

Forestry Commission Concerts

Live Music in Unique Locations



Woodlands are naturally atmospheric venues for concerts - the perfect setting for people to come and see their favourite bands. The Forestry Commission concerts aim to attract new and more diverse audiences out to the forest, and raise awareness of woodlands as stunning locations in which to relax, have fun and enjoy the great outdoors. Seven woodland venues play host to internationally renowned artists including Jools Holland, Motorhead, the Beach Boys, Madness, Blondie and Jamie Cullen, entertaining thousands of music fans at each event. For many people it is the first time they have visited the forest, and it is an experience they will never forget.

objectives

- To attract a wider audience to Britain's forests, connecting people with trees and woodlands.
- To inspire people to see woodlands in a new light, challenging perceptions about forests and the work of the Commission.
- To provide valuable revenue to plough back into the woodland in a variety of environmental and social projects.

actions

- An extensive audit of the local area is carried out before locations on the public forest estate are included as venues - to avoid impact on wildlife habitats and neighbours.
- Safety: The safety of the audience, performers, staff and the protection of the forest are key to the extensive planning and liaison that goes into organising these concerts, which meet and adhere to licensing, current BS standards and health and safety conditions and guidelines.

achievements

- The concerts have 'opened people's eyes' to how forests can offer something special to them.
- Over 123,000 people attended in 2007 – between 4,500 and 7,000 people attend each concert.
- The Tour aims to be self-sustaining - paying for itself, and providing valuable revenue to plough back into the woodland in a variety of environmental and social projects. For example: investment in recreation infrastructure; habitat creation for endangered species; health projects to encourage young and old to get out and about in the natural environment.
- Audiences have praised the special atmosphere created in the clearings among the trees. The concerts have become well known in the music industry as a unique opportunity for artists to experience forest arenas, in some of the country's most stunning locations, and to help raise awareness of the value of woodlands as part of our natural environment.
- Research shows 78% of concert-goers are likely to revisit the forest.
- The concerts have significantly enhanced the Commission's media profile with coverage in National & Local TV and press.

background

Ten years ago Mike Taylor, East Anglia's operations manager, first saw the potential of the forest environment as a venue for musical events. At that time there were a few outdoor venues offering classical music concerts, but no opportunities for mainstream audiences to enjoy rock or pop music. In 1997 a classical music concert was held at High Lodge, Thetford. A year later Jools Holland played to an audience of 3,000. Encouraged by a huge team effort, and by the concert's success, it was clear that the Forestry Commission had a good working model to expand the programme to other sites.

It has grown from its inception and currently consists of seven sites in Kent (Bedgebury), Suffolk (Thetford), Gloucestershire (Westonbirt), Nottinghamshire (Sherwood), North Yorkshire (Dalby) Staffordshire (Cannock) and Cheshire (Delamere).

To date the concert tours have included the Levellers, Pulp, Courtney Pine, Motorhead, Status Quo, The Wonder Stuff, Level 42, Jools Holland, Beach Boys, Paul Weller, Bryan Ferry, Fun Lovin' Criminals, Sugababes, Madness, The Beautiful South, Daniel Bedingfield, UB40, Embrace, Pet Shop Boys, Van Morrison, Massive Attack, Jamie Cullum, Ian Brown, Travis, Blondie, James Morrison, The Feeling, Van Morrison, The Charlatans, M People and The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. Previous tours have had strong support acts now established in their own right, such as The Ordinary Boys, Keisha White, Lucie Silvas and Morning Runner.

Forestry Commission concerts continue to attract high profile contemporary artists and has been praised by the industry for its production and site management.

quotes

'If you have ever been to Sherwood Pines on a warm summer evening to sample one of your favourite bands, you begin to wonder why all gigs aren't played out among the trees.' David Jackson, concert goer

'Thetford Forest seems an unlikely venue for a concert, but as the road winds through the woods it all begins to make sense. Hidden deep within the forest, the white domed stage finally emerges from the trees and the choice of such a beautiful location is explained.' Rob Sykes, concert goer

This was the first time I'd attended a gig at Westonbirt and the venue proved to be excellent. Access to and from the site was easy, relaxed and well organised... This was a groovy way to spend a summer's evening in a beautiful location – I'll be keeping my eyes peeled for future events at Westonbirt and I suggest you do too!
Andy Sutcliffe, concert goer

lessons learnt

- It was difficult in the beginning because the Forestry Commission were not known in the music industry.
- Be open-minded and equipped to deal with new ideas to attract new audiences.