



**The Forestry Commission working in partnership with the RSPB and Devon Birds, are seeking to recruit a number of competent nightjar surveyors with their own transport to help carry out a nightjar survey in the summer of 2016 in south Devon.**

### **Aim**

The aim of this project is to replicate the 2004 national nightjar survey to accurately count the number of nightjar using Forestry Commission woodlands as breeding territories across the Haldon hill SSSI and the forest blocks on Dartmoor (Soussons, Fernworthy and Bellever).

### **Background**

Nightjars have recently moved from red to amber in Birds of Conservation Concern (Eaton et al 2015). The national population is thought to be stable, having increased significantly up to the mid-2000s, however marked population declines in East Anglia could be indicating an overall downturn. The species currently occupies a much smaller range than at the first Atlas period (1970).

The status of nightjars breeding in plantation forestry remains mixed and uncertain, with declines ongoing in the Brecks (Thetford Forest) and the Suffolk Sandlings forests, the reasons for which are not fully understood.

Forestry Commission's Haldon Forest and Dartmoor forests both held nationally important nightjar populations in the last systematic national nightjar survey, in 2004 (c.80 and 65 territories respectively). Although some partial surveys of these sites have been undertaken, neither has been systematically surveyed for nightjar since.

### **Methodology**

Suitable habitat (conifer plantation less than 21 years old, unplanted blocks, bare ground and clear-fell areas) has been mapped by FC. Survey areas will be divided into 1km<sup>2</sup> blocks (unless any 1km<sup>2</sup> block exceeds 80ha of suitable habitat, in which case the 1km<sup>2</sup> block will be divided so as to limit any individual's area of suitable habitat to 80ha). Each participant will be supplied with a map at 1:4000 scale detailing survey areas and favourable habitats within those areas along with recording forms.

1. An induction meeting will be arranged several weeks before the first survey date, to:
  - i. ensure surveyors understand the survey methodology and risk assessment;
  - ii. allocate survey blocks to individuals/survey teams;
  - iii. distribute survey maps accordingly;
  - iv. agree arrival/commencement timings and buddy pairings.
2. Surveyors should make a preliminary visit to their site to familiarize themselves with the terrain in daylight and establish a suitable route around it.<sup>1</sup>
3. Two survey visits are required, one dawn and one at dusk.
4. A decision on whether to proceed with the survey will be taken the previous evening and communicated to all surveyors.

5. Surveyors should cover no more than 80 ha per visit, being sure to pass within 200m of all potentially suitable habitats highlighted on maps.
6. Site visits will only proceed in calm and usually dry evenings or mornings in wind conditions of less than Beaufort force 4.
7. During the surveys, the locations of 'churring' males should be recorded onto 1:4000 scale maps (males marked A1, A2, etc., for visit A, and B1, B2, etc. for visit B) provided by FC. Special attention should be given to simultaneously churring males.
8. Other calling birds or birds seen flying should also be marked on the visit maps.
9. As in 2004, 'Playback' of recorded Nightjar calls will not be deployed.

### **Dates**

Given their scale, surveys of Haldon and Dartmoor forests will be undertaken independently, on different days. Within each, surveys will be co-ordinated so that the entirety of each site is surveyed concurrently this increases accuracy in counts and provides an additional element in surveyors safety. Initial weeks outlined for the two survey visits are set out below:

**Week commencing Monday 6<sup>th</sup> June – Dusk survey**

**Week commencing Monday 4<sup>th</sup> July – Dawn survey**

The aim is to carry out the surveys at Haldon hill on Monday and the Dartmoor blocks on the Tuesday in the weeks outlined above but as the surveys are weather dependant postponement is possible and volunteers should be aware of this.

We will also hold a brief workshop/induction meeting on a week night in April (date to be confirmed) at the Ridge Studios, Bullers Hill, Haldon Forest Park, EX6 7XR where the refined methodology, survey techniques and risk assessment will be discussed and 1km grid squares allocated.

FC has a small budget to assist with volunteers travel costs. This will be allocated at FC's discretion.

Any help would be much appreciated and anyone interested in taking part in the survey should contact Peter Devenport assistant ecologist for the Forestry Commission in the southwest on [07836321125](tel:07836321125) or email: [peter.devenport@forestry.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:peter.devenport@forestry.gsi.gov.uk)



giving  
nature  
a home

