

moor trees

creating native woodland

A New Vision for Dartmoor

Moor Trees has been planting native trees on and around Dartmoor since 2001. We have created over 100 hectares (120 football pitches) of native woodland using over 100,000 trees, mostly grown and nurtured in our own nurseries from locally collected seed. All this has been achieved by a dedicated team of volunteers, supported by students from Plymouth University, and local conservation groups, businesses and families – a true community venture.

We have planted on the fringe of the open moor at Scorrington and Peter Tavy and have increased the woodland cover of the Avon valley. We have supported over 80 landowners who have made the lifelong commitment to create native woodland that will only mature beyond their lifetime, a truly visionary choice.

Human endeavour has shaped the long history of Dartmoor and how it looks today. However, from scientific research and monitoring we now know that much of it is in a poor environmental condition, retaining only a fraction of the plants and animals it once had. Our planet is rapidly warming, and Dartmoor National Park has responded by declaring a climate emergency. Woodland, along with blanket bog, is one of the most

effective ways of extracting carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and locking it away, helping to fight climate change. Trees and wetlands also help regulate water flow in Dartmoor's many rivers, helping to prevent flooding in villages and towns downstream.

We understand that residents and visitors alike cherish the open landscapes with far-reaching views but there is also growing enthusiasm for more native woodland on Dartmoor among both urban and rural communities. We believe that Dartmoor can have both. Pollen analysis has shown that when Dartmoor's famous stone circles, prehistoric settlements and other archaeological features were built, it was in a more wooded landscape. Restoration of woodland habitats and increased diversity of plants, insects, animals and birds would give visitors a new appreciation of how the people who built them might have lived and interacted with their environment.

This leaflet describes the vision of Moor Trees. It explains the history of woodland on Dartmoor and how we want to extend and connect the woodland that is already present to return large areas to a more natural state for the benefit of people and wildlife.

Dartmoor, with its iconic open moorland vistas, would naturally be much more wooded. Only fragments of the native woodland that once extended over much of the moor still remain. Moor Trees' vision is to promote nature recovery and climate resilience on Dartmoor by creating new woodlands through planting and natural regeneration, supporting an integrated approach with conservation of internationally important habitats and archaeological features.

Dartmoor Through the Ages

Post-Ice Age – 10,000 years ago

After the last Ice Age came to an end in Europe around 10,000 years ago, a milder climate allowed trees to recolonise Britain. Our native trees, such as oak, birch, hazel, willow and rowan, formed a wooded landscape across Dartmoor with a scattering of open areas on the highest and wettest ground. High ground would have remained heather moorland with sparse trees and wet valley mires and glades kept open by grazing animals. The expansive forests gave rise to a rich variety of abundant plant and animal life with both large herbivores, such as elk and aurochs (wild cattle), and their predators, including wolves and bears. Beavers populated the lower river valleys.



Today

Roughly 6,000 years ago, the landscape started to change. It is thought that a combination of a cooler, wetter climate, together with clearing of the forests by settlers, allowed the spread of blanket bog in the higher areas where trees could no longer grow. Lower down, the area of agricultural land and settlements increased, century by century, pushing the woodland back to the more inaccessible valleys. In the last century, commercial conifers replaced native woodland in many places, forming plantations of non-native trees with only limited wildlife value.

The historical landscape that we see today, with its prolific archaeological remains, is evidence of the varying efforts of humans to shape their environment. Sadly, the once rich wildlife has dwindled over the centuries as the native woodland has become reduced to a fraction of its former extent and quality, with many of the wild animals replaced by sheep and cattle. Although Dartmoor is much-loved for its peace and tranquillity, it is largely deforested. There is great potential for it to be a much richer place for both wildlife and people, which can only enhance its special qualities.



Our vision for the future

Moor Trees' vision is for a wilder Dartmoor, shaped by natural processes as far as possible, with a mosaic of restored woodland, grassland, upland heath, blanket bog, mires and meadows, teeming with insects, birds and animals. Large grazing and browsing animals are crucial in creating the dynamic landscape needed to improve biodiversity. Livestock, particularly cattle, will play an important role alongside Dartmoor ponies and deer.

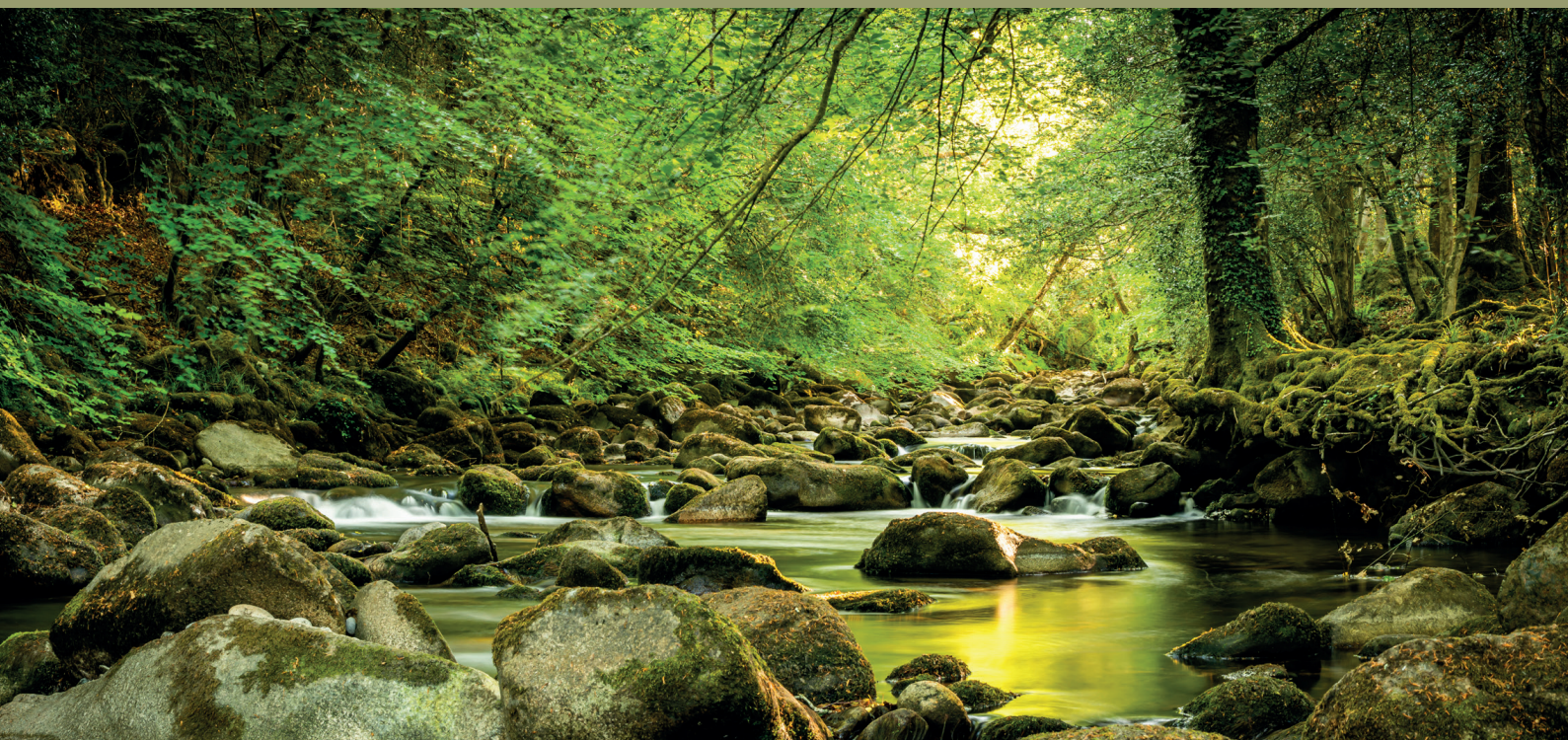
Our vision includes increased woodland along the river valleys and more open woodland and scrub spreading up the hills, with good connectivity between wooded areas. This will allow the return of other key 'ecosystem engineers' such as beavers and wild boar, which will further enhance the diversity of habitats and flora and fauna on Dartmoor. With ambition, we could once again see eagles soaring above the tors, hear cranes bugling in rejuvenated bogs and mires, spot red squirrels and elusive pine martens in the expanding woodlands, and perhaps even catch a glimpse of a wildcat.



The regeneration of Dartmoor woodlands would help restore natural processes to one of the few remaining areas in southern England large enough for this to be possible - providing vital ecosystem services that benefit everyone. A wilder landscape can also help reconnect us with the natural world, with proven health benefits.

Our vision is to restore Dartmoor's woodlands by encouraging the natural regeneration of native species that is already taking place in some areas, and helping to establish a network of community woodlands, planting trees where necessary. By 2050, Moor Trees envisages a wilder, more natural Dartmoor, with native woodland and scrub covering around a third of the National Park, alongside restored moorland habitats. A revitalised Dartmoor, managed with semi-natural grazing and by local farmers and communities, for nature, for our planet and for people.

In promoting this vision we recognise the key role of farmers and commoners in helping to restore natural ecosystems with low-input, wildlife-friendly methods of farming. We wholeheartedly endorse the restructuring of agricultural support payments to reward this. We also believe that a wilder Dartmoor will be good for the local economy, improving existing livelihoods as well as creating new opportunities.



Moor Trees:

- Engages communities and stakeholders on and around Dartmoor, to explore opportunities to promote expansion of wildlife rich, amenity-friendly native woodland.
- Works with landowners, tenants and communities to identify suitable areas for the creation of new woodland, including natural regeneration
- Works with other organisations and agencies to promote restoration and conservation of other natural habitats and features on Dartmoor
- Advocates the concept of a wilder Dartmoor that helps fight climate change, provides ecosystem services, improves biodiversity and preserves the importance of the moor for nature-friendly farming, archaeology and recreation.



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