

NEW FOREST HOTELS

Exploring the Wildlife of the New Forest: Numbers That Make the Difference

The New Forest is a diverse and thriving natural habitat, home to a wide variety of species, from majestic ponies to elusive reptiles. With over **5000 ponies** roaming freely, the region is teeming with wildlife at every turn. As autumn sets in, many of these animals are particularly active, preparing for the winter months or simply enjoying the cooler weather. Let's take a look at the numbers and variety of wildlife that make the New Forest a wildlife lover's paradise.

The New Forest Ponies: Over 5000 and Counting

The iconic **New Forest ponies** are a symbol of the region, with around **5,000 ponies** freely grazing on the heathlands and woodlands. These ponies are crucial to maintaining the balance of the ecosystem, as their grazing prevents the overgrowth of vegetation, allowing other species to thrive. In autumn, the ponies become even more visible, often found foraging for food ahead of the harsher winter months. Their wild nature makes them a popular attraction for visitors, with many stopping to take photos as they wander near the roads or through the forests.

The Deer Herds: 3,000 Deer Roaming Free

The New Forest is also home to **around 3,000 deer**, including **Red Deer**, **Fallow Deer**, and **Sika Deer**. During autumn, the **Red Deer** stags engage in the rutting season, bellowing across the forest to claim dominance. It's an awe-inspiring sound and spectacle, as the males compete for mates, showcasing their impressive antlers. These deer roam freely across the forest, foraging for food and preparing for the winter months. Their numbers and beauty add to the richness of the New Forest's wildlife.

Wild Pigs: 600 Pigs in the Autumn Pannage Season

Each autumn, around **600 wild pigs** are released into the New Forest as part of the **pannage season**, where they forage for acorns. The pigs play an essential role in the ecosystem, as acorns are toxic to other wildlife, including the ponies. By feasting on these nuts, the pigs help maintain a healthy balance. During autumn, the pigs are often spotted rooting around in the forest floor, a fun and unique sight for visitors.

Donkeys and Cows: Key Residents of the Forest

In addition to ponies and deer, the New Forest is home to a significant population of **donkeys** and **cows**. There are **around 500 donkeys** that roam freely, adding to the charming rural feel of the park. These donkeys are gentle creatures, often seen in

meadows or along quieter lanes. As for the **New Forest cattle**, there are approximately **1000 cows** that graze the fields, contributing to the landscape's health by controlling overgrowth. These animals are part of the working landscape, helping to shape the forest as we see it today.

Reptiles: A Hidden World of Serpents and Lizards

While not always the first creatures that come to mind, the New Forest is also home to a range of **reptiles**. The forest is a hotspot for **slow-worms**, a legless lizard often mistaken for snakes. There are **approximately 3,000 slow-worms** found in the region, especially in areas of heathland and woodland edges. The New Forest is also home to **common lizards**, which can be seen basking in the sun on warmer days. These reptiles play a vital role in controlling insect populations and adding to the region's diverse wildlife.

Birdlife: Over 200 Species to Spot

The New Forest boasts an impressive array of birdlife, with **over 200 species** of birds recorded in the region. Some of the more notable species include the **nightjar**, **dartford warbler**, and **woodcock**, all of which are relatively rare. Autumn is a great time to observe the forest's birdlife, as many migratory birds pass through the area. The combination of **woodland, heath, and wetland** habitats provides a perfect environment for both resident and migratory species to thrive.

Other Mammals and Creatures

Beyond the main players, the New Forest supports an array of **smaller mammals** and creatures. **Foxes, rabbits, stoats, and mice** all call the forest home, and sightings of these animals can be a delight for those exploring the woodlands. The park is also known for its **hedgehogs** and **shrews**, which can be spotted during early mornings or dusk as they forage for food.