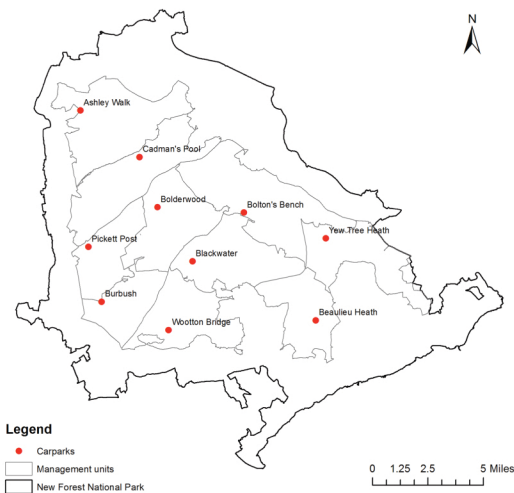


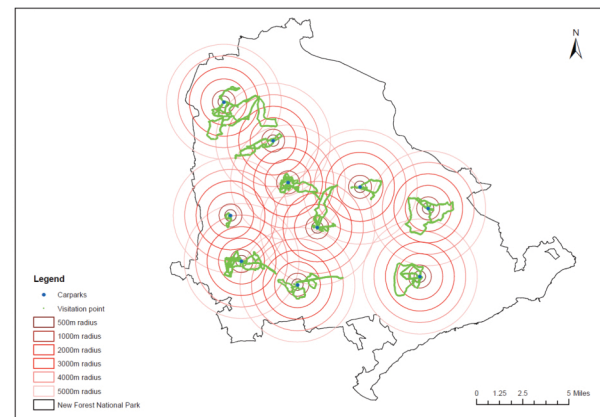
The value of New Forest woodlands



Location of survey sample points. Source: Gosal et al. (2016).



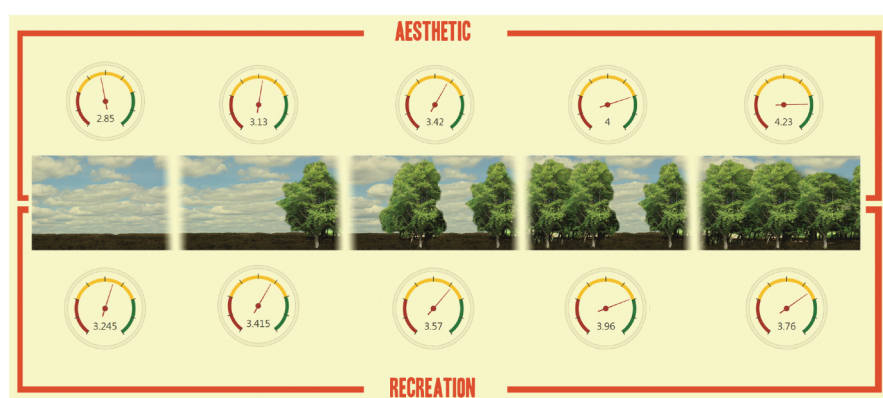
GPS device used to track the movement of volunteers, when visiting the New Forest.



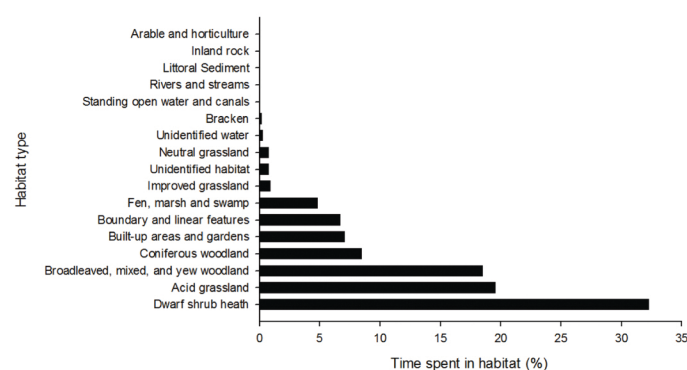
GPS tracks and buffer distances from survey sample points. Source: Gosal et al. (2016).



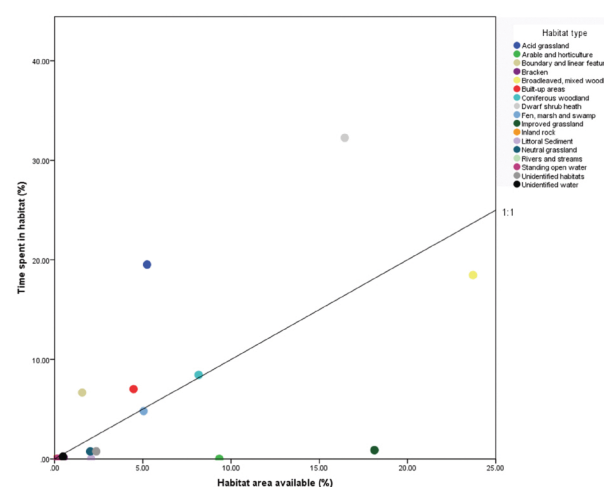
Characteristics of survey respondents. Source: Gosal et al. (2016).



Results of questionnaire survey of visitors to the New Forest, indicating a preference for wooded landscapes. Source: Gosal et al. (2016).



Time spent in different habitats by visitors to the New Forest. Source: Gosal et al. (2016).



Results of questionnaire survey of visitors to the New Forest, indicating a preference for wooded landscapes. Source: Gosal et al. (2016).

How important are the New Forest woodlands to people?

To find out, we conducted a survey of 200 people who were visiting the New Forest. The surveys took place in car parks distributed throughout the New Forest.

We asked people why they were visiting the New Forest. The most popular activities were dog walking (37%) or walking (36.5%), but other popular activities included family outings, orienteering/geocaching, cycling and wildlife watching. Other reasons given included picnicking, pub lunching, photography, horse riding and educational purposes. The largest group of respondents had travelled more than 30 km to visit the New Forest.

As part of the survey, respondents were presented with photo-realistic imagery that illustrated New Forest landscapes with different degrees of native woodland cover. They were then asked to score their preference for these different landscapes, in terms of both their aesthetic value and their value for recreation. The results were very striking: in terms of the aesthetic value, the more wooded the landscape was, the more people preferred it. The same result was obtained for recreational value, although here the effect was not so pronounced.

We also asked people about their preferences for trees. More than half of the respondents (56%) stated a preference for broadleaved trees, rather than conifers (which are not native to the New Forest, but have been widely planted). Large or veteran trees were preferred by the majority of respondents (71%) compared with smaller trees. This shows that the trees being most affected by beech dieback, namely large broadleaved trees, are precisely the ones that are most valued by people. Virtually all people surveyed (99%) stated that native woodland is important for conservation, and 88% indicated that it is important for recreation. Further, 81% of respondents expressed concern about beech dieback in the New Forest.

Volunteers were also offered a GPS tracking device, which enabled their movements to be recorded during their visit. This provides a way of checking whether people's behaviour accords with their preferences stated in a questionnaire survey. Results showed that people spent a large amount of their time in open vegetation, such as grassland and heathland, as well as in broadleaved woodland. The amount of time they spent in heathland was greater than would be expected from the area of this habitat that was available. This shows that people like to spend time in open landscapes, even though they stated a preference for closed woodland. This highlights one of the main reasons that the New Forest is attractive to visitors: it offers a wide variety of different landscapes to visit.