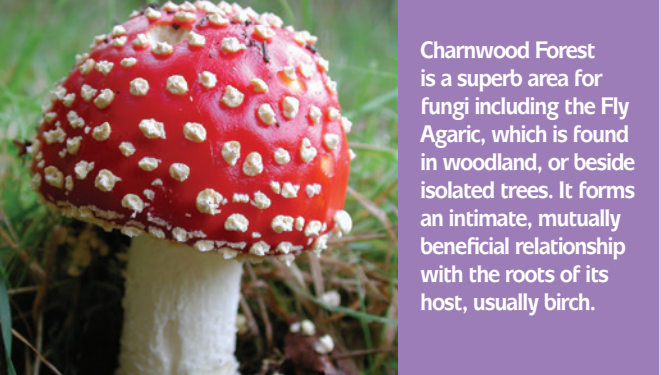
Woodland to wide open space

Until just a few thousand years ago Charnwood Forest is likely to have been covered in trees, perhaps with a few open areas where large animals such as deer and the now extinct Aurochs grazed. Wolf, Brown Bear and Beaver would also have been present, to name but a few. Then, as people took to farming instead of hunting and gathering, they cut down most of the trees to create extensive areas of arable and grazing land. By the late eighteenth century Charnwood Forest probably looked like a small, wetter, version of modern day Dartmoor, or a large Bradgate Park. There would have been wide open spaces of rough grazing land, boggy in places, with patches of Heather and Bilberry around the crags and dirt tracks throughout.

Enclosures and future change

The Enclosure Act of 1808 changed all of that. Land was drained and ploughed, and the landscape became one of small fields bounded by hedges and walls, with just a few remnants of the former open landscape. Nevertheless, wildlife was still abundant, but it became increasingly threatened in the twentieth century by more intensive land use.

One thing for certain is that the landscape will continue to change in the future. Our goal is to ensure that these changes occur without compromising the wildlife and wild places of Charnwood Forest.



We welcome your involvement and support in this project, whether you are a landowner, farmer, naturalist, parish, civic body or local resident.

Two things you could do for wildlife in the Charnwood Forest as a:

Farmer/landowner:

- Get in touch and tell us about your land, plans and ideas
- Improve the wildlife habitats on your land perhaps through joining an agri-environment scheme

Local resident:

- Join the Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust
- Create a wild area in your garden, or think about the wildlife in your home - do you have bats in your roof or House Martins under your eaves?

Visitor:

- Follow the countryside code - take only photos and leave only foot prints
- If you have enjoyed spending time in the area think about donating to the Leicestershire & Rutland Wildlife Trust

Local authority/Parish council:

- Ensure that you have the information and policies needed to protect the special quality of Charnwood Forest
- Support the Charnwood Forest Living Landscape Project

Local business:

- Join the Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust as a corporate member
- Think about your land or buildings and how they could be managed in a wildlife friendly way



Leicestershire & Rutland Wildlife Trust



Photo credits: Green winged orchid (Paul Lane), Common buzzard (Steve Waterhouse), Trout (Amy Lewis), Spider *tetragnatha extensa* (Les Binns), Cropston Reservoir (Terry Davies), Natterer’s bat (Bat Conservation Trust) with thanks to Leicestershire & Rutland Bat Group, Bluebells (Terry Davies), Fly Agaric (Les Binns), Forester Moth (Steve Woodward). Other photos (LRWT).

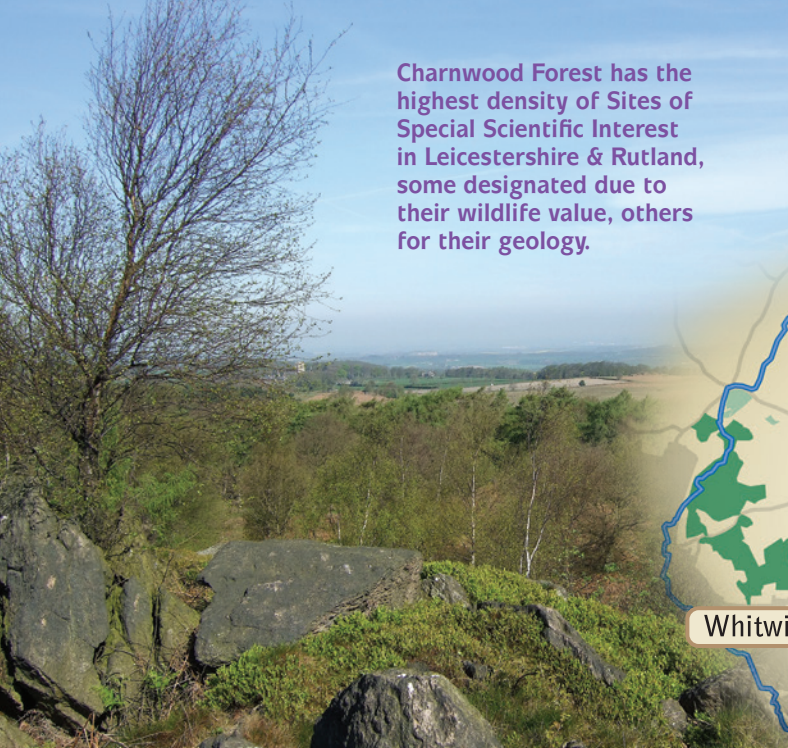
Leicestershire & Rutland Wildlife Trust is working to protect and enhance the wildlife and wild places of Leicestershire and Rutland and to engage people with their local environment. Our vision is for a Living Landscape rich in wildlife, valued and enjoyed by all.

For further information please contact:
Claire Install cinstall@lrwt.org.uk 0116 248 7367
Uta Hamzaoui uhamzaoui@lrwt.org.uk 0116 248 7364
John Bristow jbristow@lrwt.org.uk 0116 248 7365.

Registered office: The Old Mill
9 Soar Lane, Leicester, LE3 5DE.
website: www.lrwt.org.uk
Charity No. 210531 Company Reg. No. 561833

Printed on recycled paper.



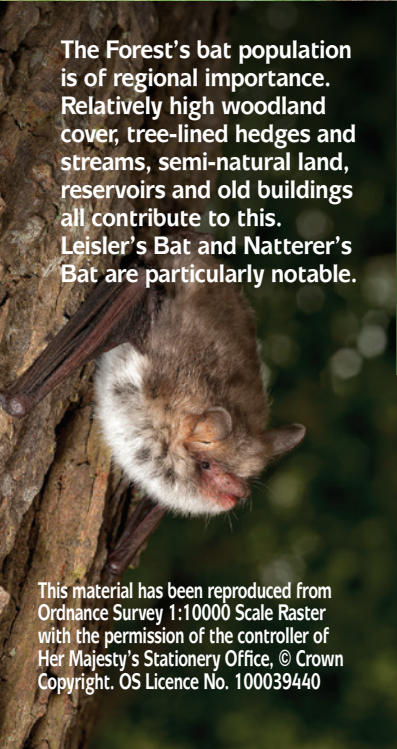


Charnwood Forest has the highest density of Sites of Special Scientific Interest in Leicestershire & Rutland, some designated due to their wildlife value, others for their geology.

The rocks moulding the Charnwood landscape date back through 600 million years of time, and contain fossils of some of the earliest large organisms to have evolved.

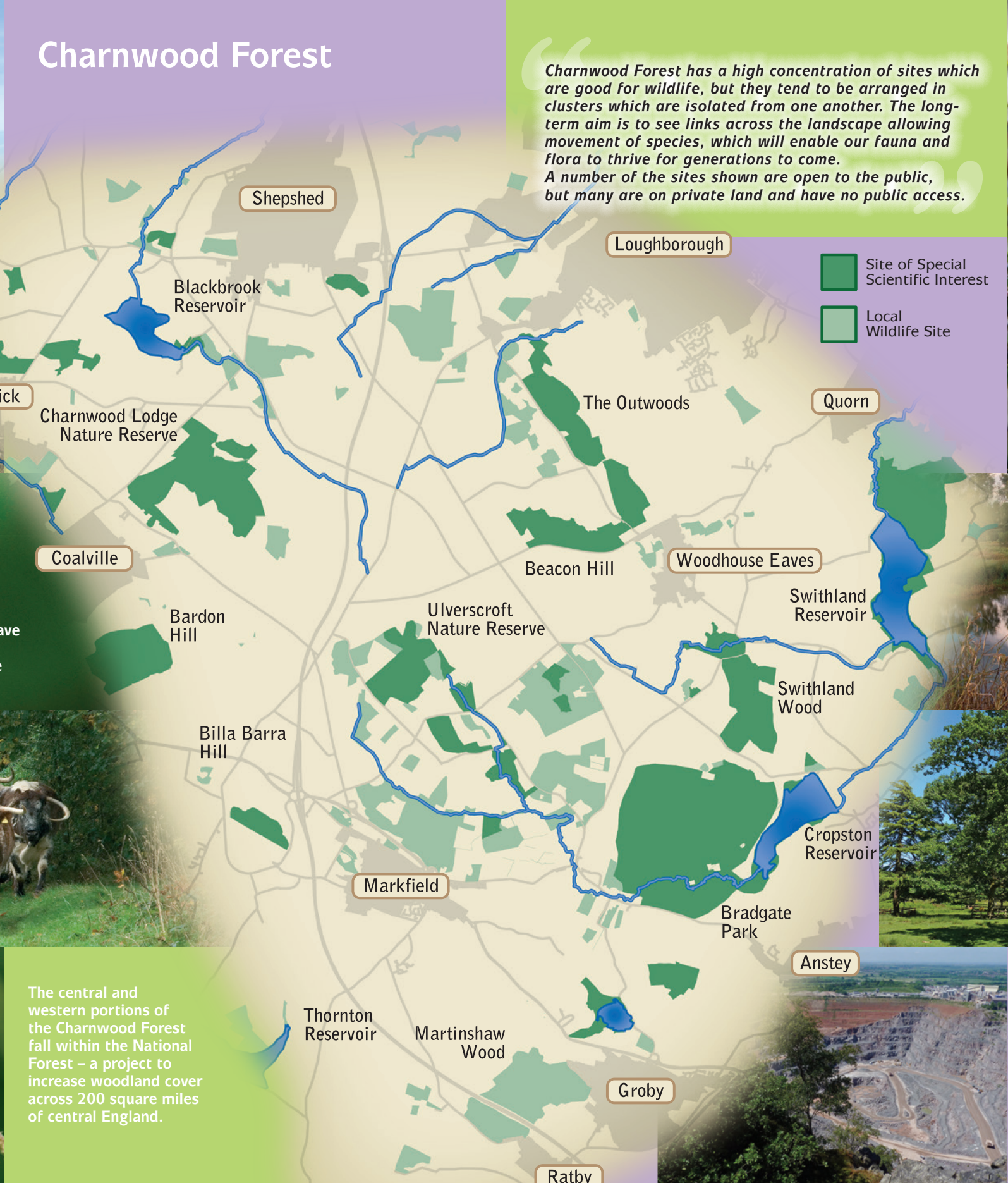


Farmers and land managers play a vital role in the future of Charnwood Forest. A number of farms in the area rear traditional breeds like Longhorn cattle.

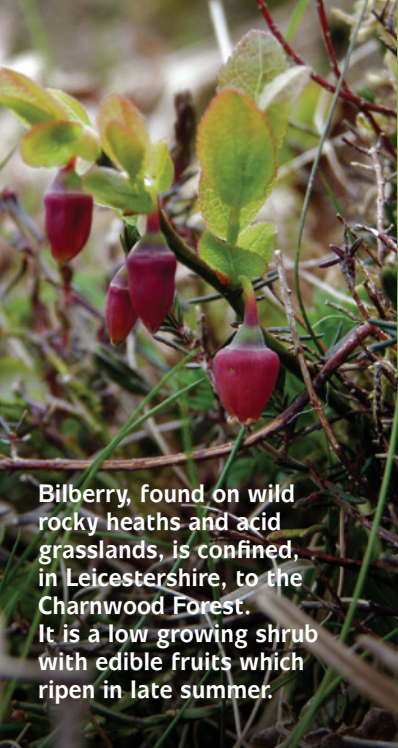


The Forest's bat population is of regional importance. Relatively high woodland cover, tree-lined hedges and streams, semi-natural land, reservoirs and old buildings all contribute to this. Leisler's Bat and Natterer's Bat are particularly notable.

Charnwood Forest



Charnwood Forest has a high concentration of sites which are good for wildlife, but they tend to be arranged in clusters which are isolated from one another. The long-term aim is to see links across the landscape allowing movement of species, which will enable our fauna and flora to thrive for generations to come. A number of the sites shown are open to the public, but many are on private land and have no public access.



Bilberry, found on wild rocky heaths and acid grasslands, is confined, in Leicestershire, to the Charnwood Forest. It is a low growing shrub with edible fruits which ripen in late summer.



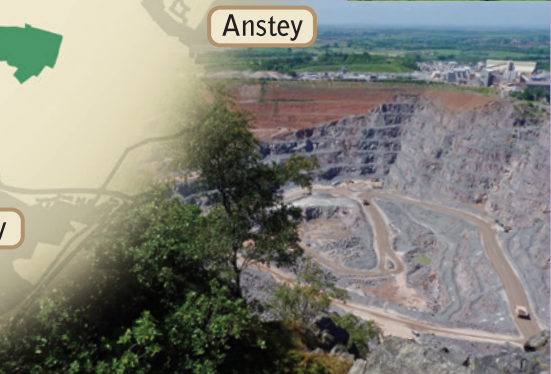
Sadly, a number of plant species have been lost from the Forest in recent times, including the Green-winged Orchid, a plant of old meadows. Charnwood Forest does however contain some of the best old grasslands in the country.



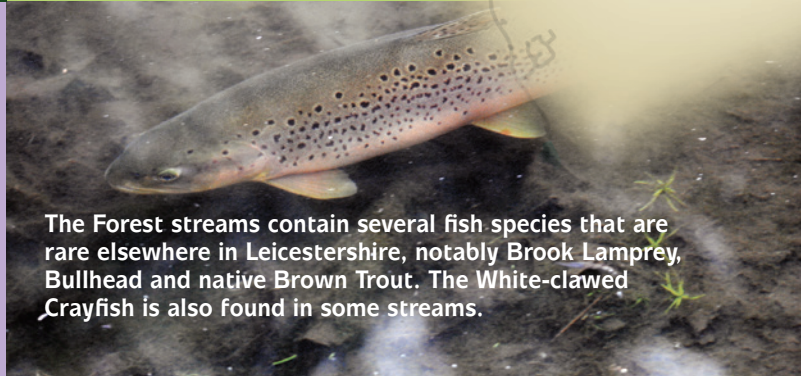
Charnwood Forest boasts four medium-sized reservoirs, three of which are Sites of Special Scientific Interest designated for their plant communities and waterfowl, but they have been affected by increased nutrients in the water.



The most characteristic tree of the Charnwood Forest is undoubtedly the Oak, many of which are hundreds of years old. Both English and Sessile Oaks occur, the latter largely confined to old woodland and parkland while the former readily colonizes hedges and open ground.



Quarrying has gone on in the Charnwood Forest for hundreds of years; the area is now one of the country's main sources of stone and contains some of the largest hard rock quarries in Europe.



The Forest streams contain several fish species that are rare elsewhere in Leicestershire, notably Brook Lamprey, Bullhead and native Brown Trout. The White-clawed Crayfish is also found in some streams.

Swithland Wood lies in the east of Charnwood Forest and is one of the most important ancient woodlands in Britain; its plant communities are incredibly rich and diverse.



Old meadow, ancient woodland, pasture woodland and marsh are amongst the Forest's most valuable habitats.