

**A whole community will be able to use the forest**

***How scheme to plant hundreds of trees alongside housing developments is taking root***

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Ancient woodland in South Cubbington Wood, Leamington Spa (Photo: Justin TALLIS/AFP/Getty)

“Wouldn’t it be lovely if all the new housing estates that are being built had a tiny area of woodland in among the houses?” says Tania Kirby, who helped plant the first of 100 ‘tiny forests’ planned for the UK last month.

Together with dozens of fellow locals, charity worker Ms Kirby helped plant 600 native trees, including oak, birch, elder, crab apple and blackthorn - all in an area the size of a tennis court on a housing development in Witney, a town near Oxford.

“I was really shocked when I saw how small it was but it has a massive impact. Not only in its capacity for oxygenation but in the way it can instantly take people out into nature.

“A massive community of people will be able to use the forest – sitting on the benches, being within the trees – and yet they’re in the middle of a housing estate,” she said.



FTania Kirby helping to plant the UK's first 'tiny forest' last month

## Looking for volunteers

Earthwatch Europe, the environmental charity behind the project, plans to plant dozens more such tiny forests in the next three years and will be on the lookout for local volunteers to help once the locations have been established.

The charity expects the Witney tiny forest to attract more than 500 species of animals and plants, including numerous kinds of insects, birds and butterflies.

It will also do its bit in the battle against climate change by absorbing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, improving air quality more generally, reducing the risk of flooding and shielding a residential street from the noise of the A40, the charity said.

Tiny forests are at the smaller end of a wide spectrum of tree planting projects planned for the UK in the next three decades.

## The Northern Forest

It includes major expansions to existing areas of woodland and entirely new forests – such as the Northern Forest, which will see 50 million trees planted in and around the cities of Liverpool, Chester, Manchester, Leeds, Sheffield and Hull in the next decade. Across the UK, there are plans to plant an estimated 1.5 billion trees over the next 30 years.

Collectively, these will go a long way to help beleaguered populations of insects, pine martens, red squirrels and other vulnerable creatures providing habitat to dozens of animals



that have been badly hit by pesticides, habitat loss and non-native competitors such as grey squirrels.



The public can play a vital role in planting new forests and restoring existing ones (Photo: ADRIAN DENNIS/AFP/Getty)

“Done well, increased woodland area could help reverse declines in insect life,” said Matt Shardlow, of insect, bugs and invertebrate charity Buglife.

And the public can play a vital role in planting new forests and restoring existing ones.

“Planting and restoring natural forests can have positive impacts on human wellbeing, biodiversity, and carbon storage,” says Professor Thomas Crowther, chief scientific advisor to the **United Nation’s campaign to plant one trillion trees** globally, and scientist at ETH Zurich University. “By restoring trees, people can have a tangible impact on biodiversity and climate change.”

Apart from helping to plant any tiny forest planned for their area, people can help by planting a tree in their back garden - or helping various charities by volunteering as tree planters.

### **UK tree cover lags Europe**

The Government recognises that the UK’s woodland is badly depleted, covering just 13 per cent of the country’s land area - compared to the European average of 37 per cent.

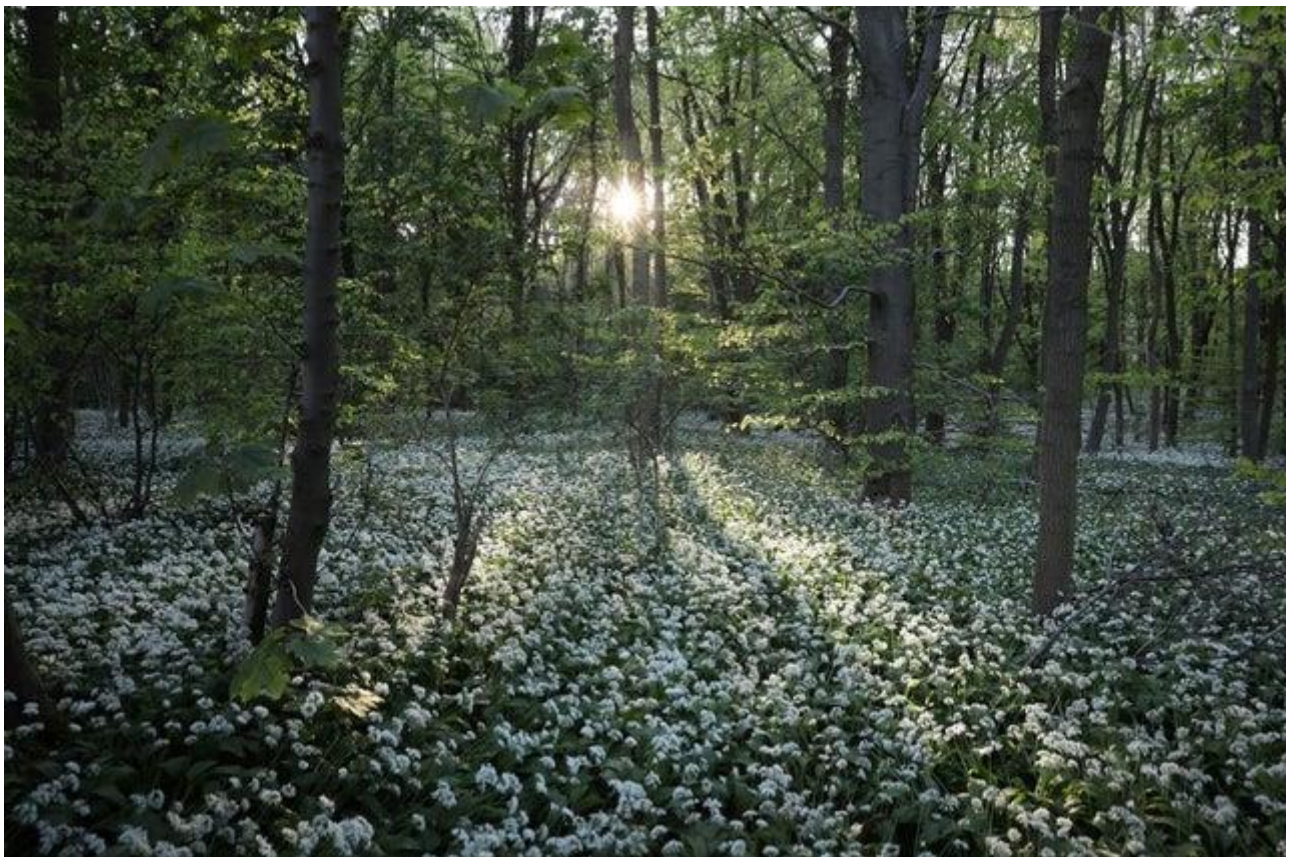
Calculating how many trees the UK has is difficult to do with any degree of precision because tree density varies widely.

However, typical native woodland contains about 1,000 trees per hectare - and there are currently 3.2 million hectares of forest cover in the UK - giving a back-of-the-envelope total of about 3.2 billion trees.

The Government has announced ambitious plans to increase forest cover to between 17 and 19 per cent by 2050, by which point the UK has pledged to become carbon neutral. This would add somewhere in the region of 1.5 billion new trees.

While this sounds a lot, it still pales into insignificance compared to much of the continent.

### **Question mark over UK target**



Typical native woodland contains about 1,000 trees per hectare - and there are currently 3.2 million hectares of forest cover in the UK (Photo: Dan Kitwood/Getty)

And there remains a big question mark over whether the Government can deliver on its pledge.

Which is where the public comes in again. Not only can people help by planting trees, flowers and plants - they can also keep the pressure up on government and MPs to create the forests they promise, campaigners say.

The country's most vulnerable species are depending on you.

"Creating, as well as restoring woodland, will boost the survival of rare, iconic animals such as red squirrels, which have suffered drastic decline and rely on woodlands to survive. And



they will also boost the fortunes dormice and the shy and elusive and very rare pine marten,” said Mr Philips.

### **The right way to plant trees**

It is important to plant the right kind of trees in the right places otherwise they can be more trouble than it's worth, warns one of Britain's leading experts on wildlife and nature.

While Matt Shardlow, **head of insect charity Buglife**, broadly welcomes the tree-planting drive he is adamant that it must be done correctly – as are many other experts.

“More woodland could help to reverse declines in insect life, but only if we get the right trees in the right place,” he said.

“This means local trees, clean trees and flowery trees, using natural regeneration and not planting trees on wildflower grassland or other wildlife habitats,” Mr Shardlow added.

Trees should only be planted on land that currently has a low level of biodiversity – such as poor-quality grassland and arable land.

And they should not have been imported live because of the biosecurity threat - ash dieback and oak processionary moth disease both came from imports.

### **Merits of natural regeneration**

In many situations natural regeneration would be better for biodiversity, than planting - bramble and scrub are important and underrated habitats - and the process should be managed so that invasive non-native trees are removed, Mr Shardlow says.

The target for new woodland should include nectar producing trees such as willow, hawthorn, cherry and lime – where appropriate to the local ecology.

Nick Phillips, head of conservation policy at the Woodland Trust, added: “The UK needs to pursue a mix of approaches including expanding native woodland, sustainable commercial plantations, urban trees, hedges and individual countryside trees.”

The Woodland Trust advocates only planting UK sourced and grown trees to prevent the import of pests and disease.

It works with nurseries in the UK to ensure trees are grown here.

Source: <https://inews.co.uk/news/environment/planting-trees-uk-conservation-environment-projects-forests-charity-woodland-2527833>