

# Research Report: What Do Owners Do With Their Woods?



[woodlands.co.uk](http://woodlands.co.uk)

7th May 2016

*Produced for Woodlands.co.uk by:*

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## Overview.

- A survey of 178 owners of small woodlands has shown that woodland owners are a vital part of UK woodland management. The report shows in detail how they:
  1. Are active managers of their woods striving to improve conditions for the wildlife in them.
  2. Are passionate about conservation and wildlife.
  3. Are keen to learn more about their woodland and how to manage it.
  4. Gain enormous personal satisfaction and wellbeing benefits from owning a woodland.

### Woodland Owner Facts

#### Active Managers

- More than half of owners have or plan to:
  - clear/open space(s) in their wood (72%)
  - plant trees (66%)
  - coppice their wood (57%)
  - improve tracks through the wood (53%).

#### Love Wildlife

- Two-thirds of owners (66%) aim to create havens for wildlife in the wood.
- Almost three-fifths (59%) are creating nest boxes for birds.
- More than half (53%) are creating new habitats or preserving existing habitats.

#### Keen to Learn More

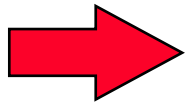
- More than two-thirds of owners (67%) have taught themselves more about owning and managing their wood.
- Three-fifths have obtained advice from small woods organisations.
- Two-fifths (40%) have been on training courses relating to their woodland.

#### Improved Wellbeing

- Four-fifths of owners see themselves as a guardian of the wood as much as being its owner.
- 29 owners spontaneously use the word “peace” in relation to high points of their time in their woods.
- The word peace is also associated with “tranquillity”, “calm”, “harmony”, “quiet” and “serenity”.

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## Introduction.

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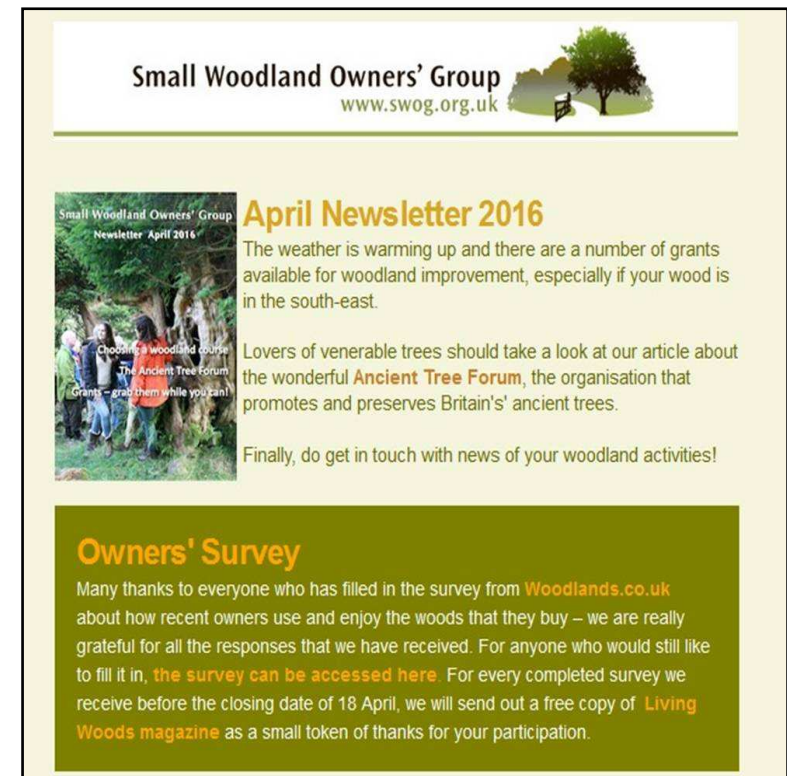
- Woodlands.co.uk is keen to understand more about how private owners manage the woods they buy, the types of woods that they own, the uses they make of their woods as well as the satisfaction that they and others gain from them and the types of training and advice they look for in managing them.
- The research in this report has been undertaken in the form of a structured survey in March/April 2016 and follows on from research undertaken in May 2011\* which looked at these issues and in particular the motives that people have in becoming owners of small woods.
- To understand more about the management that owners undertake, a structured online survey was created and was distributed (as a weblink) to woodland owners who are members of the Small Woodland Owners Group (SWOG), the majority of whom have purchased woods from Woodlands.co.uk since 2012. Their responses were then analysed.
- This report provides a picture both of the structure of activities that owners undertake as well as the satisfaction that they gain from them. The report is built around the results of the survey and is amplified by the comments that people made in a series of free-text questions. These quotations are shown throughout the report in the yellow boxes in italics. In reporting the results of the structured survey, the size of the sample for any given question or group is indicated by the use of the letter N followed by the number in the group (eg N=178).
- Although the focus of the 2016 survey differs from the research undertaken in 2011, where possible, questions that cover similar areas have been asked in exactly the same way permitting comparison of the results between the surveys. Where this is possible, comparisons are made to the 2011 research findings.

\*<http://www.woodlands.co.uk/about-us/articles/woodland-owner-survey-report.pdf>

## Methodology. The methodology of the research is outlined below.

### Structured Survey Conducted Online.

- A structured online survey was created and uploaded to the web on SurveyMonkey. After initial testing, an email was sent on 17th March 2016 to the 499 members of SWOG who had signed up as new woodland owners since mid-2012 inviting them to take part in the survey. A closing date of 18th April was set. Everyone taking part and who left their contact details received a free copy of Living Woods magazine.
- The survey was further promoted in the SWOG newsletter of 4<sup>th</sup> April.
- The survey was live from Wednesday 17th March to Monday 18th April 2016 and a total of 178 completed responses was received. This represents a response rate of 36.7%. This rate of response is very high and may reflect the interest that these owners have in their wood and potentially extremely high rates of activity and involvement as woodland owners.

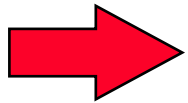


Promotion of the survey in the SWOG Newsletter of 4<sup>th</sup> April

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## **Executive Summary.**

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- The research that Woodlands.co.uk has undertaken into woodland owners reveals the emotional depth of the relationship that owners have with their woods and the enjoyment and satisfaction they gain from it. This is supplemented by the efforts that they go to to improve their woods, principally for the benefit of wildlife conservation, and how they seek to learn more about how best to manage their woods and find out more about wildlife and nature.
- Owners view their role as one of guardianship of the woods in their care. Where woods have been neglected previously, their role is to ensure that they can flourish once again as habitats for flora and fauna. When they make improvements this is principally done for the benefit of the wildlife.
- The intensity of the enjoyment that they gain from being in their woods is extremely strong. Owners gain immense strength from the peace and tranquillity of their wood and find the solitude a source of personal enrichment and a point of contrast to the busyness of their daily lives. At the same time ownership is something to be shared with others, and in particular friends and family. Nothing delights owners more than the freedom that children and grandchildren can have when they are let loose in a wood.
- Owners are eager to learn more about managing their wood whether through the advice of others, self-tuition or taking formal courses. Almost half have taken courses with the most popular focusing on the safe use of chainsaws and woodland management. A small number have applied for grants to improve their woodland with the focus being on developing high quality management plans for their woods.
- The most tangible practical benefit to ownership is the value of the fuel that comes either from fallen trees or trees that owners have grown. Very few owners seek significant financial gain from ownership through the commercial exploitation of the woodland for fuel or from sporting focused activities.

**Summary. The 2016 research finds that woodland owners see their role very much as the guardians of their woods. They are intent on planting more trees, ensuring that open spaces and tracks are cleared and that the conditions are created in which wildlife can flourish.**

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- In the research that Woodlands.co.uk undertook in 2011, there was a particular emphasis on the motives for buying woods, the activities that owners undertook in their woods and more practical issues such as how often they visited them. In this latest round of research, some of these issues are again addressed and in addition attention is also paid to a more detailed understanding of the woodlands themselves, how they are managed and the sources of advice and support owners have used. In addition we have asked a question about the satisfaction that owners have gained from their woods.
- In 2016 more than half of the owners (56%) had purchased their wood within the past 2 years and more than half (56%) were between 4 and 7 acres. On average in 2016, they have been owners for a slightly shorter length of time than was the case in 2011 and woodlands are slightly smaller in size.
- Woodlands made up principally of broadleaved trees outstrip those of conifer by almost 2 to 1. Also popular are woodlands made up of mixed planting and those which are coppiced. Around a fifth are either ancient semi-natural woodland or plantations on ancient woodland sites. Very few are newly planted.
- In 2016, the most common activities that owners have undertaken or plan to undertake include tree planting and coppicing, creating and enhancing habitats for wildlife and birds and clearing open spaces and tracks in the woods.
- This mix of activities also comes across clearly through the owners' management objectives for their woodlands. For the vast majority of owners their mindset is being a guardian of the wood. Creating havens for wildlife is also a major objective. More practically, more than half of owners are growing firewood for their own personal use.



**Summary. Owners avidly seek advice in learning more about how to manage their woodlands through self-tuition, information from associations and other owners and taking formal courses. Two-fifths have taken courses with the most popular being about the safe use of chainsaws.**

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- When working on their woods, using chainsaws and axes is more common in 2016 than it was in 2011 with more than three-quarters of owners making use of a chainsaw and more than two-thirds using axes in their woods. Also widely used are bow saws, billhooks and loppers.
- The most common sources of training and advice are self-tuition using manuals and publications, periodicals from organisations such as the Small Woods Association and advice from private foresters or other small woods owners.
- Interestingly when asked about what information sources owners would recommend (as against those that they themselves had made use of), owners were less likely to recommend the route of self-tuition and more likely to recommend taking formal courses. This discrepancy may indicate an unmet demand for formal training.
- Overall two-fifths of owners had attended courses related to their woodland with by far the most popular being the safe usage of chainsaws and learning more about woodland management.
- Under one in ten had received a grant for improving their wood. The most common grants were for the development of a management plan and the support of a consultant.
- Less than one in ten had faced issues with a local council or some other authority since they bought their woods. A number of owners noted the support they had received from the local authority and the issues that owners had faced focus mainly upon problems with or delays to gaining planning permission and issues relating to access to their woodland.

**Summary. Owners gain significant emotional satisfaction from spending time in their woods. They describe vividly the sense of peace and tranquillity that they gain and the impact this has on personal wellbeing. Children derive enormous benefits from the freedom that woods offer.**

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- The responses that owners gave to the final question about the high points of owning a wood and what had given them the greatest satisfaction fell into two main categories. On the one hand there were the emotions associated with ownership and spending time in their wood and on the other a focus on the more practical tasks they undertook that they had derived enjoyment from.
- Owners are fulsome in describing the benefits and the delights of owning a wood. The dominant feelings are of peace and tranquillity and a contrast to the busyness of their everyday lives. There is a strong spiritual dimension to the solitude that they experience and the feelings of well-being that this confers. There is delight too in sharing these experiences with others and most particularly with friends and family.
- Children are felt to be the clearest beneficiaries of spending time in woods. Children have the freedom to enjoy and express themselves in a way that is rarely possible in their day-to-day lives.
- Two of the elements offer people the greatest pleasure are cooking and eating out of doors and camping overnight.

**Summary. Owners delight in the sensitive interventions that they are able to make in their woods whether it consists of bringing good management back to a neglected wood or taking steps to encourage wildlife. Owners benefit too from being able to use the wood they grow as fuel.**

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- Interwoven with these personal gains are the benefits that owners feel able to offer to the woodlands themselves and the flora and fauna that reside in them. The survey questions found that very few owners were seeking commercial gain from their ownership. This was reflected too in the comments that owners made when they described the pleasure of making improvements to a once neglected word or making changes that would benefit wildlife.
- At the same time owners are delighted to be able to grow firewood that they can then use in their own homes thus saving significant amounts of money on fuel.
- On the more practical side, the activities that owners undertake include building cabins and tree-houses, improving drainage, improving conditions for wildlife and clearing tracks and access routes. Throughout, there is a strong feeling of value of the physical exercise involved.
- Ownership confers significant benefits and is seen as being distinct from simply visiting a wood. Being an owner enables people to develop a longer and deeper relationship with the land unfettered by the need to gain any permissions from a landowner. Ownership offers the chance for sensitive guardianship of the woods and the satisfaction of knowing it remains free from the possibility of being developed.

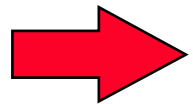


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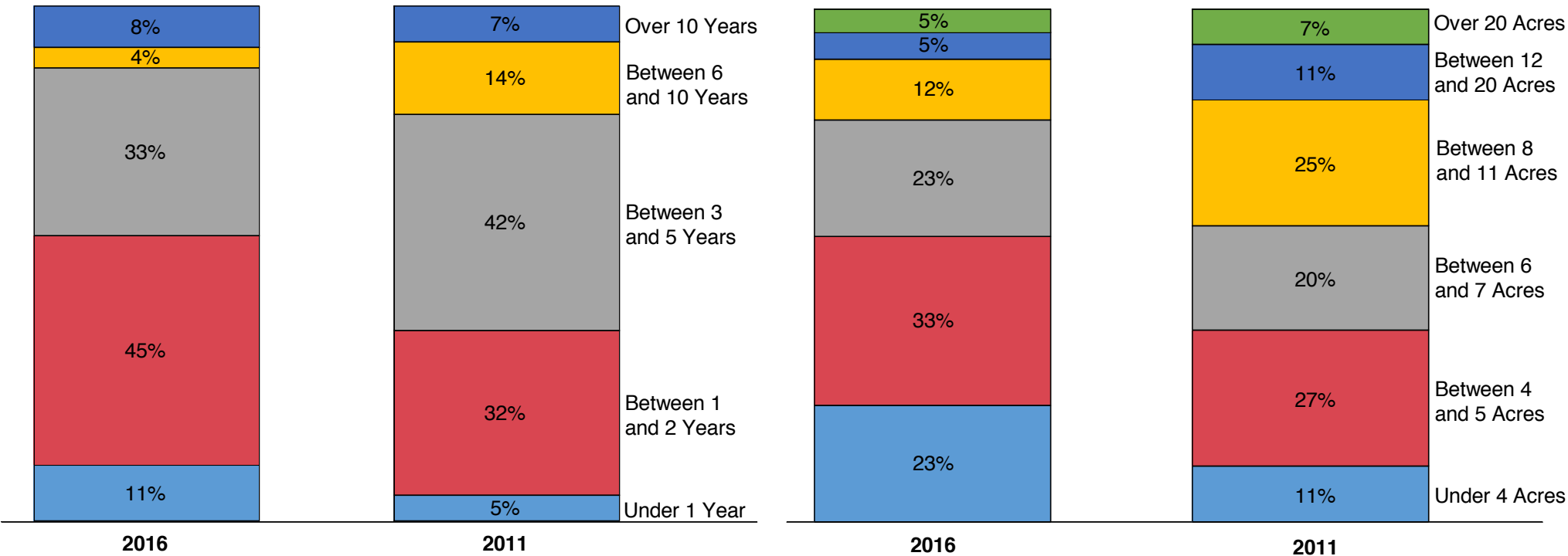
**Research Findings**



More than a half of the owners (56%) surveyed in 2016 had purchased their wood within the past 2 years and more than half (56%) were between 4 and 7 acres. The profile of those surveyed in 2016 is to have owned woods for a shorter time than in 2011 and for the woods to be smaller in size.

Number Of Years Ago That Owners Purchased Their Woods  
(BASE – All Respondents)

Size Of Wood In Acres (BASE – All Respondents)

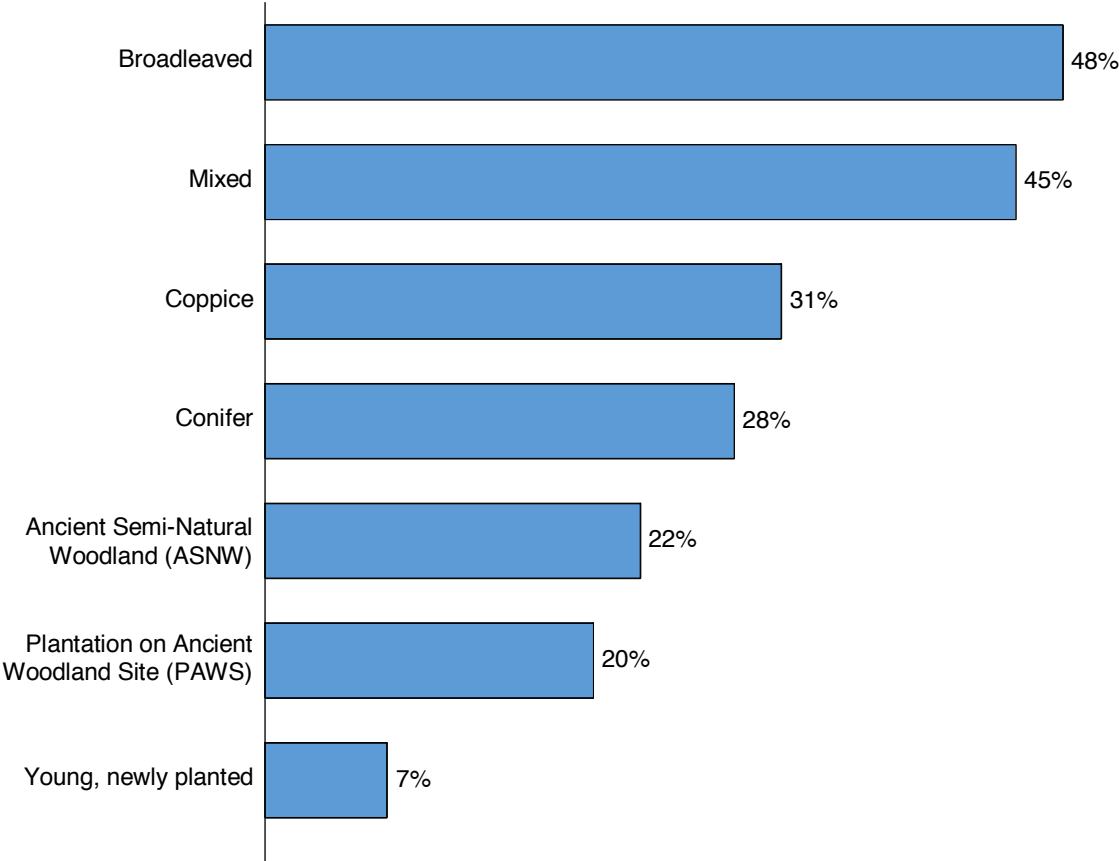


**Average Length Of Ownership**  
2016: 3.3 Years  
2011: 4.0 Years

**Average Size Of Wood:**  
2016: 7.6 Acres  
2011: 9.2 acres

**Almost half of the owners have a wood where the main type of planting is broadleaved trees (48%) and where the planting is mixed (45%). Around a third owned woods that included coppicing (31%) and conifers (28%) whilst around a fifth had woodlands classified as ASNW (22%) and PAWS (20%).**

Main Types\* Of Woodlands Owned (BASE – All Respondents)



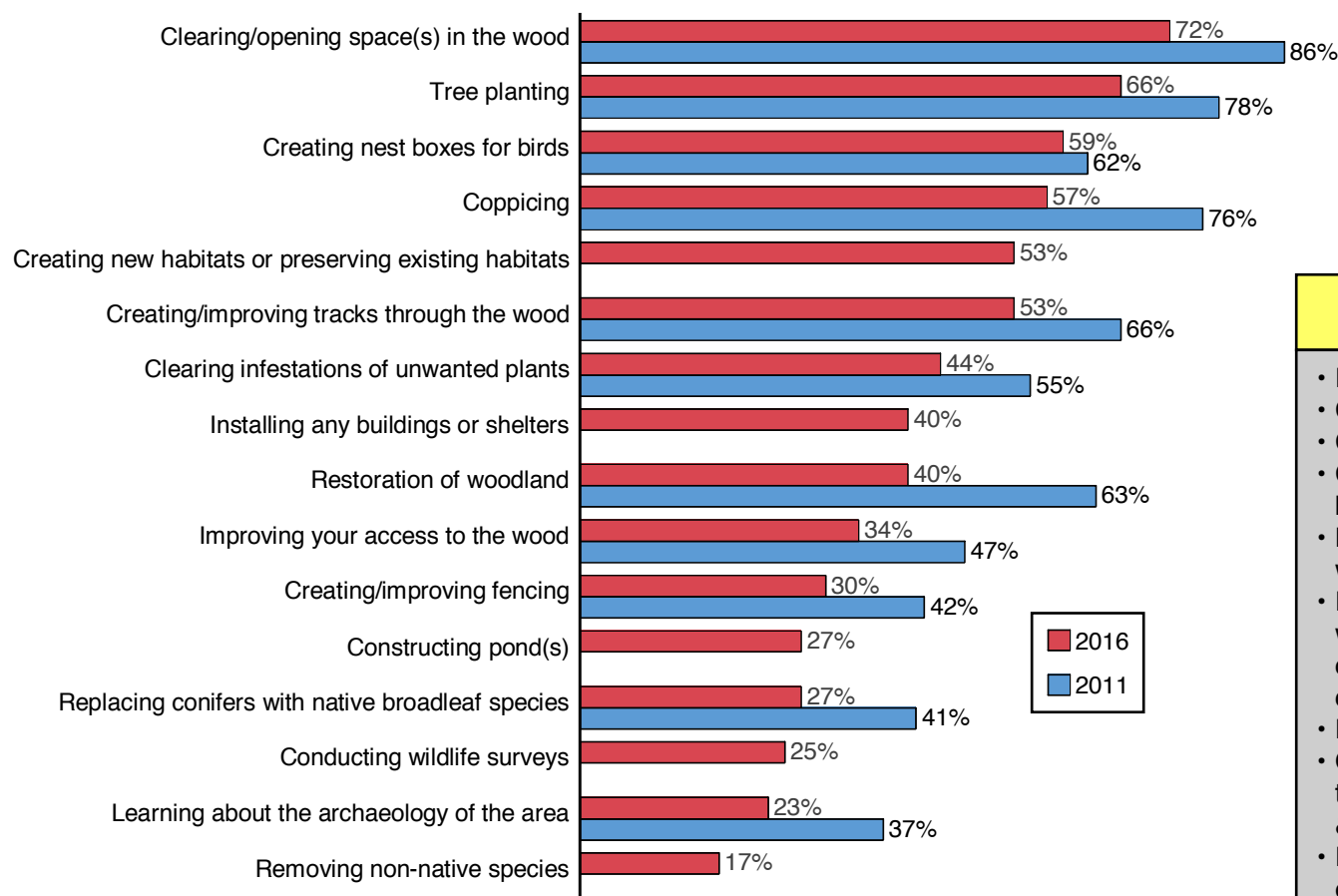
- Other information provided about the types of woods includes:
  - Bamboo
  - Douglas Fir (2)
  - Meadow (2)
  - Water (2) – one with a lake and three ponds
  - SSSI
- The oldest woodland where the age is given is 150 years old “planted some 150+ years ago”.

\*Respondents could state more than one main type of planting in their woodland



**Six of the activities that were listed were undertaken or were planned to be undertaken by more than half of owners. The four most widely undertaken in 2016 were clearing/opening space(s) in the wood (72%), tree planting (66%), creating nest boxes for birds (59%) and coppicing (57%).**

Activities That Owners Have Undertaken Or Plan To Undertake In Their Woods  
(BASE – All Respondents)

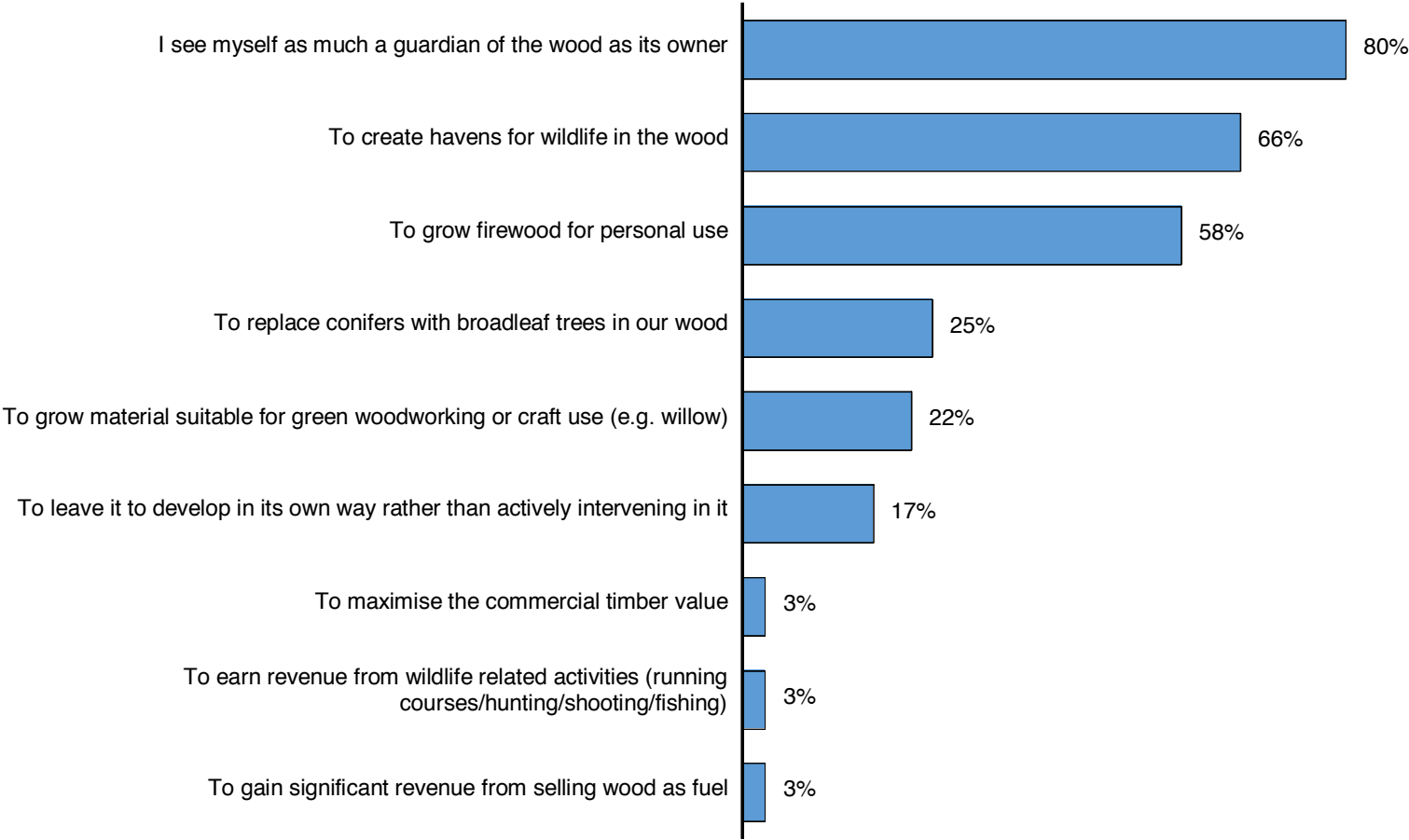


#### Other activities undertaken or planned included

- Planting hedges “laying” “planting”
- Creating beehives
- Camping
- Creating interest environments for children “Den building...introducing our children to woods/nature.”
- Management for firewood “Sympathetic collection of wood for wood burner”.
- Providing a setting for education “Educational use of wood if possible” “providing volunteering opportunities and educational activities for the local community”.
- Dry stone walling.
- Quiet enjoyment “Walk through the wood enjoying the peace and quiet and flora and fauna” “meditation & ceremonies”.
- Enhancing wildlife habitats “Creating wildlife habitats, eg making dead hedges for small mammals or birds”.
- Foraging “edible & medicinal plants”.

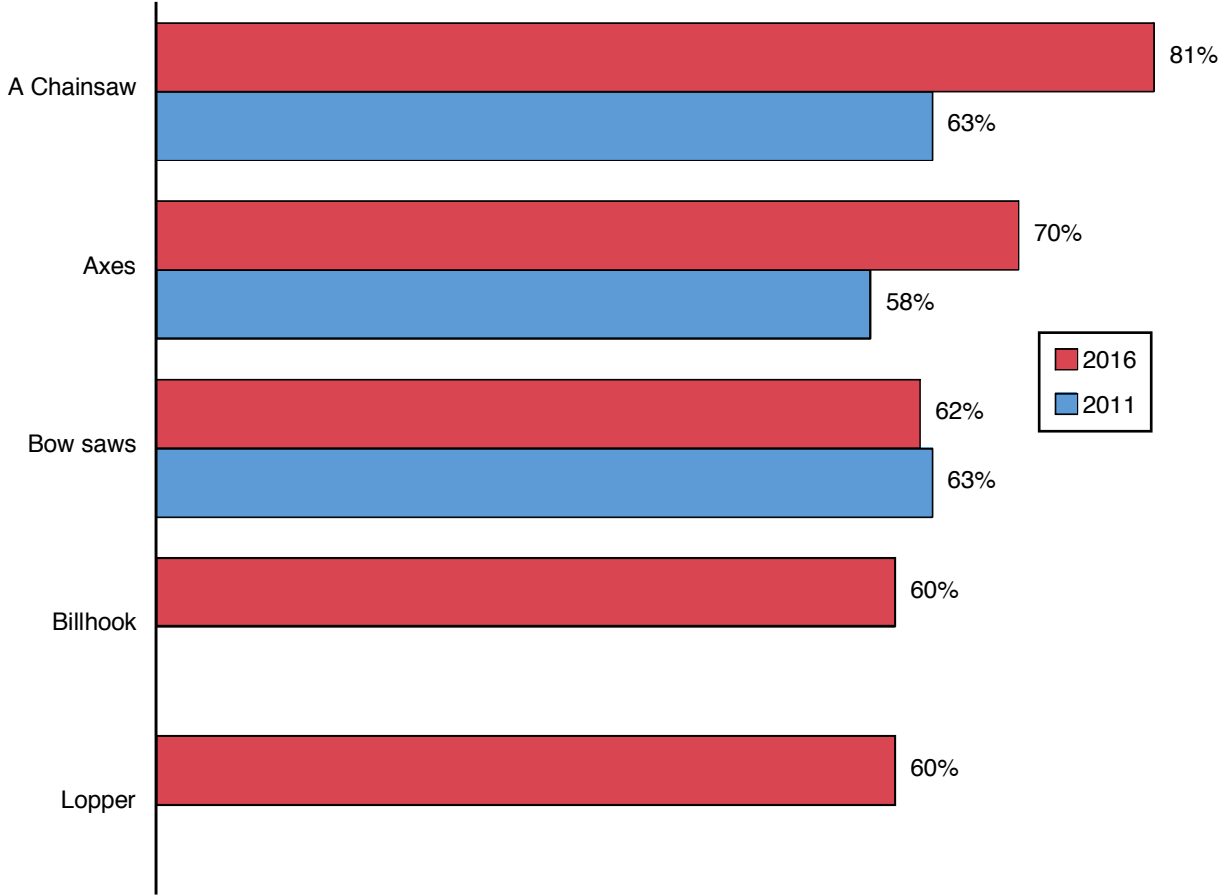
**In terms of management objectives, owners have a clear bias towards personal enjoyment of the woods and support for wildlife rather than their commercial exploitation. Only 3% of owners replied positively to the three questions about seeking to gain significant revenues from their woods.**

The Woodland Management Objectives That Owners Have (BASE – All Respondents)



The proportion of owners using tools in their woods appears to have increased in 2016 with four out of five (81%) using a chainsaw and three-fifths or more using axes (70%), blow saws (62%) and billhooks and loppers (60%).

Usage Of Tools In Managing The Woods (BASE – All Respondents)

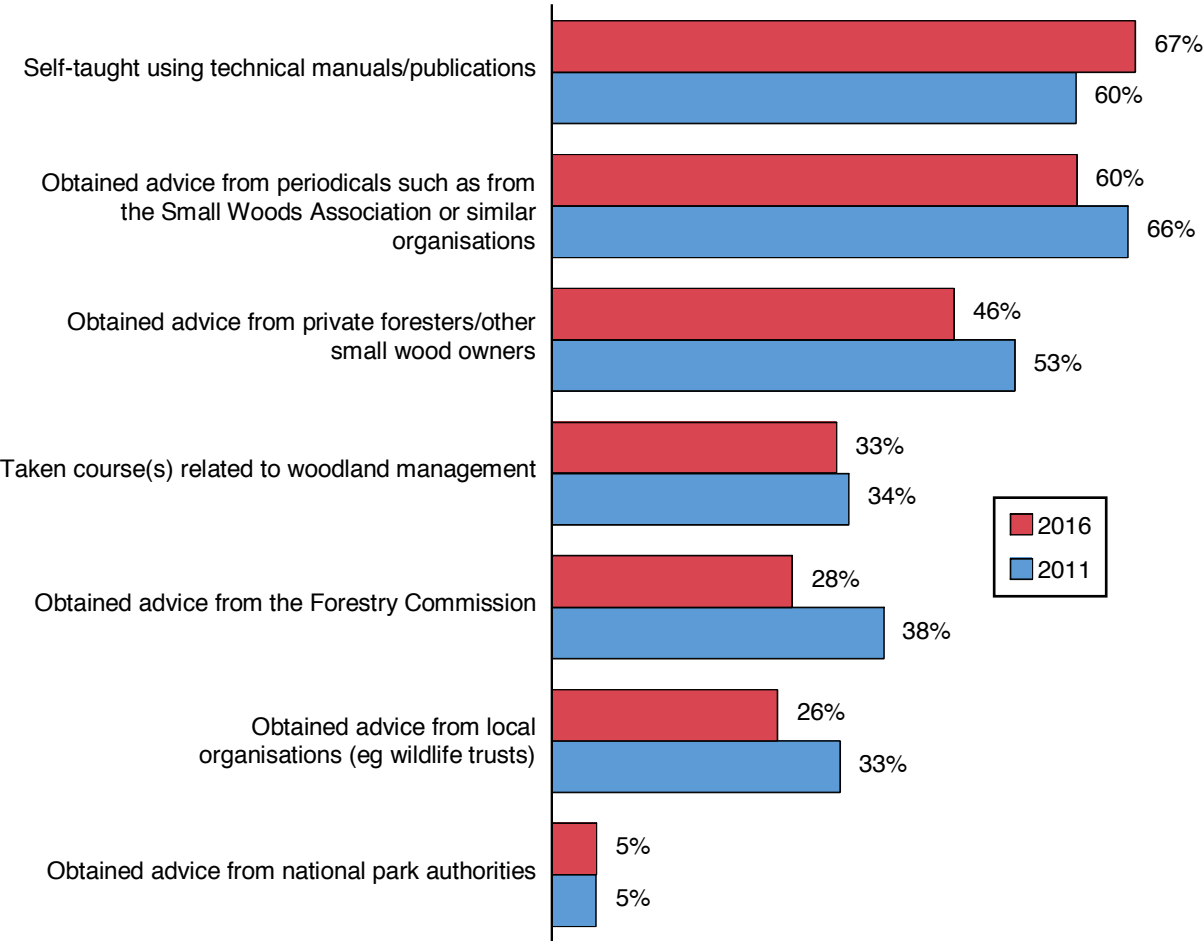


Other tools that were used and the number of mentions for each were...	
7	Silky Saws
5	Brush Cutter
4	Pruning Saw, Strimmer
3	Scythe
2	Froe, Mower, Pole Saw, Tractor and Winch
1	"Grassknife" Long Thin Curved Machete For Slashing Brambles Or Bracken, Band Saw Mill, Black Powder Explosive, Bramble Slasher, Brush Strimmer, Chainsaw Mill, Clearing Saw, Crowbar, Dashed Basher, Fencing Tool, Hedgecutter, High Pruning Saw, Log Jack, Long Handled Pruning Saw, Machete, Mattock, Maul, Post Rammer, Rake, Reciprocating Saw, Sawhorse, Saws, Secateurs, Slash Hook, Slasher, Sledge Hammer, Small Winch, Weed Burner, Wheelbarrow, Wire Strainer and Wood Chipper.



Owners continue to have a preference for being self taught and gaining information informally about managing their wood. More than half gained advice from manuals and periodicals while around a third have taken formal courses or sought advice from bodies such as the Forestry Commission.

Sources Of Advice/Training About Owning/Managing Their Wood (BASE – All Respondents)

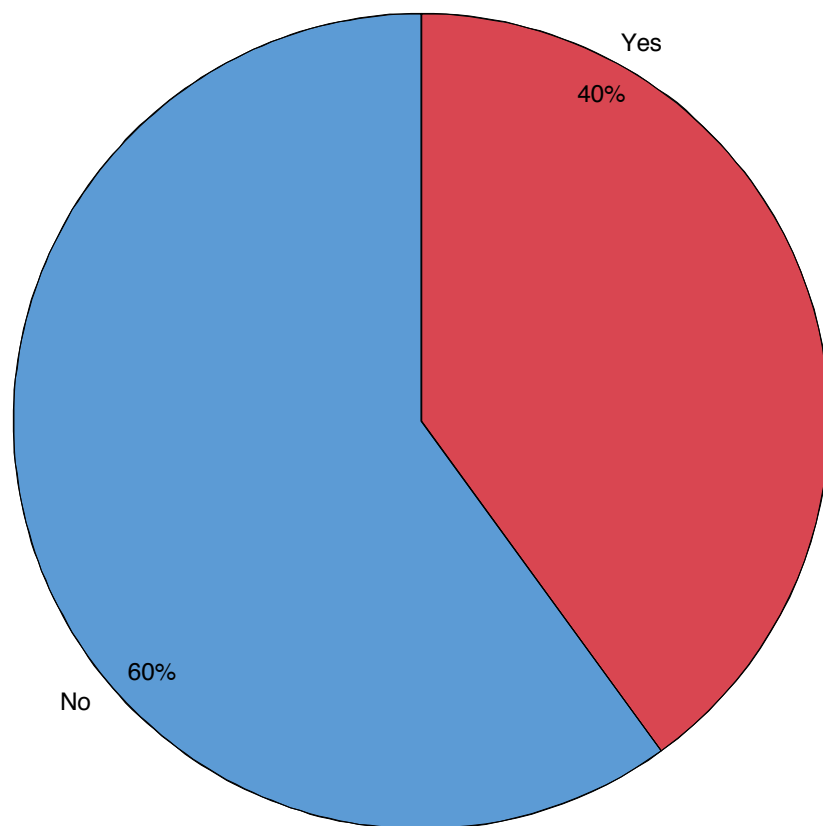


**More information from owners on sources of advice and training about woodland management.**

- The owners that gave more information about the advice and training that they had sought and undertaken fell into a number of categories which included:
- **Obtaining Advice.** Sources of advice included, parents who owned woodlands, experts such as local wildlife specialist, local authority tree officer and professional tree surgeons, Royal Forestry Society Regional Secretary and rangers on reserves.
- **Making Use of Their Own Expertise.** A number of owners were already extremely experienced. The types of experience that they had included, being an ex lecturer in forestry and chainsaw instructor, an ex-countryside ranger, being a qualified forester, having previously been a farmer/woodland owner, having Worked in woodland management many years ago and having had a Lifelong interest in ecology.
- **Going in Courses.** Courses mentioned were, All Terrain Vehicle ATV courses, using chain saws and undertaking degree in Forestry.
- **Joining Groups.** A couple of respondents mentioned joining local groups such as a local woodlanders group and becoming a member of local RFS.
- **Self Taught** using YouTube videos and books.

**Two-fifths of owners had been on training courses related to their woodlands and more than a third of the respondents listed courses they had attended. The most popular categories covered using chainsaws (31 mentions), woodland management (16) and coppicing (7).**

Whether Owners Had Been On Any Training Courses Relating To Their Woodland(s) (BASE – All Respondents (n=172))

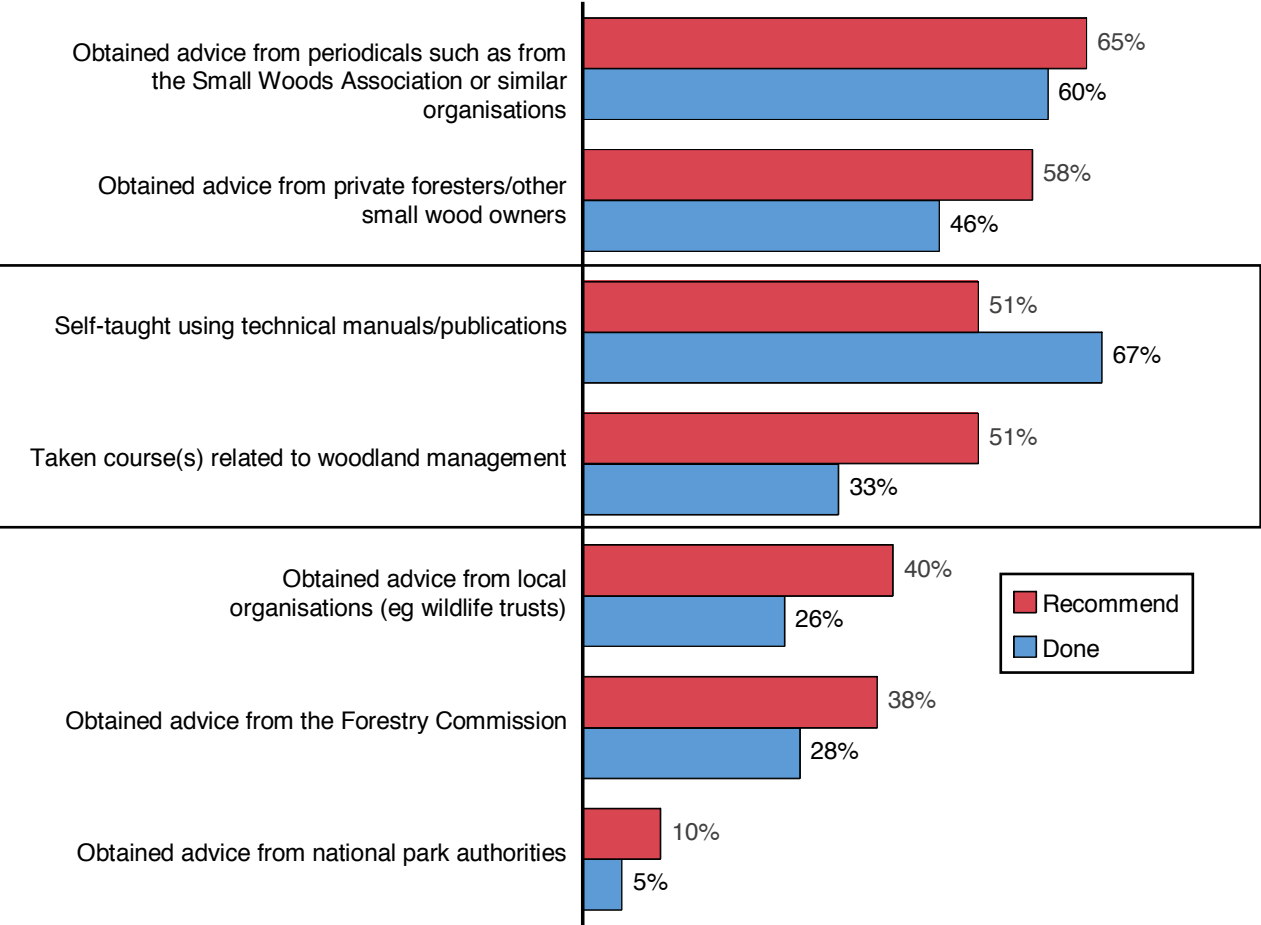


**A total of 64 owners listed training courses that they had been on.**

- The largest number of courses that owners had taken related to woodland management and the safe use of chainsaws. In addition there were a large number of diverse course that owners had taken.
- **Chainsaws.** A total of 31 owners stated that they had been on chainsaw courses.
- **Woodland Management.** These course varied in depth and covered woodland management and sustainable woodland management and a total of 16 owners mention attending courses of this sort. Of interest was the depth of interest that people had in particular at the ones that were held at the CAT. "My wife and I both attended a sustainable woodland management course at CAT, funded by Woodlands.co.uk" "Sustainable woodland management course (OCN) at the Centre for Alternative technology in Wales, great 1 week course with optional exam, very practical hand on minimal classroom time. Explored lots of other woods and learn about sustainability, woodland types, structure of woods, how to manage your wood, timber processing, some woodland crafts (pole lathes & other woodworking tools), timber production, biodiversity, the law around woods, social forestry and lots more. Highly recommend it!!!"
- **Coppicing.** 7 owners stated that they had been on coppicing course.
- **Horse Logging.** 2 owners had been on horse logging courses.
- **Other Courses.** Other courses that were mentioned included, first aid, hedge laying, Weed spraying, Willow weaving for beginners, Recreational tree climbing, principles of Woodland Generating profit, ATV course, scything, charcoal making, hurdle making, adder conservation, reptile surveying, harvest mouse surveying, small mammal ecology, coppicing, a social forestry practitioners course, bushcraft facilitators course, round-house building, outdoor education practitioners certificate, charcoal making, green woodcrafts, outdoor first aid, hurdle making and wildlife study days (identification and ecology of specific species groups).

There was a good fit between the sources of advice that owners used and those they would recommend. Owners recognised the benefits of formal over informal study and training. They were more likely to recommend courses than they had done and less likely to recommend self-tuition.

Comparison Between Sources Of Advice/Training About Owning/Managing Their Wood – What Owners Would Recommend Versus What They Have Done (BASE – All Respondents)

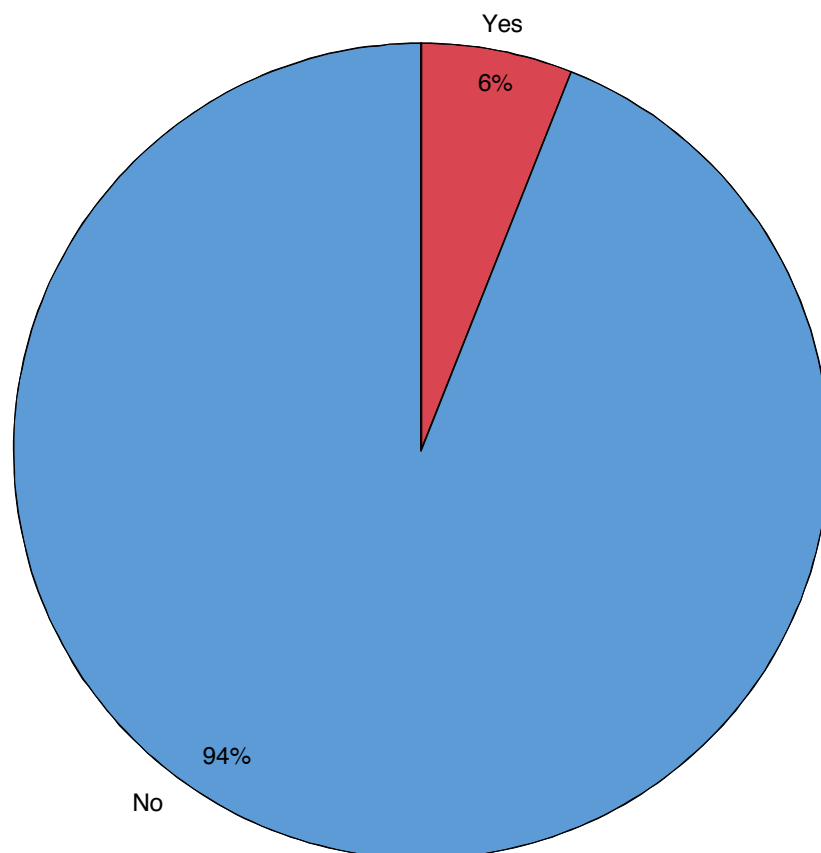


Sources of advice and support that owners recommended

- A total of 12 owners gave more information about the sources of advice and support that they would recommend.
- Suggestions included:
  - Visits to woods “Visit as many similar woods as you can”.
  - In-depth knowledge of your own wood “Spend lots of time walking round the wood so you know what you have”.
  - Using the internet and in particular YouTube clips.
  - The educational role of the Royal Forestry Society “Go to Royal Forestry Society woodland meetings”, “Attend local RFS meetings”.
  - Formal study “Undertake MSc in Forestry”, “Chain saw safety training”.

**Only 6% of owners had received grants for improvements to their woods since they bought them. The most common type of grant was for the development of a management plan with or without the help of a consultant.**

Whether Owners Have Received Grants for Improvements Since Buying  
Their Woods (BASE – All Respondents (n=170))

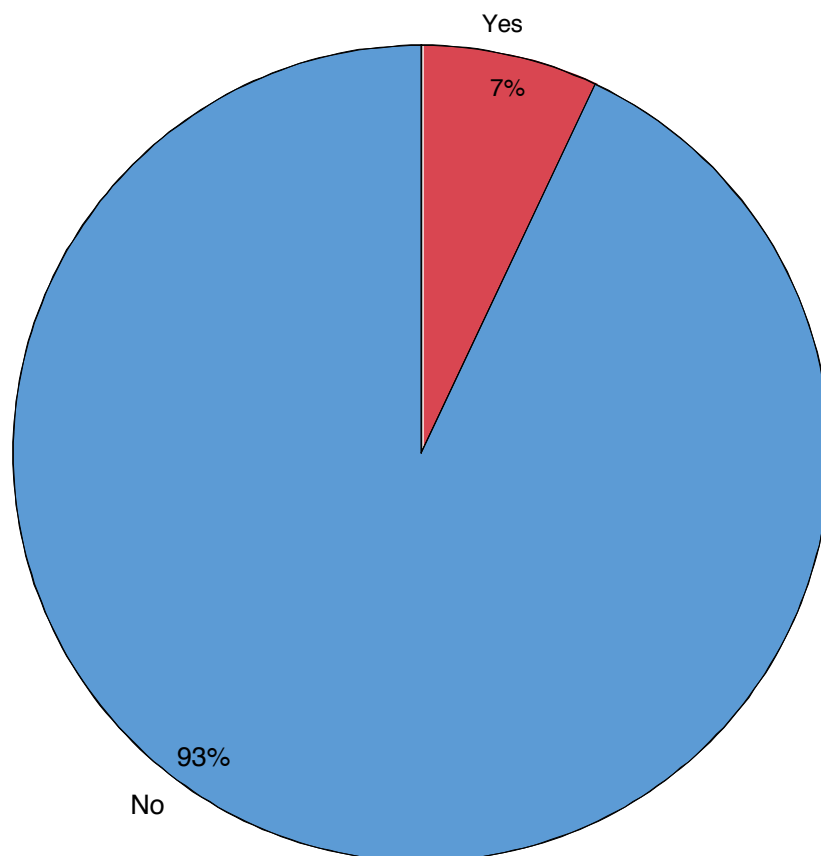


**More information on the grants that owners had received**

- A total of 15 owners gave more information about the grants that they had received. Most common were grants for the development of management plan and the support of a consultant.
- Other grants that owners had successfully bid for were:
  - Woodland Improvement Grant (WIG)
  - Grant for "New tree planting"
  - Glastir and single farm payment
  - Clearing rides "awarded to the collective of wood-owners on site for clearing rides"
  - Wildlife "£100 private donation for batboxes; £25 private donation for marsh tit boxes".
  - Forestry Commission.

**7% of owners had faced issues with the local council/other authorities since buying their woods. The most common examples were in relation to problems and delays in getting planning permission and with improving access to woods and unauthorised access.**

Whether Owners Have Had Any Issues With The Local Council Or Other Authorities Since Buying Their Woods (BASE – All Respondents (n=172))



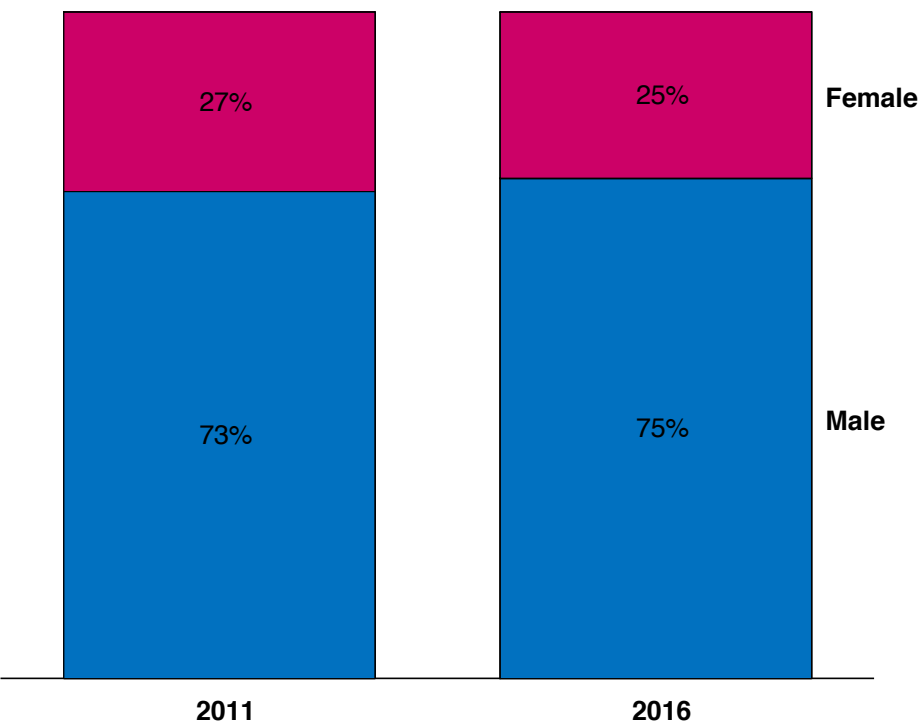
**Comments about issues that owners had had with local councils and other authorities since buying their woods**

- There were a number of instances of strong support for the owners from the local authorities “Council have been very supportive of my plans and have provided permissions for the development of woodland cabin and workshop” “Woodland management has been encouraged and supported by local council”...
- ...and successful planning applications for development “Successful application for permitted development”
- At the same time owners have faced a variety of stumbling blocks in relation to:
  - Gaining Planning Permission. “Refused permission for a permitted development because they treated the woodland as agricultural”, “I’m in Snowdonia National Park so it took some time to obtain planning permission for a shed and an access track”.
  - Delays. “I’m in Snowdonia National Park so it took some time to obtain planning permission for a shed and an access track”, “Constant delays and changes when trying to get FC grants especially RDA.”
  - Access Issues. Gaining Access: “I would need to have a dropped kerb constructed but the Council will not allow it because the entrance would be off a A road. The Council is against accessing off a A road.”, “getting access - big problems with local planning - now finally resolved after a long period of hassle”. Unauthorised Access: “Combating trespass by 4x4 owners and motorcyclists. Lobbying (successfully) to get barriers across byways”, “unauthorized access with no contact with owner”.

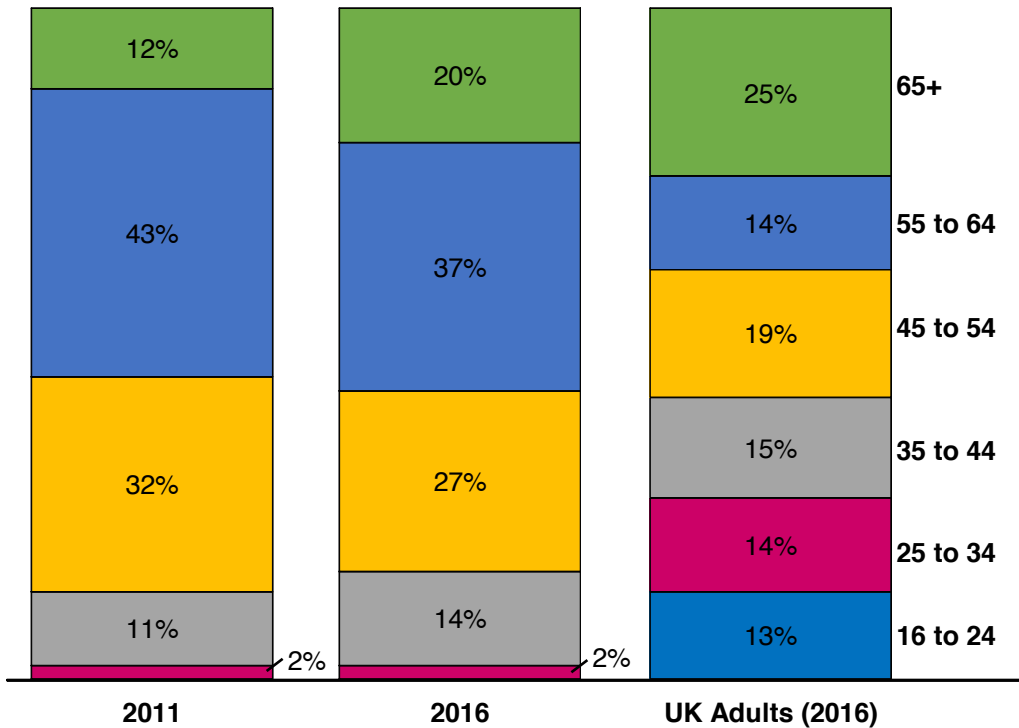


The profile of the owners continues to be skewed heavily towards males (75% of respondents in 2016). The age profile of owners remains skewed towards those aged 45 to 64 with 64% of owners in this age group compared to the 33% that they make up in the UK adult population.

Gender (BASE – All Respondents (N=162))

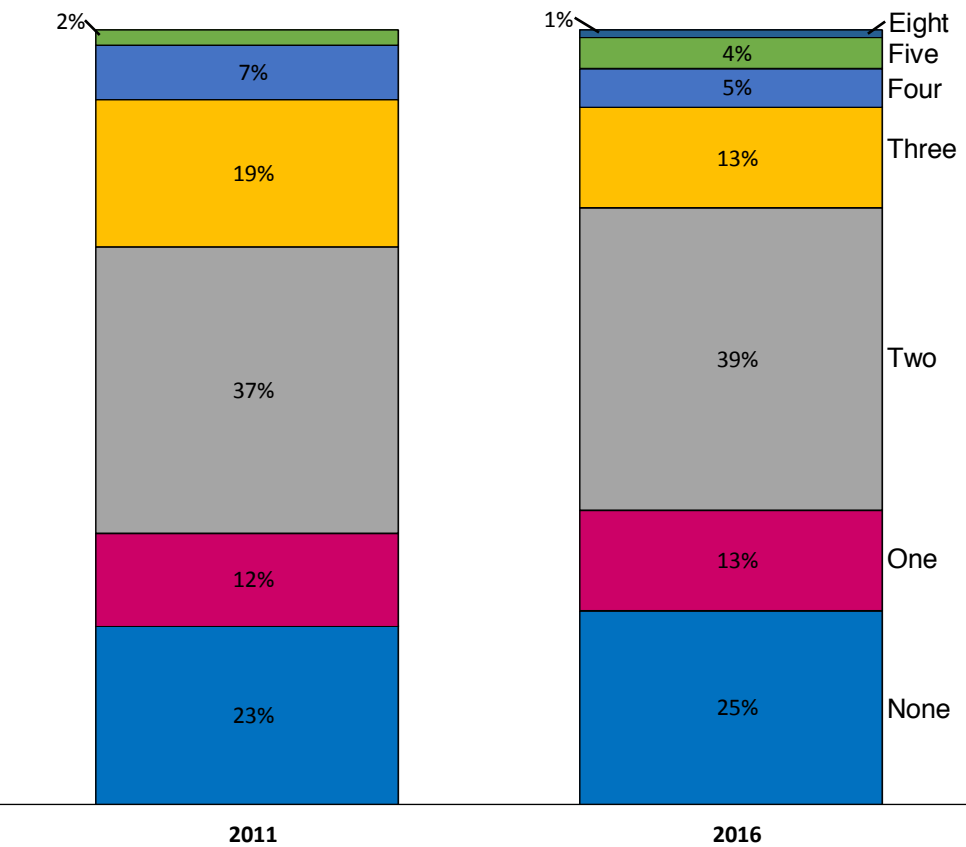


Age Group (BASE – All Respondents (N=161))

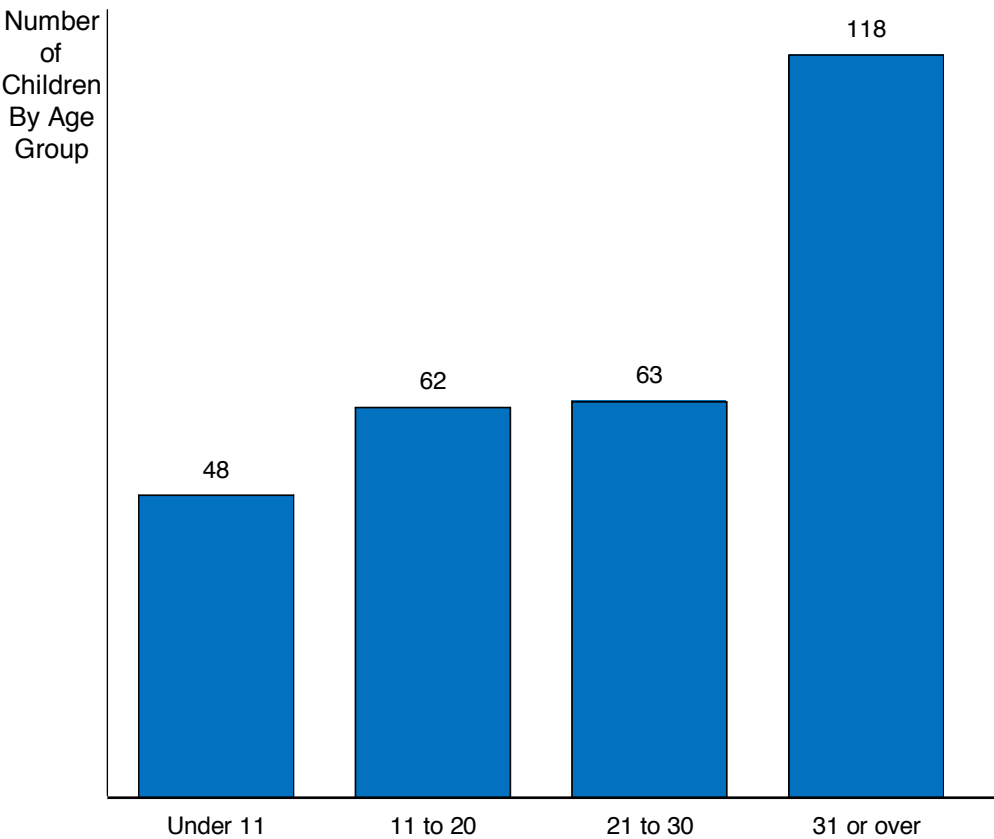


Three-quarters of owners have children. The age profiles of these children tended to be that of young adults thus mirroring the older profile of the owners themselves. Three-fifths (62%) of the children were aged 21 or over.

Number Of Children That People Have  
(BASE – All Respondents (N=158 (2016)))



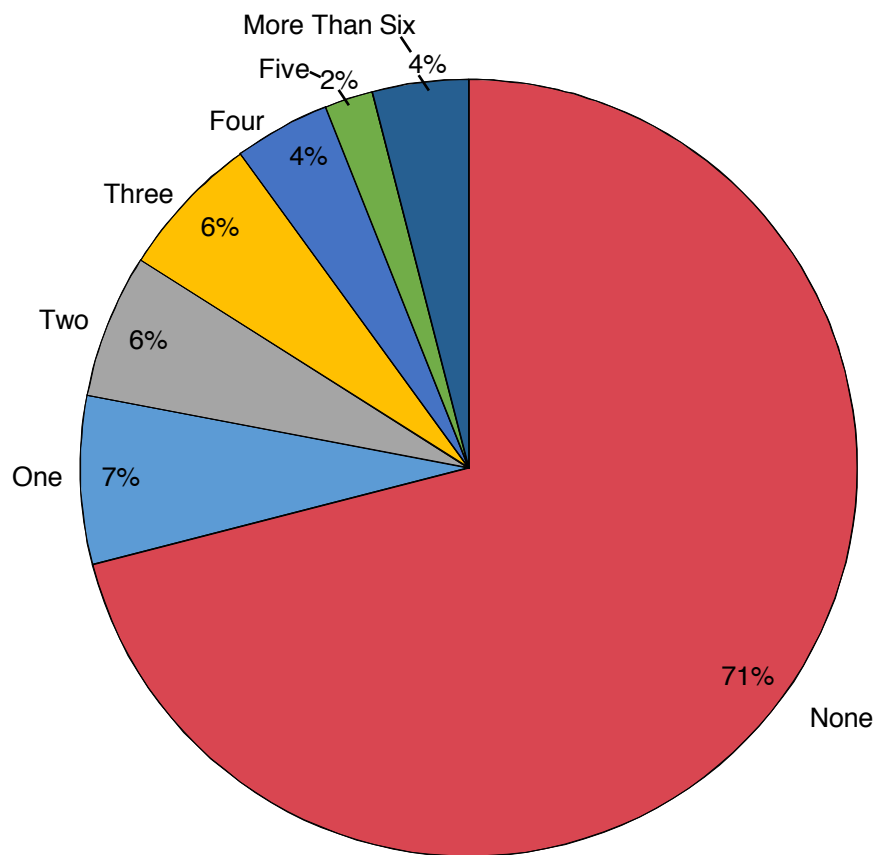
Ages Of Children (BASE – All Children (N=291))



Just over a quarter of those who took part in the survey have grandchildren (29%). This figure is lower than the 36% level observed in 2011.

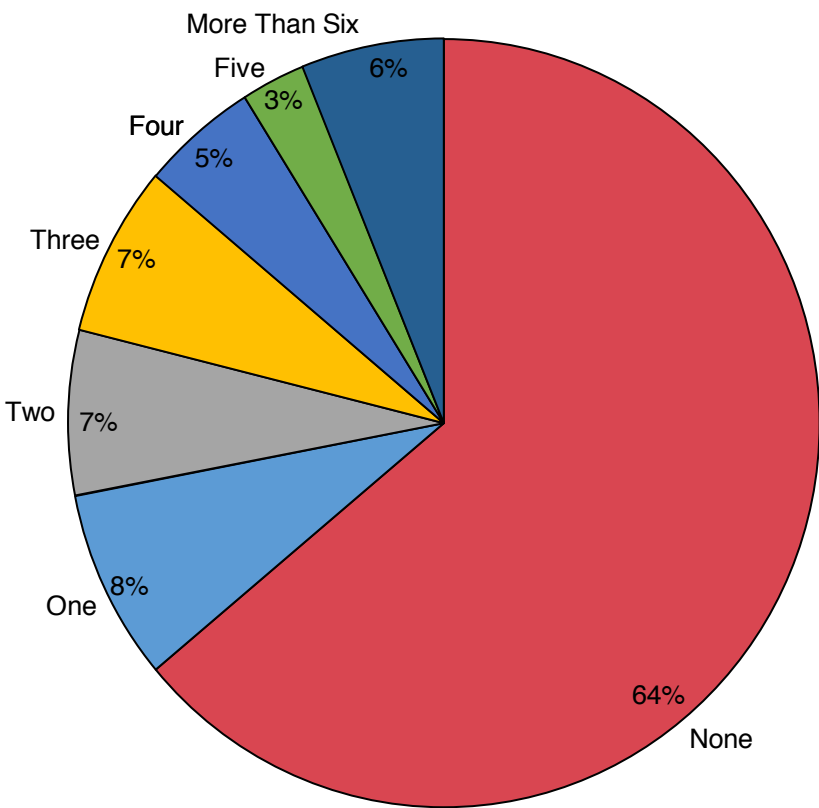
Number Of Grandchildren That People Have (BASE – All Respondents)

2016 (n=138)



The 40 respondents with grandchildren have a total of 139 grandchildren

2011 (n=108)



The 36 respondents with grandchildren have a total of 117 grandchildren

The skew towards ownership in the south-east counties is far less prevalent in the 2016 research than it was in 2011. In 2011 just over a third (37%) of owners (where the county could be identified) came from either Sussex, Kent, Surrey or London. In 2016 this figure has fallen to 26%.

County In Which The Owners Live (BASE – All Respondents (N=155\*))

Name of County	Number of Owners Living There	Name of County	Number of Owners Living There	Name of County	Number of Owners Living There
Sussex	14	Aberdeenshire	3	Bedfordshire	1
Yorkshire	12	Avon		Buckinghamshire	
Devon	11	Carmarthenshire		Cambridgeshire	
Kent		Norfolk		Ceredigion	
London	8	Northamptonshire		Cheshire	
		Oxfordshire		Clackmannanshire	
Surrey	7	Wiltshire		Cleveland	
Somerset	6		2	Clwyd	
Cumbria	4	Angus		Dorset	
Hampshire		Berkshire		Durham	
Lincolnshire		Cornwall		Flintshire	
Suffolk		Derbyshire		Gloucestershire	
		Essex		Herefordshire	
		Gwynedd		Hertfordshire	
		Lancashire		Midlothian	
		Leicestershire		Monmouthshire	
		Nottinghamshire		Northumberland	
		Pembrokeshire		Perthshire	
		West Midlands		Powys	
		Worcestershire		Shropshire	
				Staffordshire	
				Strathclyde	
				Tyne and Wear	
				Vale of Glamorgan	
				Warwickshire	

\*Where the county can be identified. When name of the county has not been given, in many cases it can be identified from the postcode provided.

**In the final question of the main part of the survey, owners were asked to outline “What would you say have been high points and most satisfying aspects of owning your woodland?” 160 respondents gave in excess of 350 different ideas.**

- The themes that owners mentioned broke down into a number of areas that ranged from the emotions experienced from woodland ownership through to the practical tasks that people undertake and the satisfaction they gain from them. These themes are summarised over the following pages in terms of the ideas that were being expressed (on the left-hand side) and the pertinent quotes which animate each theme.
- Although some themes such as the peace and tranquillity of being in a wood are extremely strong and popular, not all of the quotes that were made about that idea are included. The aim is to describe each of the themes and animate them in terms of their meaning to people rather than set down every example of that idea.

It is striking just how strong the emotional engagement is between owners and their enjoyment of their woods. Some owners talk in spiritual terms about going to their woods and the meaning that the woods have in their lives and of their sense of wellbeing and fulfilment.

*“Given me the opportunity to be spiritually closer to nature.”*  
*“I feel it has enriched my part of my attitude towards my purpose for existing in our world.”*  
*“The tranquillity and beauty - a little haven for renewing the soul.”*

Owners gain a sense of satisfaction from arriving...

*“Every visit is a refreshing high point.”*

...and then spending time in the wood.

*“It really feels like 'home' to me.”*  
*“Fantastic place to spend time in.”*  
*“Feel good factor.”*  
*“It's my 'goto place' for a number of reasons.”*

The relationship is seen as being long-term...

*“Developing the woodland for long term enjoyment.”*

...and its impact on wellbeing and satisfaction can be greater than the owner had originally envisaged.

*“The benefits are far greater than imagined at the time of purchase.”*



## A major emotional benefit of woodland ownership is the peace and tranquillity that spending time in a wood brings. This is often a welcome contrast to the busyness of the rest of their lives.

Far and away the dominant emotional theme of the comments that owners give about their woods is that of the “peace” that they find in their woods. A total of 29 owners spontaneously use the word “peace” in relation to high points of their time in their woods.

This sense of peace is linked to other feelings such as the relationship that people have with nature in general...

...and more specifically other aspects of interacting with the natural world such as seeing flowers and going for walks.

Owners highlight the contrast with the rest of their lives and the release that they have from the busyness of daily life as exemplified by a more urban life and its attendant stresses.

In particular people note the absence of the internet and the feeling of release that this brings...

...as well as the ability to take themselves off from other people.

*“Peace and tranquillity.”*  
*“Peace and calm.”*  
*“Peace and harmony.”*  
*“Peace and quiet.”*  
*“Peace and serenity.”*

*“ ‘Being at one’ with nature. Highly recommended.”*

*“Peace and calm; it’s just a beautiful place especially the river, the bluebells and the birds.”*  
*“Just being able to walk through it, enjoying the peace.”*  
*“The peace and tranquillity of walking through the woodland to the lake.”*

*“Peace and quiet, away from city, people, traffic.”*  
*“It’s a haven of tranquillity away from the pressures of daily life.”*  
*“Being able to go to it after a stressful day/week.”*  
*“Ability to ‘switch-off’ from work.”*  
*“Just having land to escape to from a busy life.”*

*“There is very limited signal, brilliant.”*  
*“Such a relief to have no internet!”*

*“Just the time spent in the woods - both working and relaxing - sometimes alone or with family and friends.”*  
*“Great places to escape from everything and everyone and enjoy the peace.”*

**As well as the peace and quiet there is a sense of solitude that many also welcome. These elements combine to create improved mental and physical health and wellbeing.**

The idea of being alone is a strong theme. It is associated with relaxation and unwinding...

...and also with genuine solitude which is a source of strength to people knowing that they are completely alone in a space.

These elements combine with physical exercise to deliver improvements to well-being through this greater physical and emotional connection to nature.

*"Somewhere to relax without interruption."*

*"Having somewhere to go to chill out with my dogs and family."*

*"Solitude and freedom."*

*"Space, peace, tranquillity and solitude."*

*"To relax and enjoy the nature and wildlife knowing that we are the only people in the woods."*

*"Physical exercise."*

*"Greater understanding of the natural environment, and improved health - both mental and physical."*

*"Reconnecting to nature."*

*"Relaxing in the environment."*

## Owners share a great interest in wildlife. They are keen to observe the changes that occur across the seasons to wildlife as well as to plants and flowers.

As well as the strong identification with wellbeing and emotional fulfilment, there is of course a widely shared enjoyment of all aspects of nature.

At its broadest there is a strong sense of watching the changing seasons and the innate interest that that generates.

These observations are heightened by the proximity to nature of being located in the wood. Interest is heightened in spring with the increase in wildlife and an growth of plants and flowers.

There is also satisfaction to be gained from the actions and interventions of owners that support and promote flora and fauna. These activities consist of both addressing previous neglect of woods and creating an environment in which wildlife can flourish once again...

...and planting which encourages plants and wildlife.

*"We feel a sense of great satisfaction and achievement and an inner and outer strength to continue with our pro-active approach to the future of our woodland and inhabitants. The peace and quiet, the privilege that one feels to be so close to nature as it changes from season to season and year to year."*

*"Watching it change throughout the year."  
"Watching the seasonal changes."*

*"Being able to observe the changing seasons at first hand."  
"It is magical seeing how it changes through the seasons."  
"Waiting for the arrival of new shoots in the spring."  
"Just seeing the different seasons and watching the wildlife."*

*"Clearing invasive species to allow young trees space to grow."  
"Clearing where trees are too dense, letting light in."  
"Coppicing old coppice that has been neglected."  
"Making a difference by improvements to a woodland neglected for some 60 years."*

*"Creating a hedge for new habitats."  
"Creating ride-edge bays for plant and wildlife diversity."*

**As well as noticing and observing nature, owners are keen to discover more about it and learn more about all aspects of flora and fauna from animals and plants through to insects.**

Throughout there is a sense of change and progress occurring at a certain pace which is ordered and perhaps in contrast with the busyness that people have mentioned about the rest of their lives and at odds with the normal rules of 21<sup>st</sup> Century living.

*"Seeing it slowly develop into a well cared for woodland."  
"Just creating a place where things are left to proceed at nature's pace and not for economics. For nature not economics."*

Important to owners is spending time in a natural environment...

*"Being close to nature."  
"Being part of nature and sharing it with others."  
"Getting back to nature."*

...discovering more about it and learning about it in a practical way.

*"Discovering unexpected flora and fauna."  
"Discovering wildlife & fauna, enjoying the peace & quiet."*

The enjoyment of wildlife takes a number of forms and is based around observation and learning more about the animals, birds and insects that exist in woods and can be of all year round interest as the seasons change.

*"It is lovely to see and hear the diverse wildlife in the woods."  
"Learning about all the flora and fauna, even the insects are interesting!"  
"Observing it over the seasons, discovering new plants and trees. Spotting new birds and wildlife."*

Owners spot a wide range of different types of animals.

*"Looking at the wildlife including deer and ducks."  
"Seeing deer, and even the footprints of boar."  
"Listening to the owls and seeing the wildlife."  
"Seeing my first wild deer was exciting!"  
"Discovering a plethora of badger sets."*

## Many owners go further and record the behaviour of the wildlife more closely and more formally and deepen the relationship by learning more about the wildlife that they are seeing.

Some go further and seek to deepen this into more formal forms of observation...

*"Noting the diverse flora in ancient woodland and bird/mammals using the sites."  
"Seeing how many species of wildlife/birds we have."*

...and use technology to capture images and record their sightings.

*"Capturing photos of wildlife on trailcam."  
"Sightings of wildlife and footage on wildlife camera."*

For many this observation of wildlife leads them on to learning more about the wildlife.

*"Getting to know and identify the various trees and flowers."  
"Learning about the plants and animals in the wood."  
"Learning about the wood in the different seasons."*

Simply being in a wood facilitates a far deeper relationship with animals and wildlife than most people would typically gain. Many are able to see wildlife at first hand in a natural and unforced way.

*"Experiencing the dawn and dusk wildlife."  
"See the wildlife that is within a stone's throw to the housing estate."*

Owners are also interested in seeing how their own interventions to encourage wildlife help to benefit them..

*"Seeing first birds investigating new nest boxes."*

...and that they themselves can become accepted as being part of the landscape.

*"Seeing how the wildlife is accepting me to be there and not taking flight."*



**As well as spending time in their woods and the natural pleasures this brings, owners are also keen to make improvements to them. One of the principal goals is to improve the conditions for wildlife and to allow them to flourish more.**

Many owners go to significant lengths to make improvements to their wood.

The woodland that they own may have previously been neglected and their efforts are helping to reverse that decline.

They observe that the efforts that they have gone are resulting in improvements for the wildlife in the area.

The language throughout is one of growth, development and improvement.

*"Being able in some small part to help and encourage nature."*

*"Working to improve biodiversity."*

*"Improving habitats for wildlife, full occupancy of the 42 nest boxes we made."*

*"Over a 2 year period we have planted over 1,400 mixed trees and hedging."*

*"After many years of neglect, it's nice to feel that I am making a positive impact."*

*"Being able to slowly improve a neglected area and create an improved area for wildlife."*

*"Improving the wood resulting in vastly increased bird & butterflies as well more types of plants."*

*"Seeing the improvement in wild flowers and fungi since managing the site."*

*"Setting new hedging and a few new trees which have survived their first winter."*

*"Watching the wood and local area improve and clearing fallen and hanging trees...creating a better wood."*

*"Watching it develop."*

*"Watching it grow."*

*"Just being in the woods and watching it's health improve."*

**While some owners love the solitude of their wood, others revel in sharing their enjoyment and this comes across most strongly in the enjoyment that children gain from spending time in woods unshackled from life's normal strictures.**

Whilst many owners enjoy the solitude of their woods and the satisfaction this brings, others love to share the experience. The impact is especially strong in terms of visits with friends and family and the enjoyment that owners can gain from that.

This sharing of the experience and the tasks are needed in the wood is a way of bringing people together and getting closer.

But it is the enjoyment that people have with children that is one of the most striking aspects of the benefits that owners gain from their woods. The starting point for children is the freedom that they have to enjoy and express themselves.

In addition to this sense of freedom, children, like adults, can learn a lot from being in the woods about wildlife and acquire practical skills that help them develop.

Some make efforts to adapt the woods to be a particularly exciting environment for children...

...and encourage others to come and gain enjoyment from it too.

*"Enjoying the fresh air and wildlife with my dogs, family and friends."  
"Own woodland to take family/friends around."  
"Taking friends and family there for the occasional leisure retreat."  
"Beautiful space to spend quality family time."*

*"Family and friends with their children can help out in woodland management activities. Eating together outside working together, having fun together."  
"Seeing visitors to the woodland become immersed in nature and crafts."  
"Sharing the activities with family and friends."*

*"See kids running around and having fun and learning about our woodlands, it's fantastic !!!!"  
"Watching our grandsons enjoy the freedom of the wood."  
"It's a great place for the grandkids to run riot!"*

*"Seeing my children and grandchildren take an active interest."  
"Kid's enjoyment. Camping there. Watching them develop."  
"Taking grandson there to explore."*

*"Turning it from dense holly scrub with an odd clearing or two into a useable woods, with a maze of connecting 'rooms' and clearings, perfect for kids' adventures."*

*"The local scouts use the wood from time to time and I love to watch the enjoyment they get from it."*

## Owners also very much enjoy camping out and cooking outside in their woods.

Another important aspect of the enjoyment of the woods is the outdoor life that goes with it. Some of the most satisfying parts of this are cooking outside and camping out.

Cooking outside is a major draw for owners either alone or as a sociable activity with friends and family.

The simplicity of overnight stays in the woods is another major attraction with the excitement of a night under canvas and its proximity to nature.

Other sources of enjoyment and satisfaction are a place where dogs can roam freely, a location for physical exercise,

*"Camping out in the woods in the summer, having friends to the woods camping and day trips, having campfire. Being outdoors."  
"We go regularly for wood but always spend time to boil a Kelly kettle for tea, to cook or to camp and to just be there to witness the seasons and the life."*

*"Having a private space for myself and my dogs to camp next to a fire at night."  
"Cooking breakfast on an open fire with the kids."*

*"A hammock under the stars."  
"Camping with the kids."  
"Sleeping overnight under a tarpaulin."  
"Spending the night there and listening to the wind in the trees."*

*"Somewhere the dogs love to be at play."  
"Green gym."*

**There are a number of more practical benefits to woodland ownership that give people real satisfaction and value from ownership. The most obvious of these is fuel for heating the home.**

One of the most valuable features of ownership of a woodland is the access to firewood and fuel. This has a significant financial value.

*"Large supply of firewood."*

*"Burning our own logs."*

*"Also knowing that we have our own supply of wood for the fire whenever we need it is pretty satisfying too!"*

This can come as a result of natural damage to woods in storms or from work that owners have undertaken.

*"Harvesting fuel from dead storm damaged trunks."*

*"With the bonus of a source of fuel after coppicing and seeing nature return."*

This can be of such value that owners will alter their fuel source at home to be able to burn the logs that come from their woods.

*"Installing a wood burner at home and producing firewood as part of the coppice restoration work."*

"This can go further to earning money from the woodland and selling firewood from it."

*"Earning money from it."*

**Owners very much enjoy the tasks that they need to do around their woods. This combination of physical exertion with mental relaxation is felt to be extremely beneficial for people's wellbeing.**

The tasks that owners undertake vary from maintenance and woodland management...

*"Making our own charcoal. Chopping down trees is relaxing!"*

...through to making improvements to the woodlands...

*"Improving drainage."*

...creating cabins and other structures...

*"Building a cabin."  
"Building tree houses."  
"Planning and creating ways to make our woodland life easier (e.g. creating firewood stores, building a shelter to store equipment etc)."*

...and making changes that are for the benefit of the wildlife in the area.

*"...establishment of an apiary."*

Throughout there is a sense of the enjoyment of this physical labour and owners gaining satisfaction from a tangible outcome for their labours and gaining new skills along the way.

*"Doing physical labour and seeing an impact."  
"The pleasure of working in the woods as my retirement project."  
"Working on my own in the woods, using old fashioned methods of weed control (scything) and woodland management."*



**Overall woodland ownership is felt to be a significant step up from just being a visitor to a wood. The development of the relationship with the woodland over time and the legal benefits that ownership confers deepen the ties to the land and give people a far greater sense of belonging.**

People like the fact of ownership. There is a strong sense of satisfaction in being able to call the wood that they are in theirs and the sense of independence that accompanies that.

Ownership is tied into a closer and deeper relationship with the wood. This is not the transient relationship of a visitor...

...but one where there is time to enjoy the space and make frequent visits to it...

...effecting positive change...

...with all the attendant benefits of elements such as collaboration and enjoyment of the space...

...and the capacity for woods to be enjoyed by people whose mobility may be restricted.

All this is done with the knowledge that as a guardian of the space, the owner has the capacity to keep the space protected and reserved for wildlife and nature.

*"Ownership of a piece of woodland."*

*"Being able to call it your own!"*

*"Having a wood of our own with free rein... without having to consult a land owner."*

*"Being part of the woodland not just a visitor."*

*"Building a deep understanding and relationship with a piece of land over time."*

*"Being able to go out of doors every day into the woods and work, walk, watch, survey, listen and enjoy them."*

*"Just being able to access it twenty four hours a day if we want to."*

*"Being the legal guardian of a piece of our land, meaning I can ensure that it is kept well and used sensitively."*

*"Owning the wood with my wife has allowed us to work on this project together as a team."*

*"The simple pleasures of working and living in a magnificent wood with breathtaking views of Cader Idris."*

*"Being able to walk all around despite disability. Have a good friend who will physically work my woodland."*

*"Most important is to protect any space from development."*