

CLOtC accredited forests for self-led learning visits

The Council for Learning Outside the Classroom ([CLOtC](#)) is the national voice for learning outside the classroom. The Forestry Commission is proud to be working with the CLOtC to create and improve opportunities for self-led learning on the public forest estate.

We are working towards [CLOtC Site Provider Awards](#) for Forestry Commission sites across England. This award recognises organisations which actively welcome schools onto their site/s for self-led visits and ensure that the sites and any other services provided meet the needs of schools.

CLOtC accredited site: New Forest Reptile Centre, Hampshire

The New Forest is a place of ancient history, beautiful scenery, fascinating wildlife and opportunities to undertake all kinds of field work and curriculum related studies. The Forestry Commission looks after several visitor sites in the New Forest, among them, the Reptile Centre (near Lyndhurst), with its specially created enclosures, housing a collection of all of England's native lizards, snakes, frogs and toads.

The site is also home to the 'Date with Nature' which aims to bring views of exciting wildlife, including goshawks and other birds of prey, right up close to the visitor, using live cameras, interactive clips, live birdfeeders, props and models.

In addition to the wildlife viewing opportunities, there is a Discovery Trail through the surrounding woodland.

The Reptile Centre attracts many visitors on a busy summer's day. On weekdays during term time the site is much quieter and ideal for school groups to visit.

The Reptile Centre and surrounding woodland is part of the public forest estate, which is made up of more than 1500 woods and forests in England that are cared for by the Forestry Commission. The Forestry Commission practises sustainable multi-purpose forestry which means that they follow long term forest design plans to ensure that there'll always be forests to produce timber, to provide habitats for wildlife and to enable people to enjoy the benefits of a forest visit.

Example school visits – a visit to the Reptile Centre offers the opportunity for a wide range of studies for all ages from Early Years to Year 13 and beyond

- **EYFS** – Understanding the world and Physical development – explore the Reptile Centre and surrounding woodland using your senses – look very carefully for the reptiles, listen for birds, smell the trees and search for different textures (rough bark, a smooth stone, a soft feather...).
- **Primary school** – Animals including humans – discuss the characteristics of reptiles, amphibians, insects, mammals, birds etc, then explore different habitats around the site, investigating where they live and why – dragonflies can be spotted by the pond, birds of prey nest in the woodland (and can also be seen on the 'nestcam'), and of course, the reptiles and amphibians are often visible in the enclosures.
- **GCSE, A-level and HE** – Fieldwork for geography, tourism studies and countryside management courses – human impact on the environment; conflicts in land use (balancing needs of forest for timber, people and wildlife); ecosystem comparisons; comparisons with other sites in the New Forest and elsewhere. Also of interest to some FE and HE visits – there is an extension loop of the Discovery Trail that has examples of all aspects of the 'forestry cycle' – young, maturing and mature plantations, deer fenced area etc ([email](#) the FC Rangers for more information).

Site [webpage](#)

- has information about site facilities, opening times, directions and events
- Also has links to the podcast and discovery trail leaflet, and footage from the nest camera

On-site facilities

- The site is open from 1st April (sometimes earlier to coincide with the spring school holidays) to the last Friday of September, every day of the week, 10am-4.30pm.
- There is ample parking for cars and coaches – parking and entry is free to schools and educational establishments (donations are welcome from other visitors).
- There are toilets and picnic tables around the site.
- The reptile and amphibian enclosures are close to the car park and have steps for smaller visitors.
- The information cabin is staffed every day through the open season until the end of August (although the site itself is open until the end of September). The cabin is part of the Date with Nature partnership, which brings together the Forestry Commission, the RSPB, the New Forest National Park Authority and Carnyx Wild (wildlife film makers). Staff are available to answer questions about the site and its wildlife, and to show visitors the displays and footage from the nest cams. There is also a covered seating area outside, where visitors can handle wildlife artefacts including deer antlers, and observe the birds through telescopes.

Surrounding woodland

- The Reptile Centre is situated right in the heart of the New Forest – within a few minutes walk is a variety of habitats including mixed woodland, open spaces and heathland.
- There is one waymarked walk from the car park – the Discovery Trail is about 1.5 miles long, mainly following a smooth gravelled surface, with a grassy section at the end. The '[Discovery Trail](#)' leaflet can be downloaded from the website and shows the best places to stop and look for wildlife as you walk the trail. For details of the extension loop to this trail, please [email](#) the Forestry Commission Rangers.
- Out of season, the Discovery Trail and site are accessible on foot, horse or bike. Vehicular access (eg coach/minibus) may be given by arrangement with the Forestry Commission.
- The historic Knightwood Oak is only 15 minutes away on foot ([email](#) the Rangers about this, as there is no way-marked trail to follow although it is not difficult to find and the walk there can be a little wet underfoot when it has been raining)

Self-led learning opportunities

- Woodland activities – trees, minibeasts, habitats (see FC [downloads](#) and [lesson plans](#)) and [Reptile Centre Discovery Trail leaflet](#)
- New Forest Nest Cam / Date with Nature – information, live footage and previous highlights can be found on the New Forest National Park [website](#)
- Active / sporting – walking; map reading; for cycling opportunities in the local area, please download a map from the Forestry Commission [website](#)
- Find out about other sites in the New Forest that are managed by the Forestry Commission at www.forestry.gov.uk/newforest
- The [New Forest National Park Website](#) has lots of information about the national park

Local Forestry Commission contacts

- The local FC office is in the Queen's House, Lyndhurst, Hampshire SO43 7NH; reception is staffed 9am-5pm Monday to Thursday and 9am-4.30pm on Fridays – [email](#) or telephone 0300 067 4601
- The local FC learning team is based at Alice Holt Forest – [email](#) or telephone 0300 067 4448

Planning your visit

- **Contact the Forestry Commission** on 0300 067 4601 or via [email](#) – we'd like to know you are coming and you will need to complete a form before you come.
- **Pre-visit** – we strongly recommend that you make a pre-visit to the site before bringing your group – you'll need to know where to park, where the toilets are and where and how you will carry out your activities; you'll also need to be able to write your risk assessment.
- **Health and safety** – we carry out regular safety checks of the area around the Reptile Centre and of the waymarked trail; we do not however, check every path and every part of the forest; if you are bringing a group to the forest, it is your responsibility to carry out a pre-visit and write your own risk assessment; we cannot provide you with a site risk assessment because the forest is a variable environment, which changes as a result of weather conditions, time of year, forest operations etc; we do offer a [sample risk assessment](#), which may be of use, when you are writing your own, and a [guide to group leader responsibilities](#); If a member of your group has an accident while visiting the Reptile Centre, please [contact](#) the local FC office.

Accessibility

- Toilets and car park are accessible and gates have latches, which wheelchair users can use.
- Parts of the trails may not be ideal for wheelchair users because they can get muddy in wet weather. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact the Forestry Commission.
- Viewing the inside of the animal enclosures is easy for most visitors. There is some limitation of view from a wheelchair, but there is still reasonable viewing access.
- The information cabin and nestcam screens have good accessibility.

After your visit

- **Feedback** – we'd like to know how you get on with your self-led visit to the Reptile Centre and have provided a short [online survey](#)
- **Further opportunities** – if you would like to find out more about learning opportunities on the public forest estate, please [email](#) and ask to be put onto our mailing list