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Living Woods Magazine

Horse Logging Is Gaining Ground

The Fight for Our Forests

Rose Prince on Road Kill Cuisine

Plus: Truncator, Pigs and Trad Tool Coppicing

Woodsmith

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Contents

Editor's comment

This issue of *Living Woods* focuses on animals: logging horses, bracken-munching pigs, tree-damaging deer of six species, forest-destroying pests, the wild creatures we (might) harvest from the side of the A303 for the pot and the ticks who see us as a free meal. It's that last specimen that reminds us that on the food chain, sometimes we're the ones in the middle.

When Mike Abbott, green woodworker, writer and teacher extraordinaire, moved out from Brookhouse Wood last winter after many years, it was Will St Clair and his partner Penny who moved in to start a new chapter in its – and their own – story. Will begins his chronicle of life at Brookhouse Wood on page 16, and will keep us updated in his column in each new issue. (Mike continues to teach chair making at his new location in Herefordshire.)

Inspirational food writer Rose Prince (page 8) says to put the brakes on from time to time, not to enjoy the view, but to pick up the beasts who've met their maker by the side of the road so we can cook them for supper.

Spoon carver Jarrod Stone Dahl paused to contemplate the nature of the wooden spoon, in Woodnote on page 48, ahead of flying across the Atlantic to teach at this year's Spoonfest.

A single typo showed up in the last issue, transforming brilliant young illustrator (page 48) Tom Wheeler into the more exotic 'Om Wheeler'. Tom's back, as himself, next to Jarrod.

Let us know that you think.

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Cover photograph by Graham Wood

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AshTags, Mangar Bani,

Save Our Ash

The Living Ash Project urgently needs your help. In the fight against Chalara ash dieback, an important line of enquiry is to identify and analyse ash trees that exhibit tolerance of the disease, especially the ash trees that remain healthy when all about them fall prey to dieback. The £1.2m project, funded by Defra, is a consortium of the Earth Trust, Sylva Foundation, Future Trees Trust and the Forestry Commission's Forest Research.

The Living Ash Project is asking you to obtain a special aluminium tag to affix to apparently healthy trees, and to submit details of the tree online together with a photo. The tags are free and can be ordered at www.livingashproject.org.uk. Springtime is the perfect season to identify signs of ash dieback as wilting growth and possibly bark lesions appear.

The goal is to find 400 resistant specimens to create the next generation of healthy trees. If you love trees, this is a way tohelp make a difference.

©David Mark/Alamy Stock Photo

TIMBER! For Teachers

Are you a teacher? Looking for resources for classroom or extracurricular teaching about Britain's trees and woodlands? Or have you developed some effective resources that you'd like to share? The Sylva Foundation has launched TIMBER!, a free online platform for educators to find and share teaching materials to engage and inform students on this most important of subjects. sylva.org.uk/timber.

New Champions for Rare Species

Nineteen MPs and MEPs who care about the most threatened species of wildlife in their constituencies have lent themselves to a new initiative to try to raise public awareness about the status of rare plants and animals in England. The Species Champion project Is based on a successful scheme from Scotland, and partners ten national conservation organisations with MPs and MEPs who use their local clout to publicise their need for protection and support. Perhaps the rare species will return the favour in 2020.

Ancient Indian Woodland Saved

The last surviving natural forest of Delhi, the 677-acre Mangar Bani forest, dense with trees and home to dozens of species of birds (including the coppersmith barbet, see photo), rare insects and flowers and even wild leopards was saved from development by local villagers, activists and a decision from India's National Green Tribunal. Sandwiched between New Delhi and the affluent and sprawling suburb of Gurgaon, the forest had been partially acquired by developers intent on flattening the area for new building. Long considered a sacred grove, the Mangar Bani forest is now legally protected by a 1,200 acre buffer of land and a rota of guards to intercept illegal loggers. The *Washington Post* reports that local residents celebrated with a victory parade.

©Dinodia Photos/Alamy Stock Photos

Axe Matchmaking

Canada's Wildfire

As the unprecedented wildfire in Alberta, Canada, continues to burn, it can be difficult to grasp the scope of destruction. At time of press, the blaze has consumed more than 220,000 hectares of forest. That's an area approximately equal to four New Forests, a third again the area contained within the M25 and not terribly far short of the area of the country of Luxembourg. But the current fire is not – so far – a record-breaker in Canada. The largest fire so far recorded, in 1951, burned 1.4m hectares of forest in a much more remote area of the province. The cause of the current fire is still under investigation.

Treebank Memories

Public art producers Situations would like you to tell your tree story. In partnership with BBC Get Creative and the University of Bristol, Treebank aims to build a 'digital forest for the future', a repository of images, voices and films to form a picture of how trees shape our experience of the planet. If you'd like to add a memory, go to www.buildtreebank.co.uk before 25 June.

Update on 'Slowing the Flow'

News from Pickering in Yorkshire. As covered in issue 39 of Living Woods, Pickering is the centre of the 'Slowing the Flow' Partnership that employs a combination of methods designed to work with nature to hold water on the land and slow the speed at which water enters the river system to decrease flood risk. A new analysis in Pickering concluded that these measures reduced the flow of floodwater between 15% and 20% last Christmas, when the area was drenched by 50mm of rainfall over a 36-hour period. The Forest Research hydrologists found that the measures 'appear to be working as expected...This is good news for the town', reports partnership chairman Jeremy Walker.

Better than Tinder

The Finnish company Fiskars, makers of all kinds of axes, loppers, saws, knives and a host of other intelligently-designed covetable tools and useful gizmos, wants to help you find the right axe for a long-term relationship. To this end, they've developed a five question online survey – in familiar Fiskars orange – that's definitely worth a few minutes of your tea break. Complete the online form and you're presented with a list of appropriate axes in order of percentage match. It could be love. www.fiskars.co.uk/new-axes#axe_machine

Heavy Horses, Light Work

Low-impact horse logging is gaining ground. By Nancy Wood

The crackle of falling trees, the whiskery neigh of a horse, the low 'Steady, good lad' of the handler and the growing pile of logs by the track. Except for the sound of a chainsaw, this could be a springtime scene from a century ago rather than 2016. Attracting horse loggers' from right across the British mainland, the British Horse Loggers' (BHL) competition in May was a pocket demonstration of this ancient, economical, environmentally sensitive and sustainable method of woodland management.

Matt Waller, co-owner of Hawthorn Heavy Horses with wife Claudia, is hosting the competition event in the woods at Hylands Park in Essex where the couple lives and manages the woodland in a partnership with Chelmsford City Council. Matt reckons possibly as many as fifty horse loggers now work commercially in the UK in some way and that many others employ horses on their own land – up from a low of just three full-time horse loggers thirty years ago. Like most horse loggers, Matt and Claudia ferry their rare breed Suffolk Punches out to the woods for felling and extraction, and also offer bracken rolling, hay mowing and grass cutting, heavy horse 'experience days', and carriage rides for newlyweds as well as judging this year's competition and looking after entrants.

'The competition has two parts,' explains Matt. 'There is an obstacle course where we look at voice commands, balance, stacking, shunting and more. Then there's the extraction and felling competition where the handler fells three small trees and extracts them with the horse. We look for best practice and deduct points for mistakes.'

Carole and Peter Coates explain further, 'There's a lot to it. You need to read your tree if it's hung up and make use of your horse. There are ways of wrapping chains on the tree so it rolls as you pull it out. Of course, in competition you can't use all the naughty little tricks we all do when no one's looking.'

Kate Mobbs-Morgan, a judge in the obstacle event and chair of the BHL, says, 'Our competition is based on ▶

Suffolk Punch Alex pulling a log, handled by Jeff Shea

©Graham Wood

©Graham Wood

Matt Waller judging felling and extraction

European horse logging competitions, where they take it very seriously. Here, it's more about encouraging people to come and have a go.'

The BHL group is an enthusiastic community, convinced that horse logging has a crucial role to play in all kinds of forestry and woodland management. The Forestry Commission, National Trust, many wildlife trusts and councils have come to agree. As has the Prince of Wales, who employs horse loggers on his estate and is now Royal Patron of both the BHL and the British Horse Loggers Charitable Trust. In order to encourage aspiring forestry entrepreneurs, the Trust operates a three year skills-based, fully accredited apprenticeship scheme (see box).

In this era of ever-increasing environmental sensibility, horse logging has re-established itself as the tool of choice in ancient woodlands and where woodlands are steep, dense or wet, or where sites of archaeological interest require sensitivity or endangered plants need protection. The ponies barely leave a mark.

Linda Thackray says, 'We used to do horse logging in East Anglia where we had heavy clay woodlands and the terrain was very wet. It's a site where, once you got machines in, you couldn't get them out until summer. And if you did use machinery, it would make ruts that would be there for thirty years. The heavy horses have broad hooves to spread their weight, so there is very little effect on the soil. The opposite of a woman in stilettos!'

Nick Walmsley, a forestry advisor for the Forestry Commission, has been quoted as saying, 'Heavy machinery can cause rutting, soil compaction and erosion. If you damage the soil, anything will struggle to grow. You can almost kill the soil this way. It's taken thousands of years to generate the soil in British woodlands. If we destroy it, our natural history is under threat. So we need to manage these sites in a sensitive way, and that's where you would bring in a horse logger.

And according to Linda, 'Lots of wildlife trusts really appreciate horse loggers because we can deflect public outrage at trees being taken down. We'll be felling in a public woodland and someone might start to become angry, then they see the horses and they calm down, because it seems natural to them, and they want to learn more.'

Horse logging is natural in the sense that the engine of work is made of muscle, not metal, but each horse logger develops his or her – there are lots of lady loggers – own method of getting the wood out. There are tools like timber arches and bracken bruisers, many of them from Scandinavia where horse logging never threatened to fall out of fashion. Steffi Schaffler, a former apprentice of the BHL Trust scheme who now has her own Ardennes, Lisa, in Dumfriesshire, says 'Horse loggers are like farmers. If they need a piece of kit, they invent it.'

The horses are a variety of breeds, from the Suffolk Punches to brown Dales to White Shires, tending to be small and sturdy with flowing fur over their fetlocks onto their hooves. Claudia says, 'Smaller horses are considered better for horse logging because their centre of gravity is lower. Though I did know a man who was the best horse logger in the country at one time and he had a Clydesdale.'

If you are interested in hiring a horse logger for your own woodland, a good place to start is the BHL website (see box) where you will find loggers operating all over the country. It's also a fine source to locate events and meetings. Volunteers are always welcome.

And if you are tempted to become a horse logger yourself, you will be in the company of many others who threw off their pasts to take up the reins. Nick Burton, who runs his Dutch draft mare, Elza, in mid Wales, came to horse logging after a career managing public open spaces in outer London. With his wife, his redundancy and the proceeds from the sale of his house, he trained with the Wallers before moving to Wales. He now manages 28 acres of softwood forest, ready for thinning, walking Elza down to the woodland each morning to pull logs out. He has owned the temperate 19-year-old horse for just three years. 'I was given good advice,' he explains, 'If you're a novice horse logger, don't buy a novice horse.'

And he, along with everyone else in the business, acknowledges that making a living from horse logging is 'difficult'. It is labour-intensive. Most actual logging work takes place in the damp and dark of the autumn and winter. Loggers tend manage with the combination of activities that the Wallers and others engage in, a mixture of logging, demonstrations, public events and wedding transport.

This growing group of loggers, dedicated to their ancient craft, both its practice and its perpetuation, offer a window into the future of sustainable forestry.

Three Generations of Horse Logging

In the best year of horse logging that George Read can remember, he took out seven thousand tons of timber. That was nearly thirty-five years ago in Cumbria when he was working three horses simultaneously for Forest Enterprise. 'A normal day, we took sixty ton of timber out, twenty ton each horse.'

George began running horses when he was 11 years old, 'more than fifty years ago', learning from his father and going on to teach his son Kevin and now his granddaughter Saskia, 16, who found time to compete in the BHL competition just before facing her GCSEs.

When George was working three horses at the same time, he could load a horse and send it down the mountain on its own, zigzagging like a skier, dragging a forty-foot length neatly behind. At the bottom on the haul road, someone would oversee the stacking and send the horse back up. Meanwhile, George would have sent another of his horses down the mountain and then the third. 'People say, 'You must have known some horses,' but I really haven't,' George says, 'because all my horses worked into their thirties. Every day, year in, year out. You have to work every day to be that good. It's the work that makes them.'

It was Kevin and Saskia who chose to compete this time. George says, 'The hardest bit is controlling the horse.' And it's clear he is proud of his progeny and pleased his granddaughter has shown an interest in the family tradition.

Will Saskia carry on horse logging, once she's left school? George and Saskia share a look. 'Yeah,' he smiles, 'she'll carry on.'

www.britishhorseloggers.org
www.britishhorseloggerscharitabletrust.org

Kevin, George and Saskia Read with Danny

Road Kill Cuisine

Food writer **Rose Prince** finds a delicious harvest by the side of the road

For car drivers, a certain sight in early spring will be a cock pheasant standing in the middle of the road. At other times in the year they are a little more savvy about moving cars, scuttling or flying out of the way with relative ease. But as soon as the weather warms and their plumage colours up handsomely, they become drunk – on love.

No driver likes to kill a pheasant, especially in its mating season, but for your own and others' safety you cannot always swerve to avoid them. The outcome being that the game bird becomes a statistic of road kill, joining a cast other wild casualties.

Game birds, deer and rabbits once only feared men and their guns as chief predator, but with the advent of the combustion engine they have had to encounter a much faster and more dangerous enemy. Evolution being too slow for them to develop the physiological equivalent of wing mirrors, it will be eons before wild animals are less unhappily surprised by a two tonne car travelling at 60mph on a country road.

Most people drive on at the sight of a tyre-squashed creature. But before doing so, perhaps consider the waste, the possibility that nature's larder has more to offer than foraged greens or fungi. No records are kept, but it is estimated, conservatively, that 10 million birds are killed on the roads each year, and 80 million mammals. Of this number there will be many that are inedible, such as crows and rats, plus a great number that are too damaged to resurrect for a meal. But now and again, there might be a recently killed game bird or rabbit, even a squirrel whose meat is largely unbruised, to salvage and take back to the kitchen.

I have part-lived in north Dorset for twenty years and now live here full time. My husband is a writer but also a countryman. For many years he ran a small pheasant shoot with a local farmer, learned swiftly the (extraordinary) economics of game shooting and with that became a keen picker-up of road-killed meat. He was not always discerning about the condition of his quarry and, after some argument, I would have to throw the wretch back out of the car window.

Yet we have eaten some good road kill dinners, most of them pheasant but the odd dish of pigeon and rabbit as well. Hare is rarer and though I am always struck harder by the accidental death of one of these magnificent animals, a little meat goes a long way to make a beautiful ragu to eat with wide ribbons of egg pasta.

Obviously, the greater number of road kill will be the most abundant species. No one wants to see a raptor or owl killed, and fortunately in my experience it is rare. But there are a lot of game birds. According to the British Association of Shooting and Conservation, 25 million pheasants are reared and released into the wild each year for commercial shooting. Approximately 40% of these will die from disease, predation or on the road. Wild game birds are even more vulnerable, with 80% mortality in their first year. It is possible to estimate in a rough sum that, if one third of these deaths are on the road, there could be half a million road-kill dinners there for the taking.

That is not to actually encourage hunting with your vehicle. The countryside code of practice goes that you should not pick up a carcass that you have yourself hit, but leave it for the next car to pick up. The Highways Agency actually lays claim to the ownership of dead animals on the road, indicating that stopping to pop a freshly killed, plump pheasant into the boot of your car is poaching. People were hanged for that in the past, or transported, but the Highways Agency rarely enforces their ownership. Their only interest is removal, especially in the case of wounded deer.

For a driver-forager, a slain deer in good nick is a find rewarding a large quantity of meat. But sadly not all are killed, but wounded. Current rules dictate that the police should be called, who will in turn call a vet to put the deer down. As one can imagine, this can take hours and the suffering of the animal is greater as a result. I suspect that on many such occasions, out of sight of the authorities, sympathetic country people discreetly euthanise wounded deer, unable to bear their distress.

If you are persuaded to join the community of enthusiastic consumers of free, healthy, wild meat, there are criteria for making your choice: With apologies to the squeamish, first look for freshness. So, no discernable sour odours and eyes that are clear and slightly protuberant are a good sign as are wounds that are new with red oxygenated blood. Discard any ▶

> **For a driver-forager, a slain deer in good nick is a find**

©John Carey

animal where there is a sign of maggot damage, or which may already have made a meal for scavenging crows or raptors.

With rabbits, examine their eyes for signs of *Myxomatosis* – they will look swollen and sleepy. Infected rabbits are nearly blind and often killed on the road. They should not be eaten. Bruised meat of any sort is not palatable, so only use meat that is undamaged. It will simply look like ordinary, wholesome, nutritious meat – but that is surely the point.

The quarry needs to be prepared for the pot. YouTube has a wealth of films to help learn how to skin and paunch a rabbit but the likelihood is that most road kill finds yield only half their meat and a sharp knife is needed to tease what you can from the bone. I am happy simply to have enough for a small supper, and have often combined the lean meat from rabbit or pheasant with belly pork to bulk out a braise and add richness.

Taking a little trouble with cooking is important as is making sure the final dish looks and tastes delicious. I was always taught that extreme meat needs that little more work in this respect, but goodness is not the only reward – there is the satisfaction that one less loss will go to waste and that tastes very good indeed. ■

Food writer **Rose Prince** has published five books, including *Kitchenella, The New English Kitchen* and *The Pocket Bakery*. She writes a regular food column for the *Daily Telegraph* and is a frequent contributor to many other publications. Rose is now taking bookings for cookery courses at her new house in Dorset.
roseprince.co.uk

Rabbit and Pheasant with mustard, fennel and rosemary

Good with new potatoes or wide ribbon egg pasta (papardelle,) a slightly creamy braise that is freshened with the flavour of lemon and rosemary.

Serves 2

200g pork belly, cut into dice (rind removed)
30g butter
200g rabbit and pheasant meat, cut in bite-size pieces
4 shallots, finely chopped
1 stick of celery, strings pared off and finely chopped
1 carrot, finely chopped
1 small fennel bulb, chopped
2 cloves garlic, chopped
leaves from one sprig rosemary, chopped
½ teaspoon fennel seeds
100ml white wine
4 large plum tomatoes, de-seeded and skinned, then chopped
approximately 400ml chicken or other meat stock
2 tablespoons Dijon mustard
100ml double cream
Salt and freshly ground black pepper
To serve: zest of ½ lemon and chopped parsley

Put the pork belly in a frying pan and cook over a low heat for 15 minutes until coloured and much of the fat rendered away. Remove the pork from the pan with a slotted spoon and set to one side.

Melt the butter in a casserole over a medium heat. When it foams, add the rabbit and pheasant – stir-fry for a few moments then remove from the pan with a slotted spoon, setting it aside with the pork.

Add the vegetables, garlic, rosemary and fennel and cook gently until the vegetables are soft. Return the meat to the pan, and add the glass of wine. Simmer for one minute then add the tomato. Simmer for 2 minutes then add enough stock to cover the contents of the pan by 1cm.

Bring back to simmering point then cook for 1 hour, until the meat is tender. Add a little more stock if the cooking juices evaporate too much. Just before serving add the mustard and cream. Season to taste with sea salt and fresh ground black pepper. Heat gently and serve.

Babes in the Woods

Peter Bottoms couldn't find any decent pork, so he's growing his own.

By **Nancy Wood**

If you happen to be in the west of Wales near Machynlleth, it may be worth getting in touch with Peter Bottoms to see if there's any of his forest-grown pork about. It's mainly sold by word-of-mouth very locally, and runs out quickly even when it is available.

Peter is owner of the Esgair Timber Company Ltd, dedicated to the production of quality sustainable timber products — as well as a small amount of quality sustainable pork from his woodland-raised Welsh pigs. 'The meat from our pigs has more flavour, certainly, and the texture is different, meatier, not flaccid or pale.'

'We employ a batch paddock grazing system. We've got four sows and a very underworked boar named Ivor the 7th. They farrow several times a year and we use a local abattoir and local butcher,' he says. The pigs are thriving, well-exercised with a diet supplemented with some hand feeding. 'They're a hardy breed that don't tend to run to fat.'

Before getting into timber, Peter was a commercial fisherman whose family ran a café, 'So we've been in the food industry for thirty years.' The move to timber was a new chapter.

'We've been here since December of 2007,' he relates, 'when there was nothing here but trees, tracks and plenty of water. There were no buildings and no resources. And 2008 was an interesting time to start a business.'

Even so, his dedication to environmental sustainability has never wavered. He and his team built a sawmill entirely from mature trees cut within a hundred metres of its site, employing a classic roof support system – the Belfast truss – from the Victorian era. The mill is off-grid, so the design uses as much natural light as possible and electrically powered machinery with juice from generators sized to the task. Recycled vegetable oil goes into chainsaws and tractors. 'We seek to strip out as much use of fossil fuel as we can,' Peter says.

The company is proud to be run at a level above Forest Stewardship Council standards, and to supply timber to the local construction and timber framing market for sustainable buildings, as well as biomass for chip or pellet boilers. Deliveries of finished products are usually limited to a forty-mile radius, in support of Esgair's commitment to sustainability. And if you've visited the Wales Institute for Sustainable Education at the nearby Centre for Alternative Technology, you've probably walked on some of their decking.

Peter aims to keep things as straightforward as possible. 'The growing of trees is very simple, made complicated by man,' he says.

A few of Esgair Timber's Welsh pigs

'The heart of the business is a completely bespoke service,' Peter explains, 'When people ring up with specific needs or niche requirements, we like to say yes. The log yard can handle timber up to 12 ½ metres in length. We have also produced wood sheds that we ship flat-packed and can be assembled in half an hour by any averagely competent person with an electric screwdriver.'

But back to the pigs: besides producing high quality pork for the Bottoms family and local connoisseurs, they also have a forestry function: keeping the weeds down in young woodlands to lessen competition with young trees, a definite benefit.

If you're tempted to get started raising pigs 'instinctually', as the Americans have been known to call it, as an element of woodland management, plenty of information and assistance is available. Expect to become familiar with form-filling, because there are certainly regulations regarding feeding, transport and welfare that must be adhered to. Jim Pettipher's thorough and practical beginner's guide to small-scale pig keeping called 'Pig Ignorant?' can be found on the Community Supported Agriculture website. Oaklands Farm in East Sussex offers one-day 'Starting with Pigs' courses that include all the basics, some hands-on pig time and an introduction to a woodland setup. Check your local contacts for courses closer to home. ■

For more information:

Esgair Timber Company esgair.wordpress.com
Oaklands Farm www.oaklandspigs.co.uk
Community Supported Agriculture, search 'Pig Ignorant,' www.communitysupportedagriculture.org.uk

How to Deal with Deer

Thibaud Madelin examines practical deer management techniques to meet your woodland objectives

Deer are the quintessential woodland animal, hunted by royalty, mythologised by Walt Disney and loved by all. On these shores, very little beats the sight of the elusive roe deer grazing a woodland clearing on a misty morning, there for an instant, gone the next.

But if there is one issue that I have grappled with over the years working at a variety of woodland sites, it is the challenging – and often emotive -- relationship between the management of woodland and the management of deer.

Whether your woodland is managed for single stand forestry, coppicing or a mixture of both, or solely for amenity, the presence of too many deer can frustrate your goals and unbalance the ecosystem. Coppice shoots are incredibly vulnerable to browsing by deer and a large part of the coppice rotation can be lost if nothing is done to protect it. In single-stand forestry blocks, damage can occur at the earlier stage of the rotation, when the trees are planted and growing. Browsing irreversibly damages the trees by, for example, creating forks or defects in the wood at a later stage. Deer can damage trees and by association impact on your objectives by fraying, thrashing or bole scoring. These are all natural behaviours and in most cases are absolutely fine and indeed can be a real privilege to observe. However, current patterns of land-use and the extent to which we are constantly reshaping the boundaries between the man-made world and the natural world mean that often things aren't in balance. The damage can be extensive and have an impact not only on woodland management objectives but the entire ecosystem of the wood and by default a wide range of fauna and flora, including invertebrates, birds and woodland plants.

Red deer in velvet

This article offers an overview of the management of deer species for woodland objectives and some links to follow for further advice.

I maintain that deer are not a pest and they should not be seen as such. They are an important component of the woodland ecosystem. The potential damage they cause, if any, must be properly assessed rather than assumed, so as a woodland owner or manager your first step is to determine the number and nature of any deer present in your woodland.

Six species of wild deer live in the UK, three large herding deer species and three smaller territorial species and nationally their range and numbers vary considerably. The larger species comprise the native red deer (*Cervus elaphus*) and the introduced fallow deer (*Dama dama*) and sika deer (*Cervus nippon*). These three species are herding deer, so if present in your woodland they will tend to form groups of varying sizes depending on the availability of food and shelter, as well as on disturbance. The three smaller species of deer consist of the native roe deer (*Capreolus capreolus*) and introduced muntjac deer (*Muntiacus reevesi*) and Chinese water deer (*Hydropotes inermis*). These three species are

territorial and are often seen alone or in pairs. The muntjac deer is particularly successful in spreading out and is a very common sight in southern England, but absent in Scotland. You may have one or more species sharing a woodland, some may be more transient than others or you may have none.

I have conducted population studies using the Forestry Commission Faecal Standing Crop (combination plot technique) but most people will be able to estimate deer numbers or impact more straightforwardly.

Environmental Impact Assessment is a simple observational system used to estimate the environmental impact of deer through recording severity and extent of damage. It is best done in early spring and is based on scoring the level of deer activity and the level of deer damage. Activity and damage correlate, as when deer density increases, so does damage. The main types of damage are browsing (browsing line), bark stripping, bole scoring (gouging of tree trunks by Sika deer), fraying (damaged caused by deer removing the velvet from their antlers) and grazing. Activity is scored on direct observation (seeing deer) and any indirect signs of deer (slots or deer foot marks, droppings and tracks). Other relevant information would include deer road traffic collisions on adjacent thoroughfares. This technique is easy to apply. For more specialised work or information about other census techniques, help can be gleaned from several sources. (See the box.)

Once you've established the species and number of deer present in your woodland, the next step is to correlate this with your objectives, whether you manage your woodland for timber, amenity or nature reserve. This is where the evidence gleaned in the first step is most important, as decisions about management of deer should be undertaken scientifically and unemotionally.

For instance, let's assume you're managing a mixed coppice rotation to produce larger stems for fencing, smaller ones for hurdles and some larger stools for charcoal burning. You've established that your woodland contains fallow deer and muntjac deer in large numbers and the occasional roe deer and you've assessed that the deer population is a threat to your crop. Muntjac deer in particular are quite damaging to coppice stands because their small size means that they are able to use their chests to flatten shoots to get at the buds they can't reach from the ground, thus killing the whole stem. Ingenious, but not ideal.

You have two options: lethal control and exclusion. Lethal control is the selective culling of animals to reduce the population dynamics to a level where they can coexist with your objectives. This is done using high-powered rifles and expanding ammunition. Of course, firearm ownership is strictly regulated in the UK and any operator will need a valid Firearms Certificate issued by the relevant police authority. In practical terms, you may also need to consider the use of a high seat, where an elevated shooting position increases the safety

©Forestry Commission

Damage to mature Sitka spruce by Red deer

©Forestry Commission /Isobel Cameron

Fallow deer tracks (slot)

of the shot. Training is available through the Deer Management Qualification process as the Deer Stalking Certificate Level 1 and Level 2. If you prefer to have a third party undertake a culling operation for you, there are plenty of people and organisations that offer help. However, a word of caution: deer have a monetary value, particularly stags and bucks, so tread carefully. If unsure, get in touch with the Deer Initiative, that coordinates groups whose purpose is the management of a healthy herd, and not necessarily healthy profits.

Exclusion simply means keeping the deer out and it can be effective if you have reservations about lethal control. Fencing is the best technique, particularly if done properly. The height – up to 2.1m high -- is dependent on species present so it is possible that the cost may be prohibitive. In addition, deer can still find a way in. Muntjac deer will often go underneath, enlarging fox tracks where they're present, unless the fencing is dug in. Additionally, in woodlands, it takes just one tree down or a large branch to compromise the fence, so it should be checked very regularly.

Other natural barriers are possible, though they require a lot of material and possibly a tractor or a lot of hands! I was fortunate to visit Bradfields Woods in Suffolk with Oliver Rackham on one of his courses to observe their system of exclusion. They built large bunds made of scrub around their newly-cut coppice rotations and it appeared a good arrangement, but, as with fencing, still needed to be 2m high. If your coppice is managed for some sort of use (i.e. not for conservation when the end product doesn't really matter), you may not have much left over after building a bund.

Having assessed the damage and decided on a course of action, you may well be left with an end product in the form of venison. The handling of venison for your personal use is not regulated, but any meat you supply to others, and that may include your family, should comply with food and hygiene regulations. There are plenty of training courses to get the necessary knowledge in handling and butchering a deer carcass and it is a very satisfying thing to eat meat from an animal you culled sustainably.

Ultimately, the end goal is to have the management of any deer population in your woodland integrated into the objectives you have for it. Just as we harvest trees for woodland and craft, deer present a management opportunity that benefits the woodland ecosystem as a whole. Trying to achieve balance can be a thankless task, but it is irresponsible to ignore the evidence if the habitat is being damaged by excessive numbers of deer. It seems counterintuitive to say, but sometimes the best thing for the woodland isn't the best thing for the deer. As long as culling is done selectively, humanely and that you make full use of the end product, it can be a very satisfying thing overall as you see a woodland thrive and biodiversity increase.

Whatever your choice, it should match your overall objectives for woodland management. These should take into consideration what other neighbouring land owners are doing as working in isolation can create disparate deer communities that skew the results. Your plan should be evidence-based and properly assessed. At both ends of the spectrum you will have issues. Too many deer will damage the habitat, lower overall biodiversity, particularly of woodland plants, and impact on overall deer welfare by having a population prone to disease and malnutrition. Too few deer (where you would expect some due to correct habitat conditions) and the woodland ecosystem will be missing one of its key components.

In the end, it's all about balance, which is sometimes the hardest thing. ■

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Hazel coppice damaged by browsing fallow deer

For more information:

The Deer Initiative www.thedeerinitiative.co.uk
The British Deer Society www.bds.org.uk
Deer Management Qualifications www.dmq.org.uk

Thibaud Madelin has studied Environmental Studies (Open Univ) and Environmental Conservation (Dip, Oxon) and worked in the ancient woodlands of Ashtead Common NNR, Burnham Beeches NNR and Epping Forest, where he is now Forest Keeper.

An Awfully Big Woodland Adventure

Inspired by great teachers and touched with luck, **Will St Clair** begins a new life at Brookhouse Wood

Four years ago, my partner Penny and I decided to seek a way out of city life. We'd been living in London for sixteen years and making our living as actors. Although we both loved our work, spending months at a time on tour away from each other had worn us down. We dreamt of a more sustainable life together in the countryside. We dreamt of buying a woodland.

We wanted to make a living by creating a beautiful place with yurts and teepees for people to stay in, and to have a space that could be used by local craftspeople to teach workshops to our guests. What could be a nicer way of living than to welcome people into paradise and teach them a new skill?

Years ago I remember watching Ben Law build his amazing house on *Grand Designs*. I yearned for that simple, easy connection to the trees. Now I wanted to learn how to use those traditional techniques and to build a home for Penny and myself from the woodland itself.

As a child I was constantly whittling, making bows and arrows, chopping firewood and climbing trees. To this day, few things bring me as much peace as sitting at the top of a tree, feeling it sway in the breeze. It's a habit that more than once has required explaining to the Metropolitan Police (it seems they are not used to seeing a grown man sitting in a tree). Later, in London as a drama student, I paid my way through my degree by restoring antique furniture. It felt good

to still be working with my hands while studying something so internally focussed as acting.

So, in 2011 we decided to leave the unstable path of the jobbing actor, and embark on the infinitely more lucrative career of the professional forest dweller. We set about looking for the right plot and asking local planning authorities how you go about building a sustainable house in a woodland. The answer is: you don't.

The real turning point for me came one day when I walked past Barn The Spoon's shop on Hackney Road. Watching the simplicity and skill with which Barn created something beautiful and functional with just an axe and a knife stopped me in my tracks.

I went in for a chat and walked out twenty minutes later with a fine spoon and an answer to what I was looking for. Barn had agreed to take me on as an apprentice. I spent two and a half years working with him, learning about green woodwork, and eventually teaching courses for him at his workshop in Stepney.

Inspired by this new world of wood culture, I contacted the man who was the source for so many people on this path, Mike Abbott, and spent some time with him assisting on his chair making courses at Brookhouse Wood. It was an inspiration to spend time with him in the woodland workshop and see how he lived the life we had dreamed of. We were still no closer to finding the right woodland for our project (or any closer to figuring out the planning nightmare!).

Though things went well back in London over the next year, teaching green woodwork courses and running bladesmithing courses with one of the best toolmakers in the world, I was itching to get back to the woods and get away from the noise and clutter of the city.

When summer came around, I headed back to Brookhouse Wood to learn more from Mike and help out on his courses. One morning, while eating my porridge in the meadow, I bumped into the landowner. He said they were looking for someone to take over the woods when Mike left in the new year. Could this be us? Five minutes later I found myself phoning Penny to tell her that we just might have found what we were looking for. We could hardly speak we were so excited.

They say be careful what you wish for. After some long conversations and encouragement from Mike, we agreed that would move to the woods and take over the workshop in the early spring. The owners were even keen to set up a glamping enterprise, similar to what we had in mind, so we started sharing our ideas and working out how to bring them into fruition.

Without knowing if everyone thought we were mad, if anyone would ever come and visit, or if we could make this business actually work, we left everything we knew in London headed off to a freezing caravan in Herefordshire. Standing for the first time in the empty workshop on a cold clear February day and seeing the endless possibilities before us, we knew we had made the right decision.

Throughout the early spring, we spent our days making repairs to the existing structures at Brookhouse Wood and building new ones. Harvesting building materials from the woodland, gathering hazel with a billhook or digging clay from the ground is infinitely more pleasing than a trip to the local builders merchant!

I will continue to teach chair making, stool making, spoon carving and bowl lathe building courses, and we will also offer yoga and painting retreats, which allow us to collaborate with old friends and grow our little community at Brookhouse Wood.

In another part of the woodland, we have plans for three roundwood timber frame treehouses for glamping. I'll be building these with local craftsman Rudi Meseg who spent many years training and working with Ben Law — a fitting connection to one of the earliest sources of inspiration for this new life.

The Living Wood workshop is an amazing inheritance, a stark change from our former life in the city. The work is hard and all encompassing, but we sleep peacefully at night and wake up eager to start in the mornings.

It's scary and exciting, and there is so much to learn about our new home, but slowing down to move in time with the seasons feels like a good place to start. There are more trees to plant, vegetables to grow, plants and birds whose names I need to learn, and a lifetime of knowledge to soak up. But I couldn't imagine a better place to start this journey than the Living Wood Workshop. And I couldn't have asked for better teachers along the way. ■

Watch for Will's new column, 'Life at Brookhouse Wood' in the next issue of *Living Woods magazine*

For course information and more: willstclair.co.uk

Start A New Wood Fair? How Hard Could It Be?

The tale of the new Strumpshaw Tree Fair, by **Candy Sheridan**

©Glenn May

Candy Sheridan and her traditional Gypsy wagon

Here in the East of England, we have a long tradition of fairs, from those of ancient times to the 1970's revivals, the Old Albion Fair, Barsham Fair and Bungay Horse Fairs. They took place in Suffolk and Norfolk, where I live, and were an eclectic mix of wood folk, hippies and Gypsies, who sold piebald Gypsy cobs.

Lately, it seemed to me that country fairs have lost much of their traditional craft exhibitors and become dominated by other business: car sales, double glazing and even conservatories. I can never fathom out why entry to a country fair would result in anyone buying such an unplanned expensive purchase!

Instead, I wanted to have the type of wood fair that would provide a platform for Norfolk's wealth of local producers and artisans. Instead of loud music and huge beer tents, I wanted buskers and microbreweries selling direct to the customers. Instead of chip and burger vans there would be local producers selling everything you'd need to put together a lovely summer picnic. I wanted pole lathe turners, chainsaw carvers, makers of willow hurdles, chairs, spoons, rakes and Gypsy wooden flowers.

In the past, I've been a market trader, set up a farmers' market, traded and exhibited at steam rallies, country fairs and horse fairs, and run several fairs and street fairs. So it felt natural to ask myself, 'How hard would it really be to start a new, traditional wood fair?' Last autumn, I set out to do it.

I chose my favourite venue, the Strumpshaw Hall Steam Museum, midway between Norwich and Great Yarmouth. Then I began the effort of finding the

sorts of exhibitors and performers I hoped would take part. Over the years, I have built up a collection of names and details from people I've met at markets and events who've impressed me with their talents, set-ups and perhaps even their romantic good looks. I sent out an email, asking them to consider booking a stall and to give us a hand by spreading the word about this new event, the Strumpshaw Tree Fair.

I found these lost souls, as I called them, fairly 'hard to reach'. 'Hard to reach' is actually a term applied by the local council – I'm a former North Norfolk councilor -- to my community of Gypsies and Travellers. In my experience, councils are excellent at evicting us, but forget to do any surveys and they qualify this by describing us as 'unreachable'.

But then, these council officers have never come across the wood folk who, in my humble opinion, are *truly* 'hard to reach'.

Of the traditional artisans I was seeking, many do not have mobile phones, and yet are never in to answer a landline. They usually have no answering service. Many more wood folk do not have the internet and can see no attraction in any aspect of it! Some do manage to have websites, but do not respond to messages. After numerous emails had achieved nothing, I realised that in order to get the artisans I wanted to my tree fair, I was going to have to use charm, persuasion and plain old-fashioned hassle. I began my 'cold calling' phase. The questions I got from the people I reached were surprising, 'Why? Who was I? More why? Was I qualified? What was my agenda?' So not only were the wood folk difficult to reach, they were wary as well.

By this point it was January and I decided a poster was required, a ploy that nearly backfired. I launched the poster and proudly stated that the fair would include a 'rake maker' – it didn't yet have a rake maker at this point, but there was a one I wanted to entice. I posted 'my' rake maker a copy of the poster, then rang him. The rake maker, who, remember, hadn't technically booked a stall, said, 'I'm not booking in. You already have a rake maker. It's there on the poster!' 'That's you!' I told him. He booked.

It surprised me that most wood folk I spoke with said they never sold anything at fairs and were often paid to attend so that visitors could see them in action.

As a Gypsy who has attended many events, I hadn't realised that so many craft people were paid. We tow our open square lot Gypsy wagons around the East of England and no one has ever offered to pay us for our contribution, photo boards, talks on Gypsy customs and traditions.

For me, to get away and be on the way to a fair is the best feeling in the world. Unlike the wood folk, we Gypsies do sell items to help with diesel costs, like old farming tools, the sort of things that my great granny also sold from her wagon back in Eire.

Traditions like that, inherited from our families, are something I strongly believe in. I do not want

my Gypsy community to be 'invisible' or 'hard to reach'. We have been part of the countryside for five hundred years and mixed with the country artisans and wood folk these last two hundred years. We worked in the fields, fixed fencing, sold horses, lamped for food, told fortunes, hawked baskets of flowers and sold our lucky heather. We met and mixed in those pea fields, hop farms and shared stories with the some of the ancestors of the very folk I was trying to support and work with. It's this common history, heritage and love of the countryside that is the motor behind establishing a new wood fair. In times past the old fairs were hiring fairs, marriage fairs and horse dealing fairs. We still have our own fairs that confirm our history and identity, but what I felt was missing was a parallel for the local wood folk.

So slowly, bit by bit and person by person, the Fair came together. On the weekend of 23 – 24 July the Strumpshaw Tree Fair will celebrate wood crafters, artisans and very talented people. Come join us! Celebrate our shared traditions and love of the countryside, and take pride in these ancient crafts. There will be local food, cider, music, Gypsy wagons, a Travelling Insect Museum, Fool Hardy Circus, hurdle maker, chair makers, driftwood sculptor and chainsaw artists, and most definitely a rake maker. ■

Candy Sheridan is a fourth generation antique dealer from a long line of Irish Traveller horse and antique dealers.

Goldengrove Un

Unchecked ivy robs our native trees of their beauty, writes **Graham Cunningham,** and we are all the poorer for it

....are you grieving over Goldengrove unleaving?
— **Gerard Manley Hopkins**

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It is glorious day in early spring and I have just returned from a stroll along the tree-lined lanes and footpaths around the village where I live. Our native sycamore, ash, alder, willow and beech are (or were) a visual delight in all four seasons – the ethereal beauty of their naked canopies in winter every bit as much as in their plumptious heavy-laden summer. A visual delight, that is, until you are brought hard up against the reality of just how many of them are – in our time — now choking with ivy.

In the lanes of your Goldengrove memory, your mind's eye sees a delightful perspective of graceful tree canopies with branches subdividing into ever more delicate shapes. What you are, these days, increasingly likely to see is a sort of Jackson Pollock abstract – mad, dark splodges of dense evergreen ivy seemingly lobbed at the trees, relegating the branches to a mere spidery backdrop. Nature imitating art, perhaps, after all! Many roadside trees have succumbed to such an extent as to have become now mere amorphous sculptures in ivy. With others, the outermost branches shoot out like frightened children fleeing the Ivy Bogey Man who - you just know - will get them in the end.

Occasionally there is relief, as when I passed along the edge of one particular farm where the hedgerow trees were gloriously free of ivy infestation. It is then that you notice the tell-tale clue that, here, the farm buildings too are more cared for than is usual with the modern agri-business type of farm - brick barns properly and respectfully maintained rather than just botched up. And you sense too that here is a farming family of a certain mentality (you can almost sniff it in the air), a pride-of-place mentality of a kind for which there is probably no answering clause in the Environmental Stewardship Farm Subsidy funding handbook. Also, the occasional gracious period dwelling with a generous roadside frontage - a former rectory, say, and home now perhaps to a successful executive, has the same quality. Whatever the reason, the result again is no ivy. These well-managed roadside frontages are the ones that the film crew will use for the scenes in Miss Marple. Ivy blobs will be edited out.

As one for whom the delights of the English landscape have been one of the very greatest pleasures of my life, I know from personal experience that it was not always so clogged with ivy. But ivy infestation is not a hot issue in modern Britain. It does not merit even a tiny footnote in that great angst-filled modern sensibility, *The Environment*.

Worse still, if you are a lover of our native hedgerow and woodland trees, then beware of the native arboriculturalist expert for whom the consensus is that ivy on trees is a good thing on account of its perceived benefit as a wildlife habitat.

nleaving

Experts? Yes you do need them — when someone is poking around your insides on the operating table, for instance. But these days, arguably, experts have spread - like ivy - into places where common sense used to thrive perfectly well on its own. Ours is an age in which media over-exposure of the (necessarily) narrow focus of the specialist expert can lead to a tunnel vision in public consciousness.

I am reminded of a *Gardeners' Question Time* on the radio a while back:

"I have a question," says a politely spoken listener, "Am I alone in being worried by the vast numbers of trees being killed by ivy infestation? Nobody seems to be cutting the stuff to keep it in check these days".

"Well, Matt?" says Eric the GQT chairperson, "You've often leapt to the defence of ivy in the past?"

"I have indeed," says regular panellist Matt who goes on to advise that ivy doesn't actually kill trees, not "as such". He concedes that when the ivy gets right up into the canopy it might look unsightly to "certain people" and can be "inclined to do damage" from the windsail effect, but overall "the gains are much greater". At which cue the other expert panellists are brought in. A breathless paean to ivy's arthropodic gains then ensues among Matt, Pippa, Christine and Eric.

"A fantastic food source for all sorts of insects," says Christine.

"Yeh," says Matt in expert-panellist transport of delight, "Yeh, wasps and flies and all sorts of interesting...bluebottles, even".

OPINION

"There you are, Mr Fear," rounds off chairperson Eric with a pleasantly *ex cathedra*, "The benefits (of ivy) far outweigh its ill effects."

None of which addresses the issue actually being aired by people like Mr Fear, which is, in essence, an aesthetic thing. It is about beauty and ugliness.

They are up against a growing constituency for whom any real appreciation of the English landscape has atrophied. Its leafy lanes and hedgerows, the managed landscape legacy of its former landed estates – these are now less picturesque delight and window into our national cultural history and more a kind of quasi-moral abstraction, which is implicit in the choice of name for our new national agency of countryside guardianship: Natural England. We have come to have this rather Rousseauesque conception of *The Environment* as a state of grace fallen victim to the ravages of mankind. For some, this losing touch with our own history is so complete that the idea has even been floated within Natural England that our picturesque landscape might need to reinvent itself so as to be more appealing to those who haven't hitherto felt any spontaneous urge to go there.

Realistically there is, in the foreseeable future, scant chance of "keeping [the ivy] in check" for — even were the case to be made — who would actually be undertaking this task in an age when so few people now actually work the land? But in the longer view, unless we regain our deep sense of the picturesque in the English landscape, understand that Goldengrove is *not* a wilderness, but something that has been lovingly husbanded by man, then — to adapt a line of Hopkins' famous poem — it may one day be that it is England we are grieving for.

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The Forestry Commission advises that ivy does not pose a threat to healthy trees. Ivy provides habitat for nesting birds, bats and dormice as well as a host of insects, and offers wildlife shelter and colour in winter months. In addition, under the *Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981* it is an offence to intentionally damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird while being built or in use.

Graham Cunningham is a retired architect and writer of occasional pieces for online journals. He is married, with two daughters and three granddaughters and lives in Cheshire.

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Imagine...
having a wood
of your own
Maybe it fulfils a life-long dream of being a land owner. Perhaps you are looking for somewhere to get lots of outdoor exercise which would not only be healthy for you, but would be good for the environment. You may be fascinated by flowers, butterflies and wildlife, and want the children to learn about them. Or you just want to get away from screens and electronics. The reasons may be endless, but imagine having a wood of your own! You can find out about woods that are currently for sale on our website
www.woodlands.co.uk

Nurture in Nature

Dangerous Dads helps men to be 'the best dad in the world', by **Ian Blackwell**

©Dangerous Dads

Mud and noise on a Dangerous Dads outing

No two families are alike, but in my experience of working with hundreds of dads over the years, whatever their lifestyle or situation, they all want to be 'the best dad in the world' for the children they care for and care about.

In the last forty years, rapid shifts in family, social and working life have introduced significant complexities to the role of fathers. Many children grow up happily in two parent and in single parent households, or with two mums, or have dad as a memory. Some children don't know their fathers. At the same time, some fathers face isolation, anxiety, addiction or lack of access to their children.

It is well known that men rarely seek support and advice. The Children's Society estimates that only about 10% of all fathers with children under 5 access a professional parenting service – that means about 1 million or so fathers never receive any professional advice at all. Early years service providers admit that they often have difficulty attracting the dads. I found myself the only father at such a Saturday morning event several years ago at the local children's centre.

There were bacon sandwiches and coffee, and the kids played inside with soft toys — nice and warm but not that exciting.

When asked about my experience by staff, we got onto discussing the kinds of activities I knew that fathers and children enjoyed: being outside, climbing trees, building bird boxes, making fires and having fun. The children's centre were interested and actively supported me to set up 'Dangerous Dads' in Totnes, Devon in 2007. Dangerous Dads offers activities once a month to dads, granddads and male carers who have children, boys or girls or both, aged 10 or under, with an emphasis on the younger age. We knew we were onto something — we had 18 dads and 27 children at the first event and numbers have been much the same every month since.

The activities we offer, such as den-building, blackberry picking, campfire cooking and muddy walks, key into the things men like doing with their children. They are challenge-based and make the most of local woodlands, orchards, lanes and riverbanks. The groups are run by the dads and charges are generally by donation. One dad said he and his kids had enjoyed 'a wonderful day at the apple pressing... my three kids could not have had a better time; it is just what they all needed, something positive to do and freedom to choose what they got up to, making apple juice, playing tag, climbing trees, chatting, even just hanging with the parent in a calm and unhindered way. Honestly it was the best day. They came away calm and fulfilled, they had fun, achieved something and felt like they had a real treat with the free juice.'

Research into school-based outdoor learning and Forest School activities clearly demonstrate that experiences in woodland and natural green spaces can enhance a child's learning, social skills, self-esteem and confidence. Likewise 'adventure-based group work', which involves the use of cooperative games, problem solving initiatives, challenge and adventure activities in an outdoor setting, promotes social skills, enriches family experiences and fosters group cohesion. In fact, I strongly believe adventure-based activities for dads and children outside in woodlands may hold the key to engaging and supporting fathers with young children.

Dangerous Dads also lets dads observe other dads' parenting styles and receive support for being good dads themselves. One dad who came to an event had never before been out with his 2-year-old daughter alone. There came a moment when she needed her nappy changing. The other fathers said, 'Come on, mate, you've got to do it some time,' so he changed her nappy for the first time, in the woods, with guidance from the other dads.

Having positive dads in society is really important. Research in recent years shows that male paternal involvement leads to higher levels of educational attainment, and is associated with fewer emotional and behavioural problems, less adolescent delinquency and with reported better relationships in adult life. A good father figure is linked with lower parenting stress and depression in mothers, as well.

Funded by various local partners, in particular the local Children's Centre, the Dangerous Dads project has seen the number of dads accessing the Children's Centre services increase steadily. Now Totnes reaches more fathers than any other town in the county. Instead of a couple of dads chatting over a coffee, it is now not unusual to have twenty fathers and thirty children at an event.

Dangerous Dads inspired so much regional interest that I started the Dangerous Dads Network in 2014 and now have groups established in ten towns in the southwest of England and one abroad in Pittsburgh. Dangerous Dads are working closely with www.woodlands.co.uk so that our dads' groups can get better access to woodlands for exploring and playing. We also aim to expand nationally — it may be that you can help us achieve that goal.

Does your town need a Dangerous Dads group? Could you offer access to your woods every so often for an event? If woodland activities can help build bonds between men and their children throughout childhood and adolescence, then your woodland could play a part in tackling some of the major social issues facing male parents. Please get in touch.

Dangerous Dads may sound simple. It is. The benefits, however, are significant and the impact on families can be substantial. I do not think we should ever undervalue the role woodland and natural green spaces can play in the health and wellbeing of our citizens. I am not alone in believing that woodlands and the wider green environment may actually hold the key to helping to tackle some of the major issues facing modern humanity.

Dangerous Dads also runs MumFest in May and DadFest in September. DadFest the only festival in the UK just for dads and children, home to the official Dad Dancing Championship. Date is 16 – 18 September in South Devon, and there were still tickets as we went to press. And for those who think Dangerous Dads is a bit one-sided, you'll be pleased to know there is also a Muddy Mums group. Contact Ian Blackwell for more info.

Ian Blackwell is Project Manager for the Natural Connections Project at Plymouth University and coordinator of the Dangerous Dads Network, email: dangerousdads@btinternet.com. For more info: dangerousdads.org.uk

Summer Dreams

Find yourself in a special woodland spot this summer. Two ideas to inspire you

Bodger the Shepherd's Hut is a down-to-earth getaway for two at Crafty Camping in Dorset. Take in a green woodworking course or laze in your hammock. From £126 per night, www.canopyandstars.co.uk/bodger or 0117 204 7830

These magical off-grid tree houses in a protected ancient woodland in mid Wales feature spring water, wood fuel stoves, and outside decks high in the trees. Near sandy beaches, but why budge? Book now for autumn or next summer. living-room.co

Fighting For Our Trees

The Forestry Commission issues a call to arms in the fight against — mainly — foreign invaders

Cluster of Oak processionary moth (Thaumetopoea processionea) larvae

In January of this year, the Forestry Commission published a page on its website that fell not far short of the language of war in describing the current state of threat to Britain's trees. The trees and we who care for them are on the 'front line in a challenging struggle'. Pathogens and pests enter the country like enemy agents. Pine trees are 'under fire'.

The Forestry Commission's concern is clearly spelled out, and its broad-based activity in understanding and countering various threats is heartening, but how did we get here and what can we do?

To understand the multi-headed hydra that is the threat to our trees, and the variety of responses to it, it is useful to consider the two most common species on these shores, the Sitka spruce and the English oak, and the dangers they face.

Sitka spruce is not native to Britain, but was

imported from the Pacific Northwest of America beginning in the 1830s, and then in a much more significant way after the First World War. The tree was discovered to be capable of growing quickly in relatively poor soils and upland areas, and a mass afforestation programme was instituted that lasted from 1950 to the late 1980s. Sitka spruce now comprises approximately half of all conifer forest in the UK, and more than 75% of that in Scotland. While its former use as props for deep pit mining and in the construction of early aircraft have fallen away, spruce remains an important source of wood for building material and other products.

The great spruce bark beetle (*Dendroctonus micans*) is found in forests in much of Europe and Asia, where it attacks, debilitates and is able to kill several varieties of spruce, including Sitka. When attacks by the great spruce bark beetle were identified in Wales in 1982, the Forestry Commission designated a control area around the site. Then another outbreak was discovered in 1996 in Kent, and others in 2003 in the Lake District and southwest Scotland, and it became clear that the beetle was a serious threat to softwood timber. In this case, not only were quarantine zones declared, but the Commission was able to identify and safely release its own special forces predator beetle, *Rhizophagus grandis*, with a most welcome ability to search and destroy the great spruce bark beetle. Fighting the pest continues to be a game of observation, identification, prevention and good forestry practice, but where *R. grandis* has been released, populations of the bark beetle have been reduced to virtually undetectable levels.

Biological control agents such as *R. grandis* are superb control tools when it is possible to use them. This would be a welcome development if the 8-toothed European spruce bark beetle (*Ips typographus*) were to be identified in the wild in Great Britain. For now, live adults specimens of this highly destructive beetle have only ever been trapped at mills and ports, but such is the potential for damage to our Sitka spruce that a twenty-page Forestry Commission contingency plan has been published. If your woodland includes spruce, it would be of use to the efforts of the Home Guard to familiarise yourself with *I. typographus* and be poised to report any sightings to the Commission.

In contrast, the Pine tree lappet moth (*Dendrolimus pini*) is already here. It, too, can be highly destructive in the right environmental conditions, periodically causing large-scale damage to pine plantations, sometimes covering thousands of hectares, in forests in continental Europe, Russia and Asia. In outbreak conditions, the moth also attacks Sitka spruce. So far, *D. pini* has been reported only in the Scottish Highlands and as occasional possible migrants on the south coast of England. But if weather trends continue to favour warm, dry summers, especially in the drier east of Scotland, it is possible that *D. pini* may cause significant impact there, in particular to native Caledonian pine forests. The Forestry Commission continues to work with other agencies and organisations to monitor known moth populations, apply timber movement restrictions, and prepare contingency plans. It considers a mass outbreak of Pine tree lappet moth infestation to be unlikely, but has made its preparations.

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Spruce bark beetle (Ips typographus)

Among deciduous trees, the English oak (*Quercus robur*) has a unique place in our forests and parklands as well as our national culture. According to some sources, the English oak can survive for more than a thousand years, so it is quite a dreadful occurrence to watch a familiar, even beloved, oak affected by Acute Oak Decline manifest oozing liquid from cracks in its bark and die quite rapidly, within as little as four or five years. Acute Oak Decline (AOD) is not the same as Chronic Oak Decline, which seems to stem from root rot fungi and takes decades to severely affect the tree. There have been previous instances of AOD caused by caterpillars of the leaf roller moth and the powdery mildew fungus, but these outbreaks tended to last less than a decade before tailing off or disappearing. This version of AOD is a new threat, not yet fully understood, and the Forest Research is working hard to tease out all the components of the condition. So far, previously unknown bacteria have been discovered as well as significant co-occurrence of oak jewel beetle (*Agrilus biguttatus*) in affected trees. A £1m research project is under way, the second publicly-funded research project into the disease. In the meantime, observation, identification, quarantine and management are the bywords.

Oak processionary moth (OPM) is a hazard not only to our oaks, but also to human and animal health, so far in southern England only. The OPM was accidentally introduced to Britain just over ten years ago. Large populations can entirely defoliate large parts of oak trees, making them vulnerable to disease and environmental strain. The hairy caterpillars can also cause itching skin rashes in humans, and sometimes sore

Profuse stem bleeding caused by Acute Oak Decline

©Forestry Commission/Isobel Cameron

A plant health inspector releasing R. grandis beetles in a D. micans infested spruce crop

The Forestry Commission has launched a 'Keep it Clean' campaign with lots of good advice about simple steps we can all take to minimise the risk of accidentally spreading pests and diseases through our own activities. Check out:

- www.forestry.gov.uk/england-keepitclean
- scotland.forestry.gov.uk/keep-it-clean
- www.forestry.gov.uk/biosecurity

There is also comprehensive information about the main threats to our woods at www.forestry.gov.uk/pestsanddiseases.

throat, breathing and eye problems. They have also been known to feed on some of our best coppicing species, like hornbeam, hazel, beech, sweet chestnut and birch. OPM are so called because of their manner of moving about in nose-to-tail parades, sometimes in arrow-shaped processions. In the case of OPM, once observation and identification are complete, it is possible to attack them with insecticides in certain of their larval stages in the spring, supplemented by manual or vacuum removal of their nests in the summer. In two cases, the Commission has undertaken spraying from the air. The Government also now requires 'plant passports' when moving oak plants into the UK protected zone, either from Europe or from infested areas in London.

Both Sitka spruce and English oak can fall victim to other pests and diseases, of course, but the ones mentioned above tend to involve the range of weapons which the Forestry Commission and the other plant health authorities usually use in dealing with threats to our trees: observation, identification, research and analysis, quarantine, control zones, plant passports, tree felling (when appropriate), application of insecticide, removal of pests, introduction of biological control agents, vigilance at ports and mills, preparedness planning and specific, public information programmes.

And what can we woodland owners and enthusiasts do? A lot that's useful, actually. We can familiarise ourselves with the threats most common to trees on our land and in our woodlands. Carry a camera of some kind to record sightings of signs of infestation or disease, make use of the Forestry Commission's identification pages, and report suspected cases to it using its online Tree Alert form. If you have a problem on your land, follow the Commission's advice scrupulously.

Above all, practise strict biosecurity. Avoid accidentally introducing pests or disease to your woodland by being sure the wood or plant stock you buy is free from infection or infestation. Know the source. When out in the wild where pests or disease may be present, brush, scrape or knock soil and plant debris from tools, vehicles and footwear before leaving, and clean them at home before visiting another woodland, park or garden. Disinfect tools which come into direct contact with plants or soil.

In the war to defend our nation's trees, we are the boots on the ground.

Room for All on R

With nine legs and many hands, **Peter Lanyon's** community-built bench renews a Devon square

A large-scale public seating commission might not immediately appear to offer itself to community participation, but it has always seemed to me that green woodworking lends itself perfectly to such public engagement: it is an inherently satisfying activity, it can be broken down into individual tasks, everybody can achieve reasonable results, and it is healthy and wholesome activity. My other public seating commissions have generated considerable press coverage, especially the memorial bench for MacAndrews Field, graphically depicting the sacrifice of more than a hundred GI's who had been stationed there and who died during the D-Day landings. So when I was invited by South Hams District Council to submit ideas for a new bench in the middle of Totnes, I jumped at it.

Rotherfold Square, the intended site, was a rather uncared-for piece of land at the top of the town. The new bench was to be the first stage of a programme of regeneration, to transform the square into a beautiful space where people would want to spend time, and to signal more improvements to come. After considering ideas with the Rotherfold Improvement Group (RIG), I came back to a construction which has worked well for projects of this kind – a slab of oak, with uprights bolted onto the back to act as multiple "legs". I was confident the organic, dramatic and sculptural nature of the finished piece would contrast nicely with the geometric shape of the space. A budget was agreed on and RIG set about drumming up volunteers.

An oak log 7 feet long and around 30 inches in diameter was chosen and delivered by a local sawmill on Dartmoor. And so one crisp summer morning last year, a group of just four of us (later joined by a fifth) armed ourselves with Gransfors wedges, gluts, beetles and mauls and began to cleave.

Cleaving wood of this diameter is always daunting. The first hour or two is spent futilely banging away at wedges which stubbornly leap out. Just as you are about to give up, exhausted, sore, and feeling hopeless, signs appear of things beginning to open. A hairline crack appears, then there is a slight change in the tone of the whacks and slowly the log gives up, gradually easing apart in a wonderful cacophony of cracks, pops and creaks. It took all morning to prise the log in half, and the rest of the day to divide up into eight almost manageable pieces.

©Jarv Mir

Inauguration of the Rotherfold Bench, Peter Lanyon front 2nd from right

otherfold Bench

©Peter Lanyon

The seat takes shape

These were transported to Rotherfold Square where I intended the bulk of the work to happen over six sessions, one day a week for the duration of the summer holidays. I wanted to do the work in the Square to raise local awareness of the project and encourage people to join in. After all, this was where the bench would eventually be installed. We cordoned off the area with red tape and began cleaning and further cleaving the pieces.

The team consisted of my colleague Kath and myself, a motley bunch of local residents, and a handful of people who had come on my various courses. Ages ranged from early teens to late sixties, and everyone pitched in according to their strength and ability.

Each upright took roughly two days' work to turn from an unpromising looking scraggy piece of very heavy oak into the lithe and tactile pieces you see today. The seat slab was a leftover from my very first community project, in Ham Woods in Plymouth. The Friends of Ham Woods had kindly donated the remaining wood from a fallen oak that we had planked for their project. This was jigsawed to shape, then travished and spokeshaved to a smooth tactile finish. Between sessions the pieces were stored at a local hostelry, the Bay Horse Inn.

I then took all the pieces in my van to the Devon Green Wood Centre to settle somewhat, before

assembly and installation last November.

It is never a good idea to install such a piece in spring or summer – much better to wait till the sun has spent its heat and the components can lose moisture slowly over the winter.

The nine 'legs' have housing joints cut in them which notch around, and are bolted with coach screws into the seat. I developed a number of jigs (workshop aids) to achieve the right angles and width of slot, which allowed our relatively inexperienced volunteers to carry out the work safely and accurately.

Once the legs were bolted on, we sawed them flat and level at the bottom to sit flush on the paving slabs. The trickiest part of the project was drilling into the bottom of the leg in order to bolt the legs onto the ground using threaded stud which we resined into the ground. In a former life I was known as 'jig man', and true to form I had developed a variety of jigs which helped drill perpendicular to the floor, and then mark accurately on a template the exact location of the studs.

On installation day we drilled the holes through the template and, using polyester resin, sank the bolts into the ground. The individual uprights were then dropped onto the bar and, amazingly, when we offered the seat up, they all lined up. No one was more surprised than me! The seat was secured using the coach screws. An access hole in the back of each leg allowed a thin nut to be used to pull each leg down tight onto the paving slabs.

The bench is stable and sound, and has survived the winter well. The alcove is north-facing which means it will get very little direct sunlight, allowing the wood to season slowly. I have been back a couple of times to check on the coach screws and see if anything needed tightening as the wood dries and shrinks. I have also carved a shallow channel, as water was gathering in one particular area.

The bench has been excellently received and I have been approached for two further large-scale commissions in the area. I learned a number of lessons in the process.

At one point I inadvertently got embroiled in some local politics around which trees on the square were to be removed, and which were to stay. One of the

©Kath Giles

Cleaving the log

©Peter Lanyon

Volunteer team working in the square

principal challenges of working like this is securing the wood solidly at a safe working height. We had been using dogs (like big staples) to secure the timbers to the trees as we were working. This was without realising that their destiny was a sore point, and that local residents wished them to remain. In future I will develop a better holding system for large timbers to avoid having to fix to any existing structures.

Another challenging aspect of this project was securing so many legs to the ground. A future design development I have planned will see stainless steel bar bracing the leg to the seat slab, avoiding the need for so many fixings into the pavement.

Working as a craftsman in this day and age is never going to be an easy option, or a guaranteed route to wealth and riches. Generating sufficient profit from selling hand-made furniture is a tough nut to crack. Community projects like the Rotherfold Bench provide excellent income opportunities for craftspeople like me, as well as generating significant public awareness of the other aspects of my work – courses, lamps and furniture. ■

Peter Lanyon is a furniture maker, green woodworker and teacher in South Devon. For information on his work and courses: peterlanyonfurniture.co.uk

The Sound of Axes

David Hunter makes the case for coppicing with traditional tools

We are a group of coppice workers. Each winter we fell an area of trees so that in spring multiple stems will grow from the bare stumps, to be harvested again when they reach the right size for the products they are to become. This ancient form of woodland management has been practiced for at least 6,000 years (Rackham, 2012) and has shaped many of the (non-plantation) woodlands that surround us today. To be able to work a coppice like our ancestors before us is a source of great pleasure, and we count ourselves lucky. It is a humbling experience to be looking at a stem from an old coppice stool, wondering what product it may become, knowing that for generations before people have been wondering the same, and that your cut today will mean that someone else can share the same thoughts in years to come. Where else, apart from in Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*, can past, present and future be seen in the same place?

Although we are modern day coppice workers we have a slightly different approach to many. We have decided to carry out our felling using hand tools, namely axes. Before I go on, I should point out we are not anti chainsaw, a highly effective tool. We just prefer the axe, and feel that it still holds a legitimate place in the coppice worker's tool kit. I use a 1963 4lb Elwell on my plot, an axe of a typical pattern used for many years for felling in British woodlands. Much of the literature on coppicing either does not mention hand tool management or is quick to dismiss it. Perhaps this is because we have forgotten how to use axes, much like the pole lathe was forgotten as a tool for making bowls before the hard work of several current craftsman brought it back to the fore. Or is it that our pursuit for productivity has meant that slowing down has become synonymous with going backwards?

So why the axe? Can it really be the tool for a coppice business? Anyone who has seen the film 'Light is Life' with Ron Smart using an axe to fell young hazel effortlessly can be in no doubt of its efficacy at this task. One or two good swings and the stem is on the floor, with a sweet, low clean cut the result. Even larger maiden trees can be felled swiftly; we timed a 7-inch diameter ash coming down in four minutes at the hands of an experienced axe user. What is more, once the tree is on the ground you have the ultimate tool already in your hand for taking off the side branches, before you switch to the bill hook to finish off.

So what other reasons are there for using an axe?

It is quiet. Why work in such a beautiful environment and not be able to hear the nature that surrounds you? Or without being able to chat with your colleagues, which aside from being of great enjoyment, is important for keeping up spirits and sharing knowledge.

It is healthful. Coppicing with an axe uses a lot of major muscle groups, meaning you can continue axing into your vintage years. I know older axe workers who will swing an axe for as long and as hard as their younger counterparts.

It is lightweight, portable, and renewable. There is something deeply satisfying about walking nimbly through the woods with axe and billhook in hand. No heavy gear, no fuel and oil, no vehicles with the consequent risk of environmental contamination. Further, if you break a handle (one of the only major malfunctions you can have with an axe) you are surrounded by the resources needed to fix it. The same cannot be said for the chainsaw.

It is inexpensive. You can equip yourself with an axe for anything between £0 and £150, depending on whether you choose to resurrect an older one or buy a new one — much cheaper than buying the necessary equipment to run a chainsaw safely.

There seems to be little research into whether using an axe or a chainsaw is more beneficial for the regrowth and overall health of the tree. What research there is (Harmer and Howe 2003, Harmer 2004) fails to indicate any difference in height of coppice regrowth compared to the tool used to make the cut. It would be possible to argue that a poorly executed axe cut would put more pressure on the tree. However, our experience is that whether the stump is left rather mangled by a first time axe user or cut cleanly and crisply by an expert, the regrowth is the same.

We acknowledge that the chainsaw has become the tool of choice amongst most coppice workers, but let me end with a request. This winter, when it is once again time to head to the coppice, give the axe a chance. You might well be pleasantly surprised. And you never know, rather than the roar of engines, maybe one day the woods will ring with the sound of axes. ■

David Hunter is a coppice worker in Pembrokeshire, West Wales. He learnt to manage coppice with an axe at Coppicewood College, Pembrokeshire, a woodland skills centre dedicated to the sustainable management of woodlands using hand tools. For more information: www.coppicewoodcollege.co.uk.

Metamorphic Ticks Ca

The fascinating life of some creepy little creatures, by **Dr Rosalind Arden**

©Forestry Commission/Isobel Cameron

Check children and dogs for tick bites after every outing

Besides being a handy word for Scrabble or Bananagrams, *Ixodid* sounds like an ancient South American god. Instead, it's a genus of blood-sucking arthropods of no use to dog or man: the hard-bodied tick. There are around 850 species of tick worldwide. Related to mites, spiders and scorpions, they transmit a huge variety of infectious organisms and globally are a scourge second only to the mosquito. In Britain, the bad news is that instances of tick-borne Lyme disease are increasing, and those of us who spend time in woodlands are most at risk of attracting the little beasts. The good news is that simple precautions can greatly reduce the odds of harm from by these vampyric creatures. Lyme disease is now widely publicised in the States where it originated, but we in the UK, where the disease is less well-known, should arm ourselves with knowledge and take appropriate precautions.

If you can get past the 'yuck factor', ticks are kind of fascinating. For example, ticks have a complex life cycle. Some species need to live on three different host animals, and the number of legs they have varies by life stage. That has to be disconcerting.

The most relevant tick for woodlanders to know here in the UK is *Ixodes ricinus*, a three-host species. Each female lays a few thousand eggs. Over a few days these hatch into six-legged larvae, which climb up nearby vegetation. Ticks have evolved a behaviour called 'questing': they wave their forelegs around when a possible host is near. Small mammals such as mice and voles are suitable hosts for the larval stage. Ticks determine the presence of hosts by cues such as smelling carbon dioxide (from exhaled breath), ammonia or lactic acid, sensing body heat, moisture, vibrations or even visual cues such as shadows.

Ticks can neither fly nor jump. When they sense a passing mouse or other suitable host, the tick larva latches on to the animal. Having fed from its host, the larva drops to the ground where it moults to become a nymph — now with four pairs of legs instead of three. The eight-legged nymph climbs up on vegetation to quest for a second host, where it will again feed for a few days. Fully fed, the nymph drops back to the ground and moults a second time to become an adult (again with four pairs of legs).

For a third time, the tick, this time as an adult, climbs up the vegetation, begins questing again and waits for the next passing free meal. Having hitched a ride, a tick will move about the animal to find a convenient feeding spot (on humans, underarms, behind ears or the groin area are some preferred locations), then dig in for a long liquid lunch.

In this adult stage, hosts include larger mammals such as sheep and deer, as well as dogs and people. In fact, larvae and nymph stage ticks may bite dogs and people too. 'Bite' is a shorthand: they don't really 'bite'. What they actually do is lean back around 50 degrees, score into the flesh with parts of the mouth that act like saws (*chelicerae*), insert a harpoon-like structure (*hypostome*) and exude a kind of bio-concrete that makes a firm bond between tick and host. And, naturally, they secrete various anti-coagulant, anti-inflammatory and vaso-dilator (to expand blood vessels) substances to get around the host's defences. That's how a tick can make lunch last

n Spread Lyme Disease

for several days without being noticed by the host. Having imbibed, the satisfied female drops off the host to lay her eggs and then die. The big problem with ticks is that they can be infected with disease-causing bacteria which they may pass on to hosts, the most well-known of which is the causal agent of Lyme disease.

That's not Lyme Regis, but an area of Connecticut, USA, where a group of patients were distinguished from those with arthritis as recently as 1975. Lyme disease is transmitted by ticks that are infected with a pathogen called *Borrelia burgdorferi*. Lyme disease can begin with a rash (but does not always), which is followed by symptoms including fever, headaches and joint aches that persist and can become debilitating. Last year, Phones 4u founder John Caudwell announced that his entire family had been infected with the disease and had struggled for several years to obtain a correct diagnosis. There is no single test that unequivocally confirms the presence or absence of Lyme disease. Its likelihood is established by clinical assessment that includes antibody tests (for *Borrelia*). There are excellent resources on the web with details of the specifics of Lyme disease in humans and what signs to look out for (see the NHS Choices page on Lyme disease or www.lymediseaseaction.co.uk).

The most important public health message is that we can greatly reduce the chance of being bitten by ticks by covering up our legs and arms when we are in parks and woodlands. Even infected ticks do not transmit their pathogens as soon as they bite. If a biting tick is removed and the bite area is washed and wiped with disinfectant, the chance of us

A blood-fed sheep tick *(Ixodes ricinus)*

Tick displaying 'questing' behaviour in search of a host

becoming seriously ill is low. Trouble is more likely when the tick is undisturbed and continues to feed for 24 or more hours. And we should watch out for our dogs.

Dogs are also liable to be latched on to by ticks. Their fur, size and joy in dashing through the undergrowth all conspire to make them easy targets for questing nymphs (of the wrong sort). It is well worth getting into a routine of checking your dog over to make sure s/he doesn't have ticks every time you walk through parks and woodlands. It is a good plan, too, to have a tick remover or tweezer at home or on your hikes. There are YouTube videos, as well as other web resources, that demonstrate how to remove ticks safely. The key is to grab the tick as close to the skin as possible and pull the tick straight up and out, without twisting it on the way.

Climate change, the movement of people and animals around the globe and changing uses of the countryside each influence the absolute prevalence of ticks. It's not easy to estimate the number and spread of ticks in the UK, but sources indicate the population and range is increasing.

As well as assessing tracts of land to count ticks, experts can usefully examine dogs. One study conducted in Richmond Park, Bushy Park and Wimbledon Common concluded that the risk of contracting Lyme disease in London parks is very low. A group of researchers tested more than 3500 dogs that had been brought in to see a veterinarian for other reasons. Of those dogs, around 500 (approximately 15%) had one or more ticks. Of those 500 dogs around 2% were infected with the Lyme-disease causing agent. This is higher than has sometimes been estimated.

It is worth assuming that ticks will be around in the countryside during spring and early summer, that they can usually be spotted, if they latch on to us or our dogs, and that if they are removed they are unlikely to cause illness. Taking some care will minimise the chance of illness. Ticks are noisome little arthropods, but biologically pretty amazing too. Imagine waking up one day as an arthropod and finding that you have twice as many legs as you're accustomed to.... somebody should write a book about that. ■

Dr Rosalind Arden is a Research Associate at the LSE. A devoted woodlander and dog owner, she lives and works in London.

Prevention

Inform yourself about ticks/Lyme disease:

- Wear long sleeves and long trousers in woodlands
- Check yourself and your children over for ticks (you may not feel a bite), especially in areas of tender skin like underarms and groin
- Keep a handy tweezer to use if you are bitten
- If you are bitten, don't panic, but do disinfect the area of the bite
- Make a note of any bites and monitor yourself for discomfort
- If you develop a rash, flu-like symptoms or feel unwell after you have been bitten, be sure to inform your GP
- Check your dogs for ticks. Remove any with tweezers or tick removal tool (no twisting)
- Wipe any bites with disinfectant

The NHS says cases of Lyme disease have been reported throughout the UK, and that some areas are known to have a particularly high population of ticks, including Exmoor, the New Forest and rural Hampshire, the South Downs, parts of Wiltshire, Berkshire, Surrey and West Sussex, Thetford Forest, the Lake District, the North York Moors and the Scottish Highlands.

Truncator 4Fold

Innovative, ergonomic sawhorse gets a thumbs up from **Mike Poole**

The brilliantly named Truncator is the brainchild of a Lake District man with a bad back. Richard Bowness invented the Truncator because there was no fast, safe and ergonomic sawhorse on the market.

We tested the midsized Truncator 4Fold. This has a chassis comprising a sturdy plank mounted on galvanised steel legs. The legs work in such a way as to compress and rotate out of the way when not in use. The name of this model confused me at first (to my mind calling it the 4Swivel rather than the 4Fold seems more appropriate). Four recycled plastic tipping cups are screwed to the plank.

Assembly

The Truncator arrives in two flat pack boxes. All the parts are included (they thoughtfully include more screws than required) and a clear instruction leaflet is provided.

I found the assembly to be intuitive and simple. It took just 30 minutes to assemble my Truncator. The only tool required is a drill driver (Pozi 2 bit). I also found a clamp useful and because I am a bit of a perfectionist I also used a tape measure and a pencil. The Pro model requires a size 10 spanner.

I emailed one minor question to their customer support during assembly ("which way do the legs face?") and had received a polite reply to my query in less than 30 minutes. If only every company had customer service this personal.

I did find that I needed to do some fettling with a drill to get the securing pins to line up correctly so that the legs could be stowed. This was not a big issue and gave the pins a snug fit (eliminating any rattles).

Using the Truncator

The Truncator is very easy to move around. It only weighs 18kg but seems even less. It is not as cumbersome as you might imagine and is easily carried upside down which means you can rest it on the cups. It is easy to lift in and out of the Land Rover and does not take up a disproportionate amount of room or rattle when being transported.

The bench should be used on flat ground. We found that the wide concave lower legs make it nice and stable on slightly uneven ground, even when fully raised. The wider end of the legs is placed on the tipping side away from the operator so that the Truncator is stable when tipping the logs into your barrow, bulk bag, etc.

At 6 foot 3 inches tall I was pleased to see that the Truncator sits at a good height for me so that I avoid stooping.

We found that the Truncator is especially useful when cutting wood in scenarios where there is no assistant to feed the wood along for each cut as you would with a traditional saw horse. The tasks (loading, cutting and tipping) are nicely discrete. This not only makes the task faster and safer but it must also be easier on the mind because you are not constantly task switching.

We were able to bring the logs straight out of the woodland and stack them on the Truncator. This is a major benefit because you are not constantly bending to pick up logs (either to be cut or once they have been chopped).

We were generally cutting logs that were about 100mm to 150mm in diameter. This seems to be an ideal width because you can fit about four logs into the cups and chop all four in one go. You can cut individual logs that are twice as wide as this because the plastic cups bend out and still support the log. Even when cutting thin logs you will want to use a chainsaw with a bar that is at least 300mm long because you will stack several logs on the bench in one go.

Although the 4 cup bench is relatively small we were able to cut the ends of longer logs that protruded outside of the bench area without the bench becoming unstable. I doubt that Truncator endorse this practice (the end logs are not collected neatly by the tipping cups so are a tripping hazard) but in the practice this more traditional method was a useful way of dealing with longer logs on a relatively short bench.

We tested the Truncator with a mix of coniferous and deciduous wood and found that the cups held logs that were bent very nicely. Because the tipping cups are equally spaced along the bench you end up with similar lengths of logs of about 280mm. This regular length will suit many uses including cordwood walls or stove logs. If you have a relatively short stove then you can mount the cups closer together than I did so that you produce shorter logs.

Potential Enhancements

As with many items you love you end up personalising them.

One of the safety benefits of the Truncator is that the plank helps protect against chainsaw injuries to the lower leg. A minor downside of this protection is that once you have cut through the lowest log it is easy to keep going and accidentally cut the wooden plank. With this in mind I upgraded my bench by loosely gluing some sacrificial squares of wood between the cups. If I cut this wood then I can simply replace it as required.

© Mike Poole

We found that even with the relatively short 4 cup model that you need a large receptacle to tip the wood into. This would be especially true of you have 6 cups or more. A wheel barrow or bulk bag seem to be the common containers that would be used but these tend to be a too small to catch the logs from the end cups. Using two containers or adding a small chute would solve this problem. An even better approach would be to tip into a small trailer. This is likely to be my long term approach especially as with a small amount of work the Truncator could be mounted directly onto the side of a low trailer. This would give a very stable working platform that could be towed to the trackside logs that are awaiting cutting.

Overall Verdict

I am very happy with my Truncator which lives up to the innovation awards and positive reviews others have given it. If you have a decent-sized chainsaw and a need for small logs then it is well worth considering.

The Truncator is available in various different sizes and styles which start at around a hundred pounds. Further information, including the different varieties available, is available at www.truncator.co.uk

Mike Poole runs a website design company and is the woodlands.co.uk agent for southern Scotland and Northumberland.

A Home in the Wilderness

Thirty Years in Wilderness Wood
by Chris Yarrow
Matador Press, £16.95
review by Alan Rance

Anne and Chris Yarrow at Wilderness Wood during Christmas tree season

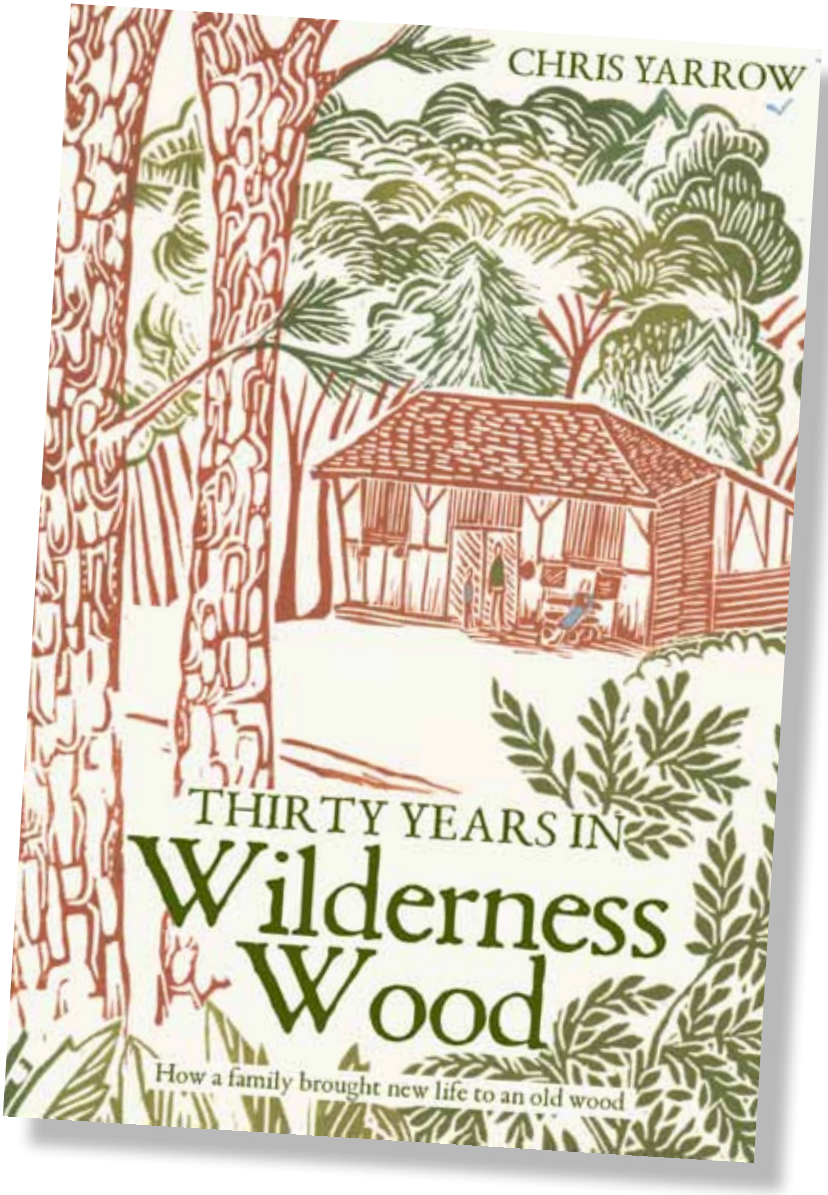
My wife Janet and I discovered Wilderness Wood at Hadlow Down in Sussex when we were touring the area in 2003. What an inspiring enterprise! I collected a programme and pricelist of the products they made and sold. We were so taken with Wilderness Wood that Janet had the excellent idea of suggesting that we spend a month there. I had taken up green woodworking and had learned to build a pole lathe and shaving horse a few years earlier, so we offered to 'work' for the month of August, 2004, five days a week, demonstrating the pole lathe and green woodworking, providing they could site our caravan.

Our offer was accepted and we were included in the Wilderness Wood programme for the year. That month enabled me to have a very good look at the Wood: the variety of trees in it and the diversity of operations, much of which was aimed at attracting the public (and their money) to the Wood. The café and the displays were housed in a half-timbered 'barn' they built complete with the traditional wattle and daub (read the book for the problems that caused) and a shingle roof produced from their own trees, as was all the timber for the building. It provided employment for a surprising number of people. I still treasure the display book that I compiled of Wilderness Wood.

Thus when I read a review of the book *Thirty Years in Wilderness Wood*, I contacted Chris (his wife Anne was the public face of the enterprise -- read the book to learn why!) who promptly sent me a copy. As soon as it arrived, I sat down and read the book cover to cover, all 300+ pages of it. *Thirty Years in Wilderness Wood* greatly exceeded my expectations.

Author Chris Yarrow has a degree in Forestry and followed it up with a Masters in Forest Recreation in Montana, USA. Anne Yarrow has degrees in both Geography and Conservation. In spite of foresters opining that Wilderness Wood, at 63 acres, was too small to support them, Chris and Anne had a dream of avoiding a middle-class existence, of being their own bosses and living and working in a woodland, employing sound, environmentally-sensitive methods. The book tells how this energetic couple, with their two young children, bought the Wood and made a success of it. The Wood had previously been worked by contractors for an absentee landlord, and it took much care and toil for Chris and Anne to transform it into a productive multi-purpose forest. Together, the Yarrows created an enterprise that supported them as well as employing the equivalent of six fulltime employees!

They managed to get planning permission to build a house there as well, which was sold with the wood when they retired. Contrast their story with restrictions placed on the house that Ben Law built in his woods. Or on the friends of mine who had to go to the Welsh Assembly in order to get a three-year permit to live in a timber A-frame that most people would not even consider for a 'glamping' holiday! Alas, the Yarrows have given up the wood and I cannot see anyone else working the wood anything like as well they did.



While I accept that the Yarrows' creation will not match the ambitions and purpose of every woodland owner, their story should stimulate thought. Some ideas may appeal or may inspire lateral thinking that could be of real benefit to many. If, like me, you do not own or have a share in a wood, but are interested in woodland and forestry, as I have been since leaving school more than fifty years ago, the book is an excellent read. It is hardbound and includes handsome sketches and photographs.

Thirty Years in Wilderness Wood is available from UK bookshops, www.troubador.co.uk or email Chris Yarrow at yarrow@hmill.plus.com.

Excerpt from *Thirty Years in Wilderness Wood*

It was not necessary to delve into dusty barns to find out how they were built. A wealth of practical information on design and construction, including detailed joints, was available in various craft publications. Of the joints illustrated, perhaps the most satisfying was the intricate "tie beam lap dovetail" at the top of a main post, where the post, tie beam, wall plate and principal rafter all meet, and are held in place by gravity and a single oak peg. Our barn dimensions were determined by the length of the beams we could cut from our trees. Three bays would give us a total length of 11 metres. Tie beams linking front and rear walls gave us a comfortable span of four and a half metres, and the resulting building would be a useful size for a variety of purposes.

Fortuitously, Raymond, the carpenter son of the village storekeeper, was at that time restoring an eighteenth-century timber barn on the Downs, so was already familiar with traditional jointing techniques. He quickly tidied up my rough chainsaw mortices, and soon we were laying out complete bays in the yard. With the precise dimensions confirmed, Brian, a builder who specialised in groundworks because his vertigo precluded ladder-work, could build the brick footings.

Anybody who saw the film in which the hero seeks refuge in an Amish community where they raise a barn in a single day will appreciate how quickly a timber frame can rise, given sufficient manpower, and homely women with basket of cookies and ginger beer. We had none of these, but somehow heaved each bay vertical, and used a pole tripod and light block and tackle to lower the tie beams into place. A photo shows a couple of centimetres of snow on the beams as, perched on ladders, Raymond and I nudge a rafter home with the sledgehammer. No wonder the building trade is in the same accident league as mining and forestry, and our barn folly might easily have been my memorial.

Four-year-old Kate explores the bluebells

With the walls up, raising the roof was a simple matter of fixing the principal rafters to wall plates and ridge-board, and nailing common rafters in between. These latter were, true to the intended rustic look, simply cleft chestnut rails normally used for post-and-rail fencing; they gave an "interesting" wavy profile, onto which we nailed battens of half-round chestnut. To shed the rain, we then made and nailed on about four thousand oak and chestnut "shingles." Shingles are among the oldest forms of roofing, particularly common in well-wooded parts of the world such as the Alps and North America. I learned how to make them from a book produced by a teacher in the Appalachians, who had his pupils record the rural techniques of their grandparents. Along with spinning wool and making soap from tallow and wood ash, they described the technique for shingle making. Roundels of timber 12 – 18 inches long are cleft into slices with a "froe" and mallet. A froe is a long metal wedge with a wooden handle at one end, and Ben the blacksmith quickly forged us one from an old car-spring. Chestnut and oak are ideal for shingles because they cleave well and their heartwood is naturally rot-resistant: though it subsequently turned out they were not durable enough for our humid woodland conditions, exacerbated by the coating of leaves and pollen from surrounding trees. We had expected them to see out our tenure, but twenty-five years later I was again up on the roof replacing them all, helped by George, an architectural student and part-time ranger at the wood.

So now we had the skeleton of a building – impressive timber frame, attractive and unusual roof, and beaten earth floor. To keep out the worst of the weather we nailed weatherboarding, milled from our own pine trees, to the back and the southern end, and began to make use of it as our workshop, store, and wet-weather shelter. Rustic yet functional, our barn should be a convincing demonstration that we intended to do things properly. ■

The Barn as workshop

Letter to the editor (edited for length)

Simon Perks' Woodland Start-Ups (LW 38) was equally helpful for its explicit advice and its underlying messages. Chief among the latter: if you're thinking of turning your hobby into your livelihood, don't! Consider this warning very carefully before deciding to ignore it, or you're unlikely to succeed.

Particular woods may be more — or less — economic for reasons of geography, irrespective of the worker. Factors quite unrelated to skills and passion can make something easy for one person and impracticable for another.

There's absolutely nothing wrong with money-earning 'sidelines', whether transitory or permanent. Any full-time bread-winning craftsperson deserves our admiration, but hair shirts and vows of poverty aren't for everybody. There's nothing inherently inferior about working part-time to earn beer money or top up a pension.

I believe it's probably the most plausible way of expanding some woodland industries and securing a future for many woods and hedgerows. I [like] the model of beekeeping, with its few hundred bee farmers complemented by tens of thousands of part-time enthusiasts.

One thing of course is axiomatic. Part-timers should never forget that what they do as a hobby may be the basis of somebody else's very hard-earned living. They should be acutely sensitive of any impact they could have on the professional sector, avoiding unfair competition. It isn't actually a problem; there's abundant work for everybody.

George Darwall

Wood Fairs and Events

COURSES

There are scores of superb courses on offer this summer. A few caught our eye.

Teenagers Fundamental Bushcraft Course
10 — 11 August, Woodland Ways Bushcraft and Survival
woodland-ways.co.uk
12 – 17 year olds can hone their outdoor skills at this two-day course

Mike Abbott's Five Day Green Wood Chairmaking Courses
continue at his new home new Bishops Frome, Herefordshire
At time of press, they were mostly full, but things sometimes change
Goingwiththegrain.org or abbott@living-wood.co.uk

Peter Lanyon Furniture (see p 34)
The Table Course
12 – 17 July then 9 – 11 September with a drying period in between
A unique course spread over two sessions, suited for couples of intermediate ability wishing to make a table together, or the perfect Father's Day gift.

Devon Green Wood Centre, South Devon
peterlanyonfurniture.co.uk

The Green Wood Guild Axesmithing Weekend taught by Nic Westermann
18 – 19 June
Stepney City Farm Workshop, East London
Thegreenwoodguild.com

Announcement
Barn the Spoon seeks a new apprentice. Learn from a master. See his website barnthespoon.com, get in touch at barnthespoon@hotmail.co.uk or drop by his Barn the Spoon shop at 26 Hackney Road, London, E2 7SJ.

WOOD FAIRS

Updates to last issue's directory:

Wales Woodcraft Festival
20 – 21 August
National Botanic Garden of Wales
botanicgarden.wales

The Dorset Do, Supporting Traditional Crafts
Saturday 1 October 2016

Ringwood School BH24 1SE
dorset-do.co.uk

The Surrey Hills Wood Fair
1 – 2 October 2016
Birtley House Estate, Bramley, Surrey
surreyhills.org/events/the-surrey-hills-wood-fair/

AVAILABLE FOR SALE

Chairmaker and green woodworker Liz Child tells us she has a unique designer studio/glamping hut for sale if you have a place to set it up. Complete details from Liz at lizchild@phonecoop.coop.

Do you know of more wood fairs and woodland events? Please let us know and we'll include them next time, nancy@livingwoodsmagazine.co.uk

What's a Wooden Spoon?

At first glance wooden spoons seem to be pretty simple objects. Their design serves some primal human tasks like stirring, serving or eating the food we need to sustain ourselves, but there must be something more, something a little deeper, to their carving and use. I think this is reflected in the continuing rise of the popularity of spoon carving world wide.

When I heard about the first Spoonfest over five years ago, there was no choice for me. I had to attend. This event was something that struck me at my very core. It was, in part, because I was a full time spoon carver at the time and it seemed the right thing to do. It was also the thought of gathering with other folks from around the world, all of which presumably, like me, were obsessed with carving wooden spoons.

Today, as I finalise my travel plans to attend the 5th annual Spoonfest, I feel a strong sense that I'm going home. One of the things I love about these types of gatherings is the sense of community. Meeting up with old friends, making new ones, and sharing stories are some of the highlights for me. I believe stories are important and when we gather we share these with each other freely. The stories of skills learned and shared, new insights and understanding of both the materials and design, stories of the land, the forest and the tree all bind us together.

The wooden spoon is the symbol of the new wood culture, a culture that uses the forest and the trees in a very intimate way. It's a community bound by a deep respect for the land and each other. For me the wooden spoon is not a simple object. ■

Jarrod Stone Dahl

©Tom Wheeler

Jarrod Stone Dahl is a spoon carver, bowl turner, and traditional handcraft advocate who lives in Wisconsin, USA, near the shore of Lake Superior. www.woodspiritcraft.com

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Pleachers Wood
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Up for the challenge

Tree work demands the best of me. From the smallest karabiner to the right saw, everything goes towards getting the job done properly and safely. I need equipment that's tough, safe, starts on first pull and keeps going through the day, every day.
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