


A scenic landscape photograph of Dartmoor National Park. In the foreground, a river flows over rocks, creating small rapids. A stone bridge with three arches crosses the river. The surrounding area is lush with green grass, wildflowers, and trees. In the background, a dense forest of evergreen trees covers a hillside under a blue sky with scattered white clouds.

Dartmoor

National Park Authority

Annual Review

2022-23



Annual Review 2022/23

Our National Parks have never been more important, nor have they faced as much pressure. Dartmoor is not immune from the impact of climate and ecological emergencies; core funding for the Authority continues to reduce in real-terms, in spite of a welcome one-off grant of £440,000 in March 2023; the farming community face an uncertain future; access to services and affordable housing remain a challenge for our communities; and yet the value of the National Park to society has probably never been higher.

The Authority set an ambitious Business Plan for 2022/23 working in collaboration with our partners, stakeholders and communities to deliver National Park purposes, support local communities and deliver the vision and aims in the Dartmoor Partnership Plan.

The achievements and progress highlighted in the Annual Review for 2022/23 would not have been possible without the active support and engagement of our partners; individuals and businesses; community groups and corporate

sponsors; government departments and agencies. We are proud of these relationships and grateful to the ongoing support of everyone that has worked with us over the last 12 months – thank you.

We look forward to continuing to work alongside our partners to share our vision for Dartmoor, to make it better for future generations, climate resilient, nature rich, beautiful, connected to the past and looking to the future; a place where people of all ages and backgrounds can live, work or visit. A place that is loved, cherished and cared for.



People

Giving more people opportunities to explore, engage, enjoy and understand the landscape.

Changing Lives, Nurturing Nature



NUTS walk at East Okement Farm*

Focused on providing a head start for early career graduates, this project was enabled by support from the Green Recovery Challenge Fund.

Partnering with National Trust, Woodland Trust and South West Lakes Trust, four Conservation and Access Trainees and three Community Engagement Rangers were employed throughout 2022.

During the year the Conservation and Access Trainees undertook practical tasks, including work across our partner sites, using baseline habitat surveys to improve 70 hectares of priority habitat.

The Community Engagement Rangers worked with young people living in and around Dartmoor, to help them experience more of the National Park. A highlight of the activities were the *Night Under the Stars (NUTS) events. As the name suggests, NUTS provided opportunities for young people from a variety of backgrounds to experience a night under the stars. We reached out to young carers, children from primary schools and young people with a range of disadvantages. We also hosted our own Dartmoor Junior Youth Rangers, who we work with to develop and instill a deeper understanding and passion for Dartmoor. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive:

"I liked hearing the animals. The quiet took your problems away"
Plymouth Young Carers Member

It was great to see everyone enjoying the experience. Not everyone has had a chance like this before"
Tavi Youth Café Group Leader

"What made it really special was sitting on the rock in Dartmoor, looking up at the stars and hearing only my heartbeat - that was really cool"
Junior Youth Ranger

"The staff were amazing, full of knowledge, kindness and patience, made us all feel welcome and safe – thanks!"
Young Devon Group Leader

"I loved being out of my house and out of the noisy town and laughing with new people and having a great time. The quiet of Dartmoor is really peaceful"
Junior Youth Ranger

During the project, over 6,000 young people took part in activities provided by the team, which demonstrated the impact of this early career cohort on inspiring a new generation of nature enthusiasts. All four of the Conservation and Access Trainees have gone on to secure employment in the conservation sector. Two of the Community Engagement Rangers have been retained by the Authority thanks to external funding from the Dartmoor Preservation Association and corporate sponsorship from BMW.



WAGs being guided on Miles Without Stiles route*

Access for All

The Authority's Access for All programme was developed in response to the 2019 Landscapes Review which called on the government to open our national landscapes to a more diverse audience. We have been working closely with groups such as the *Dartmoor WAGs (Wheelchair Accessibility Group) to identify and implement access improvements.

Grant aid funding from Defra (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) has enabled us to make Dartmoor more accessible to a wider audience, through a targeted programme of works that has enhanced access at ten sites and enabled us to develop a new Dartmoor Walking App with 15 easy access routes.



Access the Miles Without Stiles walking routes

Visitor Management

During the summer season of 2022 our Outreach and Engagement Officers, Information Advisors, Rangers and engagement volunteers, worked together to engage with visitors and the local community, to encourage responsible behaviour on the moor. Using our Love More Life communications campaign, we offered enhanced information and advice around key messages such as dogs on leads, litter, fires, giving nature space and responsible camping.



High Fire Risk gateway sign

During the heatwave in August 2022, the National Park administered a temporary ban to open fires and barbecues on common land under the Dartmoor Commons Act 1985, Section 10 (4)c. The ban received the full support of the Dartmoor Commoners' Council, Dartmoor Commons Owners Association, Natural England and Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service. The quick roll out of the ban, and adherence by visitors, ensured we were able to protect natural habitats and animals from the catastrophic damage that can be caused by wildfires.

Visitor management was supported for the third year by the Dartmoor Marshals, who patrolled every evening on Dartmoor over the school summer holidays. The marshals were supported by numerous partners including the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner.

Welcoming and Engaging Visitors

Our engagement programme has seen a successful year with a broad offer ranging from one-off activities at visitor centres aimed at new audiences, to our established Ranger Ralph Club for children aged 5-12 years. We ran 12 Ranger Ralph events through the year, totalling engagement with 430 young nature enthusiasts.

We have also utilised our own social media accounts during 2022/23 to convey important messages using a mixture of approaches, including an increased amount of video content. Due to the popularity of film format, thanks to changes in global social media habits, updating our content has helped to achieve an average increase of 132% followers across all our channels, allowing us to share our messages with a wider audience.

With overseas visitor numbers returning to normal after the Covid pandemic, our three Visitor Centres welcomed over 140,000 people and our Outreach Van was deployed to 110 events across the moor and surrounding towns and cities during 2022/23. These interactions have helped countless people to enjoy Dartmoor's special qualities while promoting positive behaviour choices. We were grateful to Ministers for a one-off additional grant worth £440,000 announced in March 2023. This grant meant that the National Park Visitor Centre at Princetown will remain open for the foreseeable future.



Meldon Wildlife Festival in 2022



Backpack Camping

The Dartmoor Commons Act of 1985 provides a right of access to the commons on foot and horseback for the purpose of open-air recreation. The Authority believed that backpack camping was included within the definition of 'open air recreation' and the National Park byelaws provided a framework to manage this activity. After a challenge to the meaning of this act in 2022, a High Court judgment issued on 13 January 2023 stated that the Act does not confer on the public any right to pitch tents or otherwise camp on the Dartmoor commons.

Following the judgment, the Authority worked at speed and in partnership with the Dartmoor Common Owners' Association, to develop a new system of permissive access agreements that provide for backpack camping on certain areas of common land with the owner's permission. This system helped ensure that Ten Tors 2023 went ahead, and that the public could still backpack camp responsibly in permitted areas. An interactive map available on the authority website provides full detail of the permitted areas available for backpack camping.

In developing the new permissive system, the Authority was clear that it reserved the right to seek permission to appeal the High Court judgment.

Place

Ensuring the quality and character of the landscape and its heritage is reinforced or enhanced. Developing a resilient and thriving economy.



Supporting Business Resilience

We have worked closely with local communities and businesses to support business resilience, improve community facilities and promote a circular economy. Working with the local community we have helped secure funding for a range of projects, including:

- **Christow Village Hall** heat pump installation – National Lottery funded
- **Horrabridge Sports Pavilion** new build pavilion and pitch restoration and repairs – funded by Sport England, Good Foundation, Bernard Sunley and Football Association
- **Drewe Arms Pub** development of Community Shares to take ownership of the pub – funded by Plunkett and Power to Change
- **Ashburton Mobile Post Office** developed to offer rural Dartmoor services – funded by LINK and Teignbridge District Council

The total value of such funding is over £450,000 in 2022/23. An important investment in the community fabric of the National Park.

Developing our Planning Processes

We embarked on a major project to update our planning application database. Once completed, the data will improve public access to planning documents through our website, to provide a fully 'electronic' delivery of our planning service.

Maintaining our service through this period was challenging, however, we have seen a number of major projects reaching conclusion, including:

- The final phase of the urban extension to Chagford, which has provided affordable housing, a new community car park and local business units.
- 39 new affordable homes occupied by local residents in Ashburton.

Work has started on affordable housing schemes in other areas of the National Park including South Brent and Widecombe-in-the-Moor.

Our new Local Plan policies are having a positive impact. For example, we granted permission for the first custom self builds at Horrabridge and our new Biodiversity Net Gain requirements mean we can ensure new development is contributing to the protection and enhancement of the ecology of Dartmoor.

Delivering Housing in Dartmoor National Park

In 2022 we launched a public consultation on a new Housing Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). This document provides detailed guidance on our Local Plan's housing policies – helping to ensure Dartmoor's limited land resource is sustainably managed and its communities and special qualities are sustained. A final version of the document, incorporating comments from the public consultation, will be published in 2023/24 – a key tool to help us address the affordable housing required in many of our communities.



Development of new homes in Chagford

Nature

Managing existing habitats for increased biodiversity and developing greater areas of wildlife rich habitats.

Farm for the Future



The Dartmoor Hill Farm Project was set up to provide support to the farming community, help them maintain viable, thriving businesses and deliver public benefits.

Key to this project is the Farm for the Future programme, which is in the second of four years of delivery. Designed to offer free advice and support, this programme was established to help farmers through the Agricultural Transition. Support is given to enable the uptake of new funding streams that will be replacing existing support mechanisms.

Farmers enrolled in the programme have been encouraged to continue their involvement from year to year, as the Transition progresses. Since its launch, 100 farm businesses on Dartmoor have taken part, giving them the opportunity to build a stronger connection within the farming community and enabling them to develop a greater understanding of how they can adapt to the policy changes.

As the local delivery partner, working with the Royal Countryside Fund (previously known as the Prince's Countryside Fund) and Defra, this programme complements many of the other initiatives run through the Dartmoor Hill Farm Project.

Curlew Conservation

Curlew are in dramatic, national decline, they are classified on the UK Birds of Conservation Concern's 'Red List' and Dartmoor provides one of the most important Southerly breeding populations. In Devon the Curlew breeding population has declined by 85% since 1985.

A project funded by the Prince of Wales Charitable Foundation and the Duchy of Cornwall is being supported by Dartmoor National Park Authority, the Wildfowl and Wetland Trust, Natural England and RSPB to help this iconic bird.

Plans were developed to include working at a landscape scale to enhance habitats, undertake targeted predator control and using a new technique called 'head-starting' to boost population. Developed by the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, this enables the rearing and release of Curlew.

Initiated in 2021, there have been a total of 60 Curlew released successfully on Dartmoor to date. All released Curlew are identified individually using yellow marked rings and flags. This allows Curlews to be spotted when feeding or roosting on estuaries, where they spend their winter, and if they return to Dartmoor to breed in future years. Most of the Curlews spotted so far have been in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly.

The Dartmoor project is the only upland headstarting initiative in the UK and the lessons learned will be incredibly valuable. The data and knowledge gained will help with other national Curlew conservation work.

Any spotted ringed Curlew can be reported to curlew@wwt.org.uk



3 week old Curlew before release

Dartmoor Invasives Project

This project, now in its fifth year, was set up by DNPA Ecologist Richard Knott to deal with Himalayan balsam and American skunk cabbage. Funded initially by the Moor Otters Project and Donate for Dartmoor, this partnership project is also supported by South West Water and the Duchy of Cornwall.

To date over half a million Himalayan balsam plants and 1,000 skunk cabbage plants have been removed. Other invasive non-native species have also been tackled, including 130 giant hogweed plants in the Wray Valley and some 2,500 monkey flower plants.

The Himalayan balsam can be found on riverbanks and nearby wet woodland and farm hedgerows. Following the last five years of effort, several areas are now just showing a handful of individual plants when there had been tens of thousands present just a few years before. This has been achieved thanks to the efforts of a mix of contractors and volunteers. Over the last year, contractor cutting was particularly effective as most balsam plants could not re-grow in the very hot weather of 2022. More volunteers will be needed in 2023 and beyond to keep this effort going, and to watch and check the areas cleared to make sure that the plant has been eliminated locally.



Volunteers remove American skunk cabbage



Creation of habitat for Curlew and other wading birds such as Snipe.

Dartmoor's Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme entered its second year in 2022, 41 projects across Dartmoor received grant funding worth over £550,000.

This funding has supported our farmers and land managers to deliver:

- 1,000 new trees planted
- 8 hectares of new woodland created
- 56 hectares of improved woodland management
- 35 hectares of new habitat for biodiversity
- 185 hectares of biodiversity improvements
- 123 educational visits
- 17 new ponds built
- 11km of hedgerow improvement
- 1,147m of dry-stone wall restored
- 7 important archaeological features maintained
- 1,800 hectares of regenerative farming practices established
- 11 nature friendly, sustainable farm businesses supported to boost their resilience

FiPL is an important resource to help deliver the vision of the Dartmoor Partnership Plan. Defra have announced that the programme will now run until March 2025 and have provided increased funding.

East Dartmoor Landscape Recovery

The Landscape Recovery Scheme was announced in 2022 as part of the new Environmental Land Management Schemes (ELMS) being developed and rolled out by Defra, aiming to provide funding to help achieve much needed environmental enhancements. All 22 national initiatives granted funding under the scheme will lead on pioneering ideas to improve the rural landscape and reverse the decline of nature.

We are part of a partnership that has succeeded with an application to develop a bespoke project within the Bovey River catchment. The East Dartmoor Landscape Recovery Scheme is a partnership of environmental organisations and land managers aiming to work together to enhance and connect habitats and ensure important species are protected and thrive.



Surveying Dartmoor's woodlands

Climate

More carbon is stored through careful management of the land, reducing the risk of flooding and making the landscape more resilient to climate change

South West Peatland Partnership

We are a partner in this project, working to deliver peatland restoration across key sites on Dartmoor. Funded for four years until 2025, the partnership is delivering peatland restoration across the region's uplands to meet climate and environmental goals. Most of the project funding is secured through Natural England's Nature for Climate Peatland Grant Scheme, with match funding in-kind support from partner organisations. Dartmoor National Park employs four of the partnership team members in restoration, historic environment and assistant roles under the Dartmoor Headwaters programme.

Totalling 303ha restored across the whole project in 2022/23, 139ha have been restored on Dartmoor alone in the past year. Dartmoor's peatlands are an important store of carbon and water. Ensuring they are restored and do not suffer any further degradation is an important part of reaching our climate goals and making the landscape more resilient to climate change.



Round leaved Sundew, found at the shore of a bog pool at Hangingstone Hill

Progressing our Climate Action Plan

The 2020 Climate Action Plan set out our strategy for achieving our ambition of being a carbon neutral Authority by 2025. The Plan establishes key projects we will pursue to do this, including those targeting emission reductions and offsetting, and indication how projects should be prioritised.

The Action Plan has delivered a number of progressive projects to reduce the organisation's overall climate impact, but also significantly improves staff's understanding of carbon emissions.

As we enter an era in which climate mitigation and sustainable land management become ever more central to all our lives, our work and policy decisions will become critical to maximising climate mitigation on Dartmoor, while we work to conserve and enhance the National Park's Special Qualities for future generations.

Achievements so far and projects actively pursued include:

- Introduced two electric pool vehicles to replace the current fleet
- Completed feasibility and secured funding for the installation of 10 electric charging sockets across Princetown, Postbridge and Meldon
- Reduced our print materials across all DNPA services and working with suppliers who offer carbon balancing to support the World Land Trust
- Supporting FiPL applications that will contribute to tackling climate change



Dartmoor National Park electric pool vehicle at Postbridge Visitor Centre



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