

Ashdown Forest
Project assistant - close-herded grazing feasibility project
Job description

Background

The Board of Conservators of Ashdown Forest believes that grazing with sheep and cattle is an important component of heathland management. Currently, some 500 ha of heathland under the Board's control are enclosed by perimeter fencing and grazed; that leaves over 1000 ha with no grazing. This project is determining whether or not it is feasible to graze domestic livestock on unenclosed areas of the Forest heathland, using close-herding. This traditional technique of a herder with dogs accompanying their flock/herd is still familiar on the Continent but has been lost from Britain. The feasibility of this project will be measured against the impact of close-herding on other Forest users, control of the livestock and the efficacy of grazing on heathland vegetation.

The ability to introduce grazing to internationally important protected landscapes without perimeter fencing is highly desirable. Natural England is funding this project and will be monitoring the results closely. It is essential that close-herding is given every opportunity to succeed. Information gained from this project will be disseminated to other site managers via detailed reports and talks. The successful applicant will be an excellent stockman but also a very good communicator.

The Project Assistant will work to the Project Officer, who is responsible for running the project, helping with the shepherding, organising school visits and writing the report.

(For general information about Ashdown Forest, see www.ashdownforest.org)

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- 1) The successful applicant will assist with grazing a close-herded flock of sheep and take part in community education events during the week and occasionally at weekends. They will work to the Project Officer, who has sourced a small flock of Hebridean sheep. It is planned to expand the flock and the assistant will also be involved with training new sheep and lambing the flock.
- 2) Community involvement is an essential part of this job. This will take the form of proactive contact with Forest users while the animals are being grazed and also through publicity in the local villages. The preferred candidate will have responsibility for organising and hosting public events and school visits. Shepherded grazing should be advocated as an attractive return to traditional ways on the Forest and interest in the project should be actively encouraged.

Personal requirements

Essential	Highly desirable
Currently living in or willingness to move to Ashdown Forest area	Teaching experience
Excellent shepherding skills	Experience/Interest in Conservation
Excellent communication skills	Working with volunteers
Willingness to work alone	Experience in biological recording or surveying
Sheepdog handling experience – own dogs preferable	Towing experience
Willingness to work at weekends and in adverse weather conditions	
Driving licence	
Understanding of Health and Safety at Work	

Initially, this job will be offered on a 2 year part time (3 days per week) contract. If close-herding can be proved to work, a permanent post may be offered. Overtime will be paid.

Benefits

Salary £14787–£15825 *pro rata* (under review)

An appropriate project vehicle (and stock trailer) will be provided for work use only.

It is anticipated that the appointed person will have a trained dog(s). The Board will meet the reasonable costs of their ownership.