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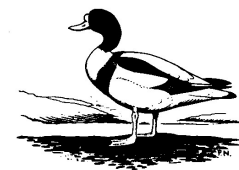
# **GUISBOROUGH FOREST PLAN**

## **COMMENTS BY TEESMOUTH BIRD CLUB ON THE DRAFT PLAN**



GUISBOROUGH FOREST

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

### Teesmouth Bird Club's Appraisal Process

- 1.1 The Teesmouth Bird Club (TBC) was founded in 1960 and is one of the longest-standing nature conservation bodies in the Tees Valley. We have an excellent knowledge of the birds of Cleveland (now the 4 unitary authorities of Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Stockton-on-Tees and Redcar & Cleveland) and produce the annual '*Cleveland Bird Report*', based on a review of all bird records during the course of a year. Our membership is well over 300 and many of our members undertake the monthly Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) counts for the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, coastal breeding seabird counts and local census work. We have recently completed a breeding bird survey for the whole of Cleveland and our Atlas is due to be published in late 2007.
- 1.2 The Guisborough Forest Draft Plan has been reviewed by the TBC's Conservation Sub-Committee and by those birders who know the Forest well. The comments contained herein reflect the official views of the Teesmouth Bird Club.
- 1.3 We are aware that the Plan is in its relatively early stages and that more detailed proposals will be drawn up at a later stage. We would welcome the opportunity to comment further as the Plan is developed.

## 2.0 GENERAL COMMENTS

### Our Understanding of the Plan

- 2.1 The Guisborough Forest Plan has been produced by Forestry Commission and outlines its strategy for the management of 480 hectares of forest over the next 80+ years. Our comments are based solely on the annotated draft plans provided by the Forestry Commission, rather than a written document.
- 2.2 We understand the key aims of the Plan to be as follows:
  - To increase the proportion of broadleaved species.
  - To increase species and age diversity.
  - To have a planned cycle of felling, related to nature conservation.
  - To remove straight lines – scalloped edge.
  - To create more open areas with scattered trees.
  - To maintain areas of continuous cover/minimum intervention.

### Ornithological Value of Guisborough Forest

- 2.3 The Forest is very important for a number of rare and scarce breeding species in Cleveland. These include Goshawk, Long-eared Owl, Nightjar, Tree Pipit, Common Crossbill and Woodcock. Some of these prefer secluded stands of conifers near clearings for hunting (eg Goshawk and Long-eared Owl), whilst others like a mixture of broadleaved and coniferous species, interspersed with large clearings (eg Woodcock and Tree Pipit). Nightjars favour clearings within coniferous woodland (such as that above Hutton Village), heathland and open hillsides with low vegetation (eg bracken and gorse), interspersed with trees.
- 2.4 Guisborough Forest is also valuable for a wide range of other common woodland species, such as Coal Tit, Treecreeper, Robin, Wren and various warblers and thrushes.

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### 3.0 SPECIFIC COMMENTS ON THE PLAN

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- 3.1 Our comments focus solely on ornithological issues and concerns but we fully understand that the Plan has been developed based on a holistic approach, which recognises the need for a balance between conservation and recreation.
- 3.2 The Forest Plan is an excellent strategy that will significantly improve and maintain the long-term health of Guisborough Forest from a nature conservation point of view. It will create a mosaic of habitats that will maintain and, hopefully, enhance the breeding populations of not only common species but also the scarce and rare birds mentioned in paragraph 2.3.
- 3.3 Our specific comments are outlined below:
- (1) There are two blocks of mature Beech, which we would like to see retained, viz:
    - near the stream in Spring Wood at NZ 61834 14147; this group comprises of 11 very tall trees, one of which has died, suggesting that their life span may only be less than 20 years, and
    - a more stunted group on the side of Highcliffe Nab, just northeast of Highcliffe Farm at NZ 61065 13614.
  - (2) The majority of species will benefit from the proposed felling regimes and we make the following observations regarding some of the least common:
    - **Nightjar:** We consider that the Plan will certainly benefit the long-term future of this rare breeding species in Cleveland, where there is insufficient suitable habitat. The Forestry Commission's efforts to create large open clearings above Hutton Village have already paid dividends and have encouraged several pairs of Nightjars back into the forest. This area also has a significant number of breeding Tree Pipits and Woodcocks and both Long-eared and Tawny Owls breed nearby. The proposed felling regime will greatly benefit breeding Nightjars; indeed, the Forest is capable of holding significantly more pairs than it does at present.
    - **Goshawk:** Goshawks are occasionally seen over Guisborough Forest and it is highly likely that they breed, albeit in very small numbers (probably 1-2 pairs). It is difficult to assess the true numbers, as they are highly secretive during the breeding season and often move between breeding sites. We believe that the Plan may benefit this species by retaining stands of conifers within the broadleaved matrix and creating more clearings and open parkland where they can hunt.
    - **Tree Pipit and Woodcock:** The creation of more open areas with scattered trees and scrub will certainly benefit these species. There are only 24 pairs of Tree Pipits in Cleveland and Guisborough Forest is one of its main strongholds. We welcome the proposal to create more open areas with only 20% tree cover. Woodcock is also a regular but scarce breeder in Cleveland, with only 94 pairs, and it will benefit from the creation of more suitable habitat proposed in the Plan, which we would recommend also includes ditches and pools for feeding.
    - **Long-eared Owl:** This mainly prefers coniferous woodland, especially Spruce and Scots Pine (relatively small stands of which can attract breeding owls), although it will also nest in non-coniferous areas and thickets (eg of mature

Hawthorn or Blackthorn). We consider that the Forest Plan will significantly benefit this species and welcome the proposal to retain stands of conifers within the more extensive broadleaved mix.

- **Common Crossbill:** Guisborough Forest holds nearly 25% of the total Cleveland breeding population. Crossbills have a strong preference for coniferous plantations, especially those comprising Scots Pine, Larch and Spruce. We welcome the proposals to retain stands of conifers within the broadleaved mix.
- (2) We would suggest the creation of some pools and wet ditches in the open areas proposed in the Plan along the southern edge. These will attract dragonflies and other insect species, which in turn will attract insectivorous birds. The presence of good numbers of dragonflies may also help to attract passing or, with luck, breeding Hobby.
  - (3) We would like to see some of the proposed new broadleaved areas retain some intermixed conifers (eg Spruce and Western Hemlock), particularly the more mature specimens with reasonable life expectancies. Such areas would be more attractive to species such as Firecrest, which at present does not breed in Cleveland.
  - (4) The creation of habitat suitable for breeding Woodlark should be considered. This species is spreading northwards and now breeds within 50 miles of Guisborough Forest. It is possible that it will eventually breed here given suitable habitat. Open, bracken- or bramble-covered scrubby areas with scattered trees is ideal and could be created within some of the southern section. Non-clinical forest clearings created by felling regimes will also be suitable.
  - (5) Whilst outside the Plan area, the parkland trees around Hutton Village are over-mature and dying off. Is there any possibility that, with the co-operation of adjacent landowners, this problem could be addressed as part of the strategy? The parkland area is particularly important in Cleveland for Hawfinch, Green, Great and Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers and wintering Bramblings and Siskins.
  - (5) Allowances should be made for potential breeding Red Kites, which prefer wooded hillsides with mixed broadleaved species, especially Oak. With the nearby kite reintroduction schemes, it is only a matter of time before this species breeds in Cleveland.
  - (8) Similar allowances should be made for breeding Common Buzzards, which should breed in the forest (there is possibly only 1 pair in the north of Cleveland, though successful breeding remains unproven).
  - (7) Our other comments are as follows:
    - Who owns/will own the forest?
    - We would not wish to see a Centre Parcs type recreational development.
    - How are pest species, such as Rhododendron, to be controlled?
    - How does the Forest Plan 'fit' with the proposal for a Mountain Bike Centre?
    - Have there been any consultations with adjacent landowners. 'Traditional' gamekeeping is a major problem to breeding raptors in estate areas and birds that are encouraged to breed in Guisborough Forest through the creation of

suitable habitat may be persecuted in adjacent kept areas. Cleveland has the unenviable reputation of being the only county in the UK without breeding Common Buzzards, despite ideal habitat. The co-operation of adjacent landowners will, therefore, be crucial to the success of attracting scarce raptors to breed.

- As in European countries such as Sweden, we assume that the felling and forest management will not be 'clinical' and that some mature specimens and dead trees will be retained within the cleared areas and that the forest floor will be strewn with dead wood and brashings. A cycle of re-stocking, thinning and felling will produce a patchwork of habitats of benefit to all of the species previously described. Dead trees are essential for woodpeckers, particularly in more open areas.
- We assume that the Plan will include the widespread provision of forest feeding stations, nest boxes (for species such as Tawny and Barn Owls and Spotted Flycatcher) and bat boxes. Such measures are widespread in Swedish forestry and bring enormous benefits, both for conservation and recreation/education (please see below).
- We assume that the Forest Plan will include a monitoring programme to 'measure' the effectiveness of the strategy during its life cycle against key targets.

#### **4.0 FURTHER CONSULTATION**

- 4.1 As the leading ornithological and longest-standing nature conservation body in Cleveland, with a wealth of data accumulated over the 56 years since the Club was first formed, we would welcome the opportunity to be involved in any future consultations.
- 4.2 If any specialist ornithological surveys or studies are required, the TBC could assist with these, as we have some very high calibre field ornithologists, some of whom know Guisborough Forest very well. We could also help with butterfly, moth and dragonfly surveys.

#### **FOREST MANAGEMENT IN SWEDEN**



FEEDING STATION IN A SWEDISH FOREST: Hugely attractive to birds in winter and give visitors close-up views of normally secretive species.



FELLING IN A SWEDISH FOREST: Some mature and dead trees retained.