

Interactions between the public and depastured stock in the New Forest in 2018

This report is based on information collected in 2018 by Forestry Commission (FC) rangers and Camping in the Forest (CitF) wardens, or reported to the Verderers' office. It relates to interactions between members of the public and depastured stock that were reported by the public or witnessed by staff at a range of locations in the New Forest. There are 186 records in the database: 100 come from CitF wardens on five campsites located on the open forest, 47 are reports from rangers at many locations across the Forest and 39 were reported to the Verderers' office. A small number of the reports are duplicated by different reports, most notably when a serious incident has occurred.

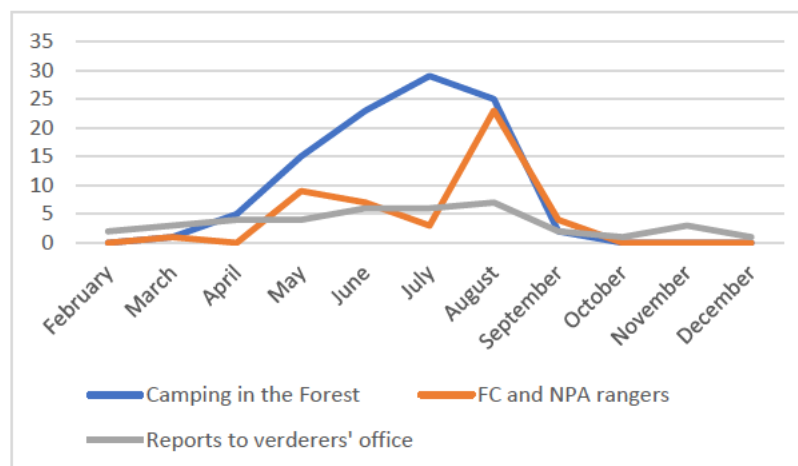
Table 1: Source of reports at different locations

	Camping in the Forest	FC and NPA rangers	Reports to verderers' office	Total
Campsite	100	0	4	104
Popular stopping place	0	32	15	47
Other car park	0	0	3	3
Roadside	0	9	3	12
Village	0	6	2	8
Open Forest	0	0	12	12
	100	47	39	186

Almost all the reports made to the Verderers' office relate to serious incidents involving injury to people or animals. The four serious incidents that come from campsites come from campsite staff, three of them requesting the removal of an animal following an event on the campsite.

The great majority of incidents reported by CitF and rangers were considered to be minor: only 10 cases resulted in injury to a member of the public and none required the presence of an ambulance. There is one case of serious injury to a depastured animal by a dog and four in which concern about an animal was reported to the verderers.

Figure 1: Number of reports by month in 2018



Reports of incidents involving commoners' animals were made to the Verderers' office in all months of the year (excluding January), showing only a slight increase over the summer months (see Figure 1). However, reports from Camping in the Forest and rangers start in March with very low numbers, increasing steadily up to the Easter holiday. After that, in June/July figures are low for ranger reports but continue to increase on campsites. It is not possible to tell from the data whether this is due to fewer visitors or less monitoring by rangers outside the school holidays – or other factors. Incidents peak in July for campsites and August for rangers, then decline markedly in September for both sets of data.

The animals most likely to be involved in the reported incidents are ponies, making up 58% of all cases, with the majority of interactions taking place on campsites (see Table 2 below). Donkeys make up almost a quarter of the total (24%) and are as likely as ponies to be involved in stopping place encounters. Considering that donkeys make up only a small percentage of depastured stock (2% in 2017), this clearly indicates a high rate of interaction between donkeys and the public. Cows are involved in 13% of incidents, these most likely to occur at popular stopping places or on the open Forest.

Table2: Type of animal involved at different locations

	Pony	Cow	Donkey	Pig	Sheep	Unrecorded	Total
Campsite	73	3	22	0	0	6	104
Popular stopping place	17	12	18	0	0	0	47
Other car park	2	1	0	0	0	0	3
Roadside	6	3	3	0	0	0	12
Village	5	1	2	0	0	0	8
Open Forest	4	5	0	2	1	0	12
	107	25	45	2	1	6	186

Although the reports have been recorded in a single file, the difference between the roles of forest rangers and campsite wardens, as well as the types of interaction between the public and the animals in different locations, make it more productive to look at the three sets of reports separately.

Campsite Reports

Information has been collected from five campsites managed by CitF and recorded by the campsite wardens. All the sites were given recording sheets and asked to keep brief details of any interactions between campers and the commoner's animals that were not deemed serious enough to be reported to the authorities. This was specifically to include campers approaching the animals as well as animals interfering with people's equipment and food.

With campers living and eating their meals on the open Forest where commoners' animals graze, campsites are particularly prone to human-animal interactions. And, since wardens are on site throughout the day and at night, they are more likely to witness a wide range of contacts than any other types of officials employed in the area. The wardens' thoroughness in reporting incidents makes this data particularly valuable as a record of the level of contact that ranges from mutual curiosity to unpleasant and potentially dangerous confrontations between the animals and the public.

	Frequency	Percent
Roundhill C/S	37	37.0
Hollands Wood C/S	27	27.0
Ashurst C/S	21	21.0
Ocknell & Longbeech C/S	10	10.0
Denny & Matley Wood C/S	5	5.0
Total	100	100.0

Table 3, above, shows that the three campsites with more extensive facilities which attract young families and groups appear to have much higher number of people/animal contacts (although this will also depend on the wardens' ability to record each incident). Table 4, below, also shows that different animals are involved at different campsites, with ponies mostly named at Ashurst, Hollands Wood and Ocknell, while donkeys outnumber ponies at Roundhills.

	Cow	Donkey	Pony	Unknown	
Ashurst C/S	1	0	16	4	21
Denny & Matley Wood C/S	1	0	4	0	5
Hollands Wood C/S	0	0	27	0	27
Ocknell & Longbeech C/S	0	0	10	0	10
Roundhill C/S	1	21	13	2	37
	3	21	70	6	100

With all the CitF campsites situated on the open Forest where ponies, cattle and donkeys are free to roam and graze, the proximity of campers' equipment and food to the animals at all times of the day and night, make these areas especially prone to interactions of all kinds. The wardens' continual presence has meant that the campsite dataset is well recorded while, despite their best efforts, it is likely that they are unable to prevent many of the incidents that take place.

Tables 5a and 5b, below, show the type of incident that has been reported over the summer in all five campsites. The tables indicate that almost two thirds of the reported interactions are animal initiated (60 compared to 36 people initiated). These incidents relate to animals stealing campers' food, damaging equipment or intimidating people, with the most common report (53%) being of tents being raided. On the other hand, 64% of incidents initiated by people relate to petting or feeding the animals, with a further 25% being people interfering with the animals in other ways.

	Frequency	Percent
Tents Raided	32	53%
Animals injuring/intimidating people	13	22%
Raiding Picnics/food	12	20%
Damage to equipment/food	3	5%
	60	100%

	Frequency	Percent
Petting	15	42%
People worrying animals	9	25%
Feeding	8	22%
Dogs worrying livestock	3	8%
Taking pictures too closely	1	3%
	36	100%

If the source of all reports is analysed, it is apparent that only 22% have been witnessed by wardens, while 78% have apparently been made by campers (the origin of these reports is not always clear from the data). Reports of animals being fed, petted or harassed by campers are almost equally likely to have been witnessed by wardens as reported by the public (47%:53%). However, perhaps not surprisingly, incidents of animals damaging campers' goods or harassing people, are far more likely to have been reported by campers or other members of the public (93% not witnessed by wardens).

Some of the reports make worrying reading, describing animals that have become habituated to entering tents and stealing food, or taking it from tables where people were eating. In some cases, they showed aggressive behaviour to the campers:

- *Shetland pony stealing food - very aggressive, kicked out - near miss*
- *Pony walked up to table and took a bread roll*
- *Pony going from tent to tent trying to steal food*
- *█████ raided set of 4 tents, chased away. Raided a car and another tent and took food from lady having lunch at a table*
- *█████ entered tent, removed food bag and was chased away*
- *Shetland pony evicted from tent*
- *Horse trying to get food out of tent*
- *Ponies forced way in to damaged tent trying to get food in tent*
- *Harassing campers and trying to get in tents*
- *Campers left breakfast on tables. Raided by donkeys*
- *Horse in tent eating campers' breakfast*

Some of the interactions have clearly resulted in injury to the people involved:

- *Child and uncle kicked by brown horse. Taken to HPL*
- *Pony came from another tent and came towards open car boot. Pony put head in and took some bread. Customer tried to get the horse to move and it kicked out. Pony gave customer a small kick who then fell onto his car and sprained his shoulder blade and broke his glasses. Advised to attend A and E*
- *Shetland pony kicked a seasonal ranger in the leg*
- *A grandad was kicked in the stomach as family were picking up food left on the floor*
- *Ponies came up sniffing and took bread. Children inside safe. Father got kicked in lower stomach*
- *Ponies came for food and kicked gentleman to the floor - lower abdomen - Advised to go to A&E*

- *Family having breakfast and 3 ponies came in to area and took bread. Dad tried to retrieve the bread and took a kick to the lower abdomen which knocked him to the floor. He fled to C/S reception in his car*

Alternatively, some of the reported behaviour by campers towards the animals was unacceptable and potentially dangerous:

- *Young teenage boys squirting large water pistols at ponies*
- *Camper letting off fireworks near ponies causing panic. No injuries and camper was spoken to about behaviour*
- *2 children advised to move away from pony as they were seen running around it, screaming*
- *Children chasing ponies. One had a stick*
- *Children messing around on bikes getting horses to kick*
- *Children running around pony and one kicked out, just missing his arm*
- *Adult trying to put child on a donkey*
- *Reported by a camper - banged pots and pans: didn't work. Set dog on it: dog got kicked. Hit it with a chair - it bolted through site narrowly missing 2 young children - No details given as to what the pony had done.*

Ranger reports

The reports from rangers relate to periods during which they were on duty advising and informing the public about the New Forest, while also monitoring public behaviour around the animals and trying to avoid conflict. These reports are limited to the times when they are able to attend specific sites, and do not therefore give a full picture of the levels of interaction over the large area of the open Forest.

In addition, it should be noted that, although there are only 47 reports, many of these involve multiple interactions with the public at a particular venue, and so refer to a far greater level of interaction than their number suggests. A total of 15 reports give specific numbers of people involved indicating a total of 58 people involved (an average of four people per incident). In other cases, it appears that the rangers were too busy talking to people to record individual statistics. For instance, one report from Boltons Bench states,

'20-30 incidents of pony and donkey petting / close photography within sight of middle car park. In many cases the animals were over-friendly and approached people first. Saw one incident of possible pony aggression (it turned away with ears back as if to kick). Almost all of the people were spoken to and given leaflets, but in a few cases, they had moved on before I could reach them. Many said they thought it was ok to stroke the animals but would not feed them.'

As Table 6, on the next page, shows, the great majority of the reports (87%) indicate people approaching the animals to pet or feed, either on foot or from vehicles, although in some cases the animals were seen to be approaching people or raiding picnics. There was only one injury to a person recorded, although the report states that this was 'Not a bad kick and no mark left.'

	Frequency	Percent
Petting	24	51.1
Feeding	9	19.1
Petting / feeding from vehicles	5	10.6
Raiding picnics	5	10.6
Taking pictures too closely	3	6.4
Injury to people - kicking	1	2.1
Total	47	100.0

Almost half of the reports come from Hatchett Pond (14) and Boltons Bench (7), both of which are well known for problems with members of the public petting and feeding the animals. The remainder come from 21 other locations¹, with the majority of these only having one recorded incident. However, it is not clear whether these relate to chance encounters or designated duty periods, nor how the recording of all incidents was arranged or monitored by management. Without this information it is not possible to make direct comparisons between the number of incidents at the different locations.

Reports to the Verderers

In most cases only serious incidents of human-animal contact, usually amounting to conflict, are reported to the Verderers' office. The reports make clear that a small number of such incidents occur at almost any time of the year and that they occur in all parts of the Forest. Over half (53%) of the animals involved in these reports are cows and the great majority of incidents concern either animals intimidating walkers/riders (46%) or dogs worrying or attacking depastured animals (33%).

Table 7: Type of incident and animal species reported to the Verderers office

	Pony	Cow	Donkey	Pig	Sheep	Total
Damage to equipment/food	0	1	0	0	0	1
Dogs worrying livestock	3	7	2	0	1	13
People worrying animals	2	0	0	0	0	2
Animals injuring/intimidating people	5	13	0	0	0	18
Other	1	0	0	2	0	3
Tents Raided	2	0	0	0	0	2
	13	21	2	2	1	39

¹ Balmer Lawn, Burley, Burley Cricket Pitch, Parc Pale, B3053 off A337, B3056 Lyndhurst, Bolderwood, Brockenhurst Village, Waters Green, Culverely, Emery Down, Godshill, Gorley, Knightwood Oak, [REDACTED] area, Picket Post, Setley, Shatterford, Swan Green, Tilery Road. Whitemoor Pond

Since only serious conflicts between depastured animals and the public are normally reported to the Verderers' Office, descriptions of these events are of considerable concern:

Animals injuring/intimidating people:

- *Shetland ponies aggressive. Terrorising people walking etc. People seen feeding them.*
- *Reports from FC of stallion interfering with dog walkers in Inclosure, no definite details but area popular with dog walkers.*
- *Young stallion challenging ridden horses in Deerleap area, riders having to turn around and go back the way they came.*
- *Stallion allegedly behaving aggressively towards horse riders.*
- *Pony kicked child in the head. Family had just arrived and were unpacking car. It was suggested the pony came over to see if there was any food and a dog appeared. The pony may have kicked out at the dog but got the child. Pony ordererd off Forest permanently.*
- *Highland type cattle chased lady with dog at heel. Lady was tossed in the air by a cow.*
- *Cattle knocked over lady walking dog.*
- *Lady knocked into ditch by cattle. Believed to be the same herd as above incident.*
- *Lady walking near to Hockeys, South Gorley. Cow went for her dog she hit it on the head with her walking staff cow backed off. Charolais type cow, creamy colour.*
- *Lady with dog, pinned against Chapel railings by cattle.*
- *Gentleman out walking his dogs attacked by herd of cows.*
- *Cow behaving aggressively towards male with dog. Cow did not actually attack.*
- *Cow went for lady out walking. No mention of a dog on this occasion.*
- *Two ladies out walking their dogs were charged by a white cow. It stopped short of making contact and went back to grazing.*
- *██████████ lady with dog on lead gouged by cow. Lady taken to hospital by ambulance. No contact from injured party or family but reports received from other MOPs saying ██████████*
- *Cow attacked lady walking her dog. Cow then attacked Agister RM who suffered minor injuries. ██████████*
- *Cow charged lady with dog and tossed dog into the air.*
- *Lady with dog attacked by herd of cattle.*

Dogs worrying/attacking depastured animals:

- *Shetland foal missing from Lyndhurst Racecourse was discovered 48 hours later in Bartley after having been chased and mauled by dogs, bites to face and body, one ear completely bitten off the other hanging off and was later removed by vet.*
- *Foal attacked by dog resulting in foal suffering a broken leg. Foal dispatched by Agister and dog owner told to report incident to the police.*
- *Dogs out of control and chasing stock. Reported by commoner. Police informed. Police found owner of dogs and spoke to him.*
- *██████████ other dogs worrying stock, chasing ponies and jumping around cattle laid down. Walker became aggressive after being asked to get his dogs under control.*
- *Commoner had a run in with the ██████████. He was out on his horse when he saw the man and dogs walk straight into the middle of a group of cattle and calves that were laying down. He had a word with the man who was completely unaware of the issues caused by ██████████.*
- *Commoner had a young calf chased by a lurcher. The calf was exhausted and would have been killed by the dog had he not been there the see the dog off. The dog was being walked by a ██████████ dog walker.*

- [REDACTED] dog walker walking [REDACTED] dogs, dogs flushed out and chasing small calf, walker has no control of animals.
- Commoner checking on his cattle saw 2 dogs chase and circle two of his cows; challenged dogs' owner who denied her dogs were worrying his cattle. [REDACTED].
- 5 dogs chasing ponies and cattle. [REDACTED] type dogs & 2 [REDACTED], reported to Hampshire & Dorset police by caller after owner of dogs threatened caller [REDACTED].
- Commoner out to remove cow believed involved in incident on 19/7 was unable to get to the cow as she was being circled by two large husky type dogs, owner arrived 15 minutes later and called off the dogs.
- Dog v donkey. Both animals died.
- Dog attacked donkey. Donkey badly injured but survived.
- Small yappy dog chasing sheep, has bitten off sheep's tail and also nasty bite injury on neck.

Draft conclusions:

1. This is the first time that information on all interactions between depastured animals and the public has been collected for analysis. Previously, only serious incidents have been routinely recorded, making it difficult to understand the nature of human-animal contact and how more dangerous situations may be developing.
2. Information recorded by FC and NPA rangers is sketchy and difficult to analyse. However, it is clear that rangers are encountering a high number of incidents where people are feeding and/or petting the animals, with almost equal number of ponies and donkeys involved.
3. Since there is no information about the time being spent at each location, the data is only an indication of the scale of the problem.
4. It is hoped that in the coming season rangers will be trained in the use of the short form used by CitF warden, so that there is a greater chance of gathering more detailed information.
5. The information gathered by campsite wardens is far more informative and clearly shows the different aspects of the problem: from taking photographs too closely through petting/feeding to animals invading tents to steal campers' food and lashing out aggressively.
6. With wardens on duty at all times on campsites there is far greater opportunity for staff to witness and react to incidents.
7. Some of the campsite information is cause for concern since a number of the incidents reported may be precursors to more serious incidents involving injury.
8. It is of concern that campers are not warned about the presence of free roaming animals when they book their stay. The only warning on the CitF website is about opportunist theft in the New Forest, while advice to campers about how to behave around the ponies as well as 'cows and smaller mammals roaming free' is only given in the website Blog.
9. The descriptions of reports to the Verderers' Office of conflicts between the public and depastured stock indicate the range of situations in which there is potential for serious injury to the public as well as depastured animals in an environment where there are multiple opportunities for close contact and misunderstanding.