

Living Woods

No.54 WINTER 2019

MAGAZINE



MILLING TIMBER
PORTABLE CHAINSAW MILLS

GET TRAINED
WOODLAND WORKSHOPS

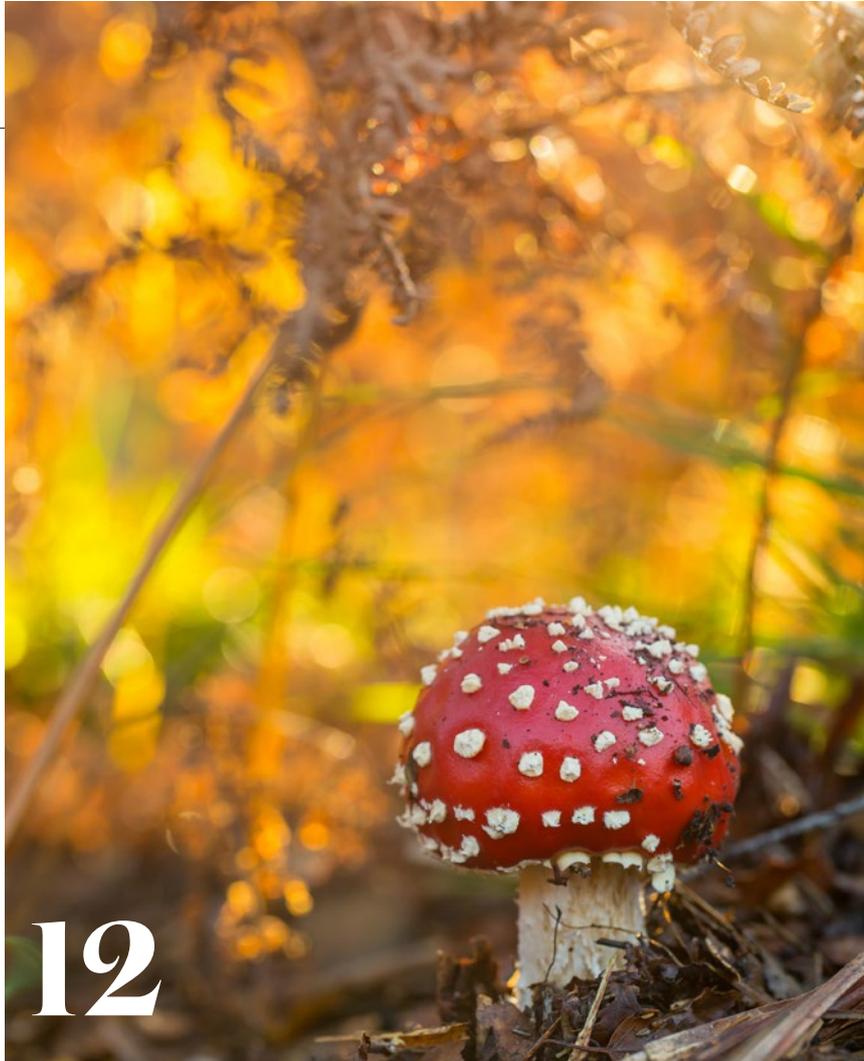
+ **MEET THE MAKER: Giles Newman**
PHOTOGRAPHING WOODLANDS

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2019 may well be remembered as the year when the phrase 'climate emergency' took root in the popular conscience. We review the timely and thought-provoking *State of Nature Report*.

None of us know what the future holds, but woodland owners are undoubtedly discussing how they can manage their woodlands for the future and asking how they can do more. In this issue, we have focused on woodland courses and training, as well as the sustainable and low-impact extraction of logs and timber. We also look at ways to simply enjoy the trees – photographer Beth Mercer shares her tips on how to photograph woodlands effectively and the talented Giles Newman describes his love of woodcarving. For all those tree trivia experts, Professor Julian Evans shares a few lesser-known forestry facts. Finally, we send best wishes to all our readers for the Christmas season and the new year.

Judith Millidge Editor
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Woodland fungi by Beth Mercer



COVER PHOTO
BY SANDRA FREY ON UNSPLASH

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Photo: Niall Benvie WTML

TREE WITH A FACE LEADS BATTLE AGAINST DUTCH ELM DISEASE IN THE SCOTTISH HIGHLANDS.

The 'Last Ent of Affric' is a magnificent lone elm which was named Scotland's Tree of the Year 2019 last month after a public vote organised by the Woodland Trust. Hundreds of years old, it has lived quietly protected by its remote location – a 10km walk from the nearest road.

The tree has a peculiar 'face' visible on its trunk which is why it has been named 'Ent' for the mythological tree creatures which feature in JRR Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*.

Dr Euan Bowditch of the Wooded Landscapes Research Group at Inverness College, University

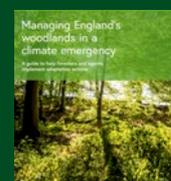
of the Highlands and Islands, said: 'The public perception of elm is probably quite defeatist. Many people might not realise that healthy elms exist, grow and regenerate. I think it is important to emphasise that elms are not lost to our landscape.' The ElmWatch campaign aims to stop the spread of the disease in Scotland and carries out research to secure the future of the species.

Where are we with Elm? by Karen Russell and published by the Future Trees Trust, summarises the work done to breed disease-resistant elms and preserve the few that survived Dutch elm disease. 'With the right people in the right place and the funding we can put elm back in the landscape,' she said. **Read the full report.**

MANAGING WOODLANDS IN A CLIMATE EMERGENCY

The Forestry Commission has issued new management guidance to provide practical advice to landowners and woodland managers on ways they can better manage their woodland to combat the effects of climate change.

The 16-page booklet provides clear and concise advice, covering the likely impacts of climate change on England's trees and woodlands, followed by suggestions for management in the future. Click on the image to read it.



Deer Manager

Woodland owners and managers face a constant battle with deer, which damage young trees. Tracking and managing populations is not easy, but Sylva Foundation's popular **myForest** woodland mapping website now has a new set of tools for landowners and managers to collect, store and collate deer management information across landscapes.



In tandem with this, the Deer Manager mobile app has been completely revised to aid to better record-keeping. Stalkers can instantly add sighting data, including information about species, sex, age, larder weight and location.

Download the app from Sylva's website: sylva.org.uk/myforest/deer-manager or Google Play (Android phones). iPhone owners will find it in the App Store.

YEAR OF THE TREE IN RICHMOND PARK

Richmond Park in south-east London is home to 130,000 trees, including some of the oldest oaks in the country. There are around 1,400 veteran trees, some up to 800 years old. To celebrate the launch of Year of the Tree 2020, a year-long conservation programme, the Friends of Richmond Park commissioned the artist Mark Frith to draw the iconic Royal Oak, which is the official emblem of the campaign.

Limited edition prints are available and all funds raised go to support the conservation efforts in the park. More details: **Friends of Richmond Park** website.



Excellence in Forestry

The Royal Forestry Society's Excellence in Forestry Awards 2020 will be reaching across the Irish Sea for the first time as they seek to identify the very best in woodland management in Northern Ireland, the Isle of Man and Wales.

Urging owners and managers of woods of all sizes and those running woodland education and learning projects to take part, Excellence in Forestry Awards co-ordinator Rachel Thomas said, 'At a time when we hear a lot about the need to plant new trees to combat climate change, it is equally important that we manage our existing woods to optimise their benefits for climate change, rural economies and health and wellbeing.'



'We know there are many fine woods and forests in Wales, Northern Ireland and the Isle of Man and we want to be able to shout about them. These awards will throw a spotlight on those who are achieving the very best, helping to share and promote best practice.' The deadline for entries is Tuesday 3 March 2020, judging will be held in May with an awards event in July.

Full details: www.rfs.org.uk/awards/excellence-in-forestry-2020

CAMPAIGN FOR A THOUSAND HUTS

Following a change in Scottish Planning Policy, there is a revival in Scottish hutting. However, building a simple, low-impact hut in the woods is still not straightforward.

Karen Grant, of Reforesting Scotland's Campaign for a thousand huts writes, 'We believe that a culture of recreational hut use, similar to that enjoyed in many countries across Europe, could benefit people greatly. Hut life brings people closer to nature. It cultivates practical skills in low carbon living, and the physical and mental health benefits are clear.'

'This spring we'll be hosting a Hutter's Rally for around 200 participants in Dundee to address the issue head-on, tackling big barriers such as access to land, as well as the challenges of developing a hutter's group and building a hut, or starting a site with several huts. The event will include a Hutter's Trade Fair, where participants can access products, services, knowledge and contacts to help them achieve their dream of a hut



in the wood. There will be keynote speakers, plus a panel taking questions and answers on how to set up a hut site. The afternoon will be filled with a choice of sessions on everything from hut construction to planning permission and negotiating leases.'

A new online Resource Hub will be launched as a one-stop-shop for potential hutter's, hut builders and hut site developers to find all they need for new hutting opportunities.

The Hutter's Rally will take place on 8 February 2020. To receive a notification when tickets go on sale, email huts@reforestingscotland.org, or check www.thousandhuts.org

VIEW THROUGH THE TREES

JULIA GOODFELLOW-SMITH exerts tough love; with a management plan in place, she begins felling trees to improve the life and biodiversity of Garland Wood.

The time has come. We love our woodland and our trees. And yet, we've started to cut them down.

This autumn, we celebrated our tenth wedding anniversary in our woodland. Our friend, an opera singer, sang to the trees and we renewed our vows surrounded by family and friends. Now it is time for some tough love, to extend the life of the woodland by doing something that we both hate the thought of – felling some of the trees.

We have spent two years reflecting on the best course of action, taken advice and written a management plan, now approved by the Forestry Commission.

I learnt about grading trees on a Royal Forestry Society (RFS) course, and Mike has re-done his chainsaw certificate – both necessities for us to be confident that we are doing the right thing in the right way.

Ring-barking for biodiversity

At the suggestion of our RFS mentor, we won't fell the trees with holes in them. Instead, we will ring-bark them so that they provide shelter and sustenance to woodland wildlife as they slowly decay.

We will hire a professional with good insurance to fell the tricky trees that could damage our neighbour's property as they fall, but we don't want contractors to do all the work. Our woodland is precious to us, and we know that we will take care of it better than anyone else. Now that Mike is more skilled at felling, we have decided to take out the other trees ourselves.

And so, the work began.

I stood well back. The peace of the woodland was



shattered as the chainsaw ripped through the beautiful Scots pine. Almost imperceptibly, the tree began to fall. As it gained momentum, Mike stepped away, watching carefully, the chainsaw now quiet.

Controlled felling

I expected the tree to crash to the ground with an almighty thud, but it didn't. It had hardly started falling when it stopped, balanced on the branches of another. Our woodland is seriously overcrowded, so I shouldn't have been surprised.

Mike calmly looked at the tree from different angles, contemplating what to do next.

With the careful use of wedges, precise cutting and something that looks like a medieval torture instrument to grab and roll the tree (a felling bar), it fell to the ground, completely under

control. None of the other trees suffered any damage in the process.

There was a crash as smaller branches splintered on impact with the woodland floor, but the sound that stood out was the crescendo of leaves and pine needles as they brushed past each other and vibrated on landing – and then abruptly stopped. Once again, the woodland was peaceful.

This is now how we will spend our winter weekends – Mike wielding the chainsaw, with me moving and stacking the timber and processing the brash into piles and dead-hedges. This seems like the ideal way to spend winter weekends to me – relaxing my mind, exercising my body and protecting the future of Garland Wood. What a perfect combination!

GET TRAINED

WOODLAND WORKSHOPS



Photo courtesy of Lantra.

Learning as you go or formal training? Hands-on training experience or watching YouTube from the comfort of your sofa? We discussed the merits of woodland courses and workshops with owners and tutors.

You can learn pretty much anything from the internet, which might seem to reinforce the slightly jaded view that there is nothing new under the sun. However, for those interested in the outdoors or traditional crafts, there is no substitute for practical experience, for being able to feel the rough grain of the wood, hear the throaty roar of the chainsaw and smell the aroma of freshly-cut pine.

While internet resources are free, workshops and courses delivered by trained professionals cost money, although when it comes to teaching the safe operation of powerful cutting equipment, it is surely not a time for penny-pinching.

A Woodlands.co.uk survey, **What do owners do with their woods?** showed that 74% of woodland owners

own a chainsaw; most were self-taught, using books, periodicals and the internet for their initial guidance. Slightly less reassuring is the statistic that only 20% of those chainsaw owners had undertaken formal training.

Other subjects such as woodland crafts, coppice training, tool maintenance, first aid, charcoal-making, willow-weaving, small mammal ecology, butterfly and bird ID, tree and plant ID all benefit from practical training, too.

Alexander Pope's aphorism, 'a little learning is a dangerous thing', is all too true when it comes to the operation of chainsaws. Horror stories about injuries are common and it is sensible to gain an understanding of the risks involved, the correct protective clothing and, of course, instruction in how to use one safely.

TRAINING COURSE: chainsaw maintenance, cross-cutting, felling and processing of trees up to 380mm

MARTIN SEVERS, recently retired and a new woodland owner, finally had the time to sign up to a comprehensive six-day Lantra course. This is his verdict.

As a 62-year-old recently retired professor of medicine and new-ish owner of a wood of about 7 acres, I am what Roy Keane would describe as a member of the 'prawn sandwich brigade' or Will Carling would describe as an 'old fart'. This course, run by Arbor-Venture Training in Hampshire, comprised five days of teaching and one day of assessment.

Day 1

We tackled the legal and regulatory framework, followed by chainsaw maintenance. As we moved through the legal details, Dan picked salient topics relevant to working in woodland both to highlight something, and also to drill the point home. The afternoon focused on chainsaw maintenance, with the pattern of sound theory supported by practical reality and experiential insight.

Day 2

This started with a short burst of additional theory, including HSE Regulations, then it was outside to start the practical reality of safe and effective cross-cutting. Risk assessment work suddenly became very real. We learned step cuts on trees less than 200mm with the associated voice of reason: 'if you cannot carry it out do not do the step cut!'

Day 3

We received our second Lantra workbook and started to learn about the theory of standard felling cuts in the classroom, which was followed by an immediate return to the wood, where we could practise sink cuts. For felling cuts, we followed the routine of 'see one, do one.'

Dan demonstrated the correct method, then he watched while the

student did a supervised cut. Next, the student performed a solo fell with more distant supervision. I was especially jealous of the way Dan's felled trees wafted to the floor, with the top-most leaf gently stroking his distance and direction marker stick.

Snedding, (or branch removal) and buttress management were also covered, as well as how to manage a hung-up tree using the 'roll-out technique' – a little extra which was encountered in an unscheduled 'teaching opportunity'.

Day 4

Straight to the wood with an immediate test on what our risk assessment included to mitigate any harm by injury or illness. We were taught and practised the cuts for forward and backward leaning trees and had to undertake serious delimiting. By the afternoon we were tired and mistakes were creeping in. Our tutor had predicted this and was very vigilant. We returned to base for some chain-sharpening, then home ready for the last day of teaching.

Day 5

Practice makes perfect, so practice was the order of the day. We also learned the Danish or Pie cut and had another learning opportunity, using the winch. We focused on small things to improve customer satisfaction and attention to detail: sound stacking of brash, logs easily accessible from the ride, stumps clean and as low to the ground as possible. Nerves were creeping in; did we know enough for Monday's assessment?

Day 6: Assessment day

Assessor Josephine Hedger was warm, calm, clear, but not officious.



During the morning she checked our theoretical grasp and grip, along with our practical skills in chainsaw maintenance. The afternoon was about the practical cuts, but it was also about ensuring we could work safely under pressure. She made us deal with a hung-up tree soundly and safely. Her interventions tested the student's rationale, she was sensible with her advice and observations and always watching! Her feedback was pertinent, delivered in a humane way with education at its heart and safety paramount both for the student, their fellow workers and third parties.

Result

I now have two NVQ level 2 awards (phew!), I was absolutely shattered physically and mentally at the end of the course and assessment, but was elated, relieved and grateful for the opportunity to attend this course. My personal journey was one from unconscious incompetence ('What is there to know that you cannot learn off YouTube?') to a mixture of conscious competence in the area of the course, but much more importantly, I am now consciously incompetent ('I am clear what I do not know') over a range of felling challenges about which I know I need help. Seriously, I cannot find fault with this course, which was first rate.

Arbor Venture Training is based in the New Forest, Hampshire.
www.arborventure.co.uk



Photo courtesy of Lantra.

Traditional training

For those who prefer less noisy woodland tasks, there are courses available in every aspect of woodland activity, from bushcraft to basket weaving, via coppicing, chair-making, hurdle-making, trug-making, foraging, and wildlife conservation work.

Phil Hopkinson has been running coppice workshops at **Malvern Coppice** in Worcestershire for 15 years. He believes that hands-on experience cannot be bettered.

'The most valuable things that people get to understand is how much can be done in a given day by one person or a group of people as we coppice a small area from start to finish over the duration of a course. They can then translate this experience into the management of their own wood.'

'By the end of the course they understand the working methods and its reasoning. None of this can really be gained by looking at YouTube clips. They also get to enjoy time in a native woodland with like-minded people.'

In contrast to the more formal Lantra courses, workshops like this are more relaxed, while still being incredibly useful. One owner said, 'It's the perfect means to wind down. I will be booking my second visit for some one-to-one tuition as soon as I can.'



Photo courtesy of Phil Hopkinson.

USEFUL LINKS

LANTRA's website explains their qualifications and includes a postcode-based course provider search option
www.lantra.co.uk

Royal Forestry Society

The RFS offer both regional and national workshops to support owners in woodland management.

Small Woods Association

Runs courses in many traditional woodland skills and chainsaw training at their base near Telford.

Small Woodland Owners' Group

Course list searchable by course or location, with feedback from owners.

Centre for Alternative Technology

Based in north Wales CAT provides course on many aspects of sustainable living, including woodland management.

Woodland Skills Centre

Courses in traditional crafts, bushcraft and more, Denbigh, north Wales.

Malvern Coppicing

Traditional skills taught in a Worcestershire woodland.

EXTRACTING TIMBER USING A PORTABLE SAWMILL

RICHARD HARE explores the different options of harvesting timber in small woodlands, without resorting to the use of heavy moving and lifting equipment. Chainsaw milling systems are both portable and cost-effective.



Setting up a swing arm chainsaw mill.

Forestry can sometimes look like quite a destructive process. Felling on a large scale will often leave a site looking harsh and barren, scarred by the ruts and compaction left by the movements of huge machines. Even the immediate effects of coppicing can look fairly damaging, but of course this is short-lived and come the spring, the life and vitality of a woodland will return in abundance.

The harsh realities of the economics behind small-scale forestry mean that it is difficult to make a living from the time-honoured coppice cycle, which is one reason why so many British woodlands have fallen dark and derelict. They are often an under-valued and under-used resource, their products superseded by cheap plastic replacements in a global economy.

Restoring these dark and derelict woodlands can be a real labour of love, but in amongst the fallen debris and tangled

over-stood stools, there are often some trees of value which are worth milling either for personal use or to sell on. The big problem, of course, is getting to them and extracting them without incurring the expense of heavy machinery and the damage it can cause.

Horse-logging is one solution, although it is not particularly cheap and not without some of the compaction problems. However, for a modest investment, smaller, lightweight, milling systems can increase the viability of this kind of job by taking the mill to the tree instead of the tree to the mill. It works well in certain circumstances and can return some cash flow into your business. Smaller operations cannot hope to compete with the large-scale sawmills, but their big advantage is that these mills can be dismantled and carried into the wood by one or two people without causing any damage to the woodland floor.



Logosol chainsaw mill.

Chainsaw mills

One of the simplest methods is to adapt your chainsaw to cut in a straight line along the grain of a log, known as a 'ripping' cut. Chainsaw mills use a fairly standard, but powerful chainsaw to achieve this. They can vary in their sophistication, but in essence you have a chainsaw held in some kind of jig or clamp which runs along a straight edge. The bar and chain transfers this straight edge to the log as it cuts. It is sensible to purchase a bespoke ripping chain which has a much lower cutter angle. Alternatively, you can regrind your chain down to 10 degrees. There are quite a few models to choose from and many systems include benches and little pulleys to add to the system to make things easier.

The Logosol version above right has a bespoke beam to run the saw and jig along, a homemade bench and some spiked dogs which grip the log steady. The jig can be adjusted up or down with a fairly accurate calibration system to produce different sized boards or beams.

The Alaskan Mill below holds the nose of the bar as well, and can run along any straight edge you might have. Most people find an aluminium ladder does the job. I've found it to be a very accurate way of producing wider slabs or boards.

You can also buy a nose guide which will put a straight edge on the boards, or in this case, a slight curve for the wind braces on a timber frame.

Cutting with the grain is hard work on the saw and it really

Alaskan Mill portable milling system.



needs to be meticulously sharpened and well maintained. I have a 5ft (160cm) bar and chain for cutting oak slabs up to about 40 in (100cm), which has something like 172 cutters, all of which need to be razor sharp and exactly the same length. It can be a bit daunting if it needs re-sharpening after just two or three cuts, so it might be worth investing in a mechanical sharpener.

The Granberg 12-volt precision grinder, for example, will maintain the cutters at the same angle and size, although it still takes some time to sharpen. Importantly, it reduces the stress on both saw and operator.

Chainsaw mills – the pros

- Convenient: one person can walk into the wood and set it up alone
- Lightweight and can be set up in most awkward sites
- Good for milling occasional wind blown or small orders of bespoke high value timber
- Low initial investment. However, a fairly powerful saw is needed, depending on the size of timber you want to mill.

Cons

- Cutting can be tediously slow, as is the sharpening process
- A lot of waste: the wider the saw cut (kerf) the more waste is produced. A .404 chain will displace over 10mm of sawdust per cut in the kerf.





Above: swing arm mill, powered by a large chainsaw.



Above: rolling an oak butt off the stump and onto bearers with a hand winch ready for milling. The butt can also be skidded on to bearers by attaching the strop to the bottom of the log. This means you can get it into the most efficient orientation for milling. Take extreme care and carefully plan each move using chocks and wedges.

Swing arm mills

Not quite as portable as the chainsaw mills, swing arm mills are gaining in popularity. They can still be dismantled and walked into a wood, and are a much faster and a more efficient way of producing dimensional timber.

The model above is powered by a large chainsaw which drives a circular saw blade instead of a chain. The whole carriage on which it runs is able to 'swing' through 90 degrees, so it can cut in both horizontal and vertical planes to produce boards or beams straight off the tree.

Set-up time is considerably longer for these machines and it is therefore more efficient to concentrate on milling up larger trees in situ.

Logs under 16in. diameter which can be moved in a logging arch are still worth processing, and with a little help from gravity, can usually be manoeuvred onto the mill.

Bigger trees require more work to manoeuvre them off the stump and turning them for the best orientation before building the mill around it.

Swing-arm mills: the pros

- Convenient: two people can walk it into the wood
- Quite lightweight, although there is a limit to how far it can feasibly be carried

- Good for a wide size range of saw logs
- Produces accurate dimensional timber
- With a chainsaw version as the power source, it can also be used with an Alaskan Mill set-up
- The circular saw has a smaller kerf than the chainsaw.

Cons

- Expensive outlay
- Set-up time – the choice of trees needs to be factored in for maximum efficiency
- Similarly, the work area is limited to how far from your truck/trailer you are prepared to carry it.

Overall, these two different systems both have their place, but a lot will depend on what kind of wood you have as to whether or not it is worth investing in one or both of them.

For me, as a professional woodland manager, it works well to use both systems. It is a fine line and occasional milling is not going to make you a millionaire. However, if you consider the fact that you are really doing two jobs – selling high value timber and restoring and managing the woodland in the most sensitive and sustainable way possible – then it is totally worthwhile and a very satisfying process.

MORE INFORMATION

Logosol www.logosol.co.uk

Alaskan Mill www.alaskanmill.co.uk

Lucas Mill www.lucasmill.com

Keeper's Coppicing

richard@keeperscoppicing.co.uk

PHOTOGRAPHING THE WOODS AND THE TREES



Award-winning photographer **BETH MERCER** trained at the London School of Photography and is a member of the Guild of Photographers. She shares the secrets of how to capture great photographs of your woodland.

I'm really lucky to live in Sussex, one of the most heavily wooded counties in England. I've got easy access to many ancient woodlands and the vast area of heathland and woods of Ashdown Forest. Walking in the woods with my dog is a wonderful part of my everyday life and I've got to know my local ones well. I know where the flowers and fungi are, where I can hear woodpeckers and owls and where to go for the misty sunrises and to catch the ethereal rays coming through the trees.

Talking about photography doesn't come as naturally to

me as taking the photos themselves, as I think things become instinctual and I don't really think about the technicalities of what I'm doing. I heard an interview with the actor David Suchet recently in which he talked about his photography. A gifted amateur, he doesn't confine himself to any one genre but instead takes photos of whatever he sees that makes him think 'I love that'. And I realised that this is me!

I am moved to take photos by a love for what I see and the desire to somehow capture and portray its essence. The best lens you have is definitely your eye.

“

*The best lens you have
is definitely your eye.*

”



Having said this, here are some basic tips which will help you capture memorable woodland shots.

1. GET TO KNOW YOUR WOODLAND

Spend time there, explore it and enjoy it! Discover the areas off the beaten path and see what happens to it in different weather conditions, times of day and seasons.

2. USE THE LIGHT

Often the best time of day is the golden hour; the hour or so around dawn and before sunset when the light is magical. The morning light can be so beautiful as rays come through the trees and you can play around with capturing them clearly. Sometimes it's also a little misty and you can create the sun star effect if you position yourself so that you can see the sun peek out from behind a tree.

3. DON'T JUST STICK TO THE 'GOLDEN HOUR'

Days with high grey cloud can be fantastic for capturing the colour of the woodland, especially in autumn. Try photographing the gorgeous contrast between the bright green foliage and blue skies on sunny summer days. Even miserable rainy weather can be useful, to create moody atmospheric shots, possibly in black and white.

4. EXPLORE DIFFERENT ANGLES AND SHAPES

Look up into the tree canopy or get close to tree trunks to add towering drama to the shot. Shoot pictures from a lower position and don't be afraid to lie on the ground to get the best shot. (That's another tip – wear old clothes!)

5. IF YOU HAVE A SLR CAMERA, USE DIFFERENT LENSES

A telephoto lens brings the background elements forward, fills the frame and compresses the scene.

A wide-angle lens can be great for shots



looking up at the trees, making the tree tops look further away and creating converging lines so it feels as though you are totally encircled by them.

Macro lenses are perfect for capturing the detail in woodlands. I love photographing the features of leaf litter, bark, insects, blossoms, flowers, mosses, leaves and fungi. Once you start looking at the woods on the small scale you discover so much more: worlds within worlds of beautiful life, shapes and forms and colour.

Macro lenses require more light, so you have to use a high ISO and learn

to play with the depth of field as a low F stop can mean that just one pinpoint of the picture is in focus. It creates the most amazing bokeh (the blurred out-of-focus points of light) which makes it fun looking for nice colour and foliage compositions to frame your subjects.

Beth's camera kit

Canon 5d Mk III body with
17-40mm L Series F4 wide angle lens
24-105mm L Series F4 lens
70-200mm L Series F4 lens
100mm Macro L Series F2.8 lens

BETH MERCER
PHOTOGRAPHY

BETH MERCER specialises in natural lifestyle portrait photography, branding, commercial and events photography. Contact her via her website: www.bethmercerphotography.co.uk

STATE OF NATURE

The *State of Nature* report was published in September 2019. It examines the pressures on the natural world in the UK and some of its conclusions make for depressing reading.

Produced by a partnership of more than 70 organisations involved in the recording, researching and conservation of nature in the UK and its Overseas Territories, the **State of Nature Report** provides an overview of how the natural world is faring. It draws on statistics from nearly 50 years of monitoring to assess how nature has changed, and whether this change is for better or worse. It also examines the pressures on the natural world and what measures are being taken by conservation and governmental bodies to counter them.

Daniel Hayhow, the lead author of the report said, *'We know more about the UK's wildlife than any other country on the planet, and what it is telling us should make us sit up and listen... Governments, conservation groups and individuals must continue to work together to help restore our land and sea for wildlife and people in a way that is both ambitious and inspiring for future generations.'*

The whole report can be read on the **National Biodiversity Network website**. Headlines include

- the abundance and distribution of the UK's species have, on average declined since 1970
- before 1970, centuries of pollution, persecution habitat loss and degradation had already depleted wildlife in Britain
- 41% of British species have decreased in abundance
- 15% of species are threatened with extinction such as the wild cat and the greater mouse-eared bat.

Pressures on the natural world are wearily familiar and include agricultural activity, notably the intensification of land management. Average UK temperatures have increased by nearly 1°C since 1980 and a warming climate is undoubtedly affecting the natural world. The needs of a growing population mean that



acres of wetlands, woodlands and farmland are lost to infrastructure and housing projects.

The total number of breeding birds fell by 44 million between 1967 and 2009 and farmland birds have declined more severely than those in any other habitat. Butterfly species have declined by 16% since 1976 and moths by 25% since 1970.

The good news

It is not all bad news. There is undoubtedly greater awareness of the threats to the natural world and as a result, conservation initiatives continue to grow and enjoy wide public support. Spending is up 24% since 2010, with a 46% increase in time donated by volunteers. Thanks to conservation efforts, some specialist species have recovered from very low numbers. Bitterns, corncrakes and the large blue butterfly have been saved by the dedicated efforts of conservation organisations and individuals.

But public sector spending on biodiversity as a percentage of GDP has declined 42% since a peak in 2008-2009, although total expenditure on international biodiversity has increased.

Woodlands

Woodland cover is steadily increasing, although perhaps not fast enough. Invasive pests and pathogens threaten native trees, while a lack of management, overgrazing by deer and nitrogen pollution all increase the pressure on woodland.

Woodland covers 13% of UK land, and while this is a huge improvement from the 5% cover a century ago, it is well below the European average of 37%. Ancient woodland accounts for just 2.4% of the UK. It has been eroded in the past by conversion to plantation forestry and faces ongoing threats from infrastructure and housing development.

Sadly, the expansion in woodland area is not matched by an increase in woodland species, and this seems to be down to a lack of suitable woodland management. Only 44% of British woodland is managed sustainably and improving this one statistic could have a huge effect on species decline.

Woodland butterflies are in long-term decline, as are certain specialist bird species such as the lesser spotted woodpecker and the willow tit. Specialist woodland species depend on woodlands over 80 years old, with a high level of structural diversity.

Bringing woodland back into management, perhaps by introducing a coppice cycle, or by thinning a dense wood, or by replanting with a mix of suitable species can help mitigate wildlife decline and improve biodiversity.

Although the report makes sobering reading, there are glimpses of optimism. Humankind has undoubtedly had an adverse effect on the natural world, but equally, changing habits and legislation around farming practises, emissions, and broader environmental policies are slowly restoring the equilibrium in places. Let's hope this work continues.

MEET THE MAKER



Fine art wood carver **GILES NEWMAN** uses simple tools to produce the most delicate and intricate designs. We asked him what inspires him and about the practical side of his craft.

How and when did you realise you wanted to be a wood carver?

Growing up in an area surrounded by woodlands I have always had an affinity with them, but through my adult life and an increasingly digital-focused career, I had slowly lost this connection. In 2015, at the age 36, I was working as a graphic designer for a software company and, finding the job increasingly soul-destroying, was frequently feeling a child-like urge to escape to the woods, especially the small woodland in the mountains of Snowdonia that my family had bought some 20 years earlier. And so I did, almost every weekend, as a way to mentally reset and to push away the



stresses of the working week.

During these short escapes I began whittling for fun using just the knife and axe that I had for working in the woods, and the plentiful supplies of naturally fallen timber that lay on the

woodland floor. It developed rapidly from roughly shaping wood into abstract forms, to the carving of basic implements like tent pegs, spatulas and eventually spoons. I was instantly fascinated by the process of carving spoons; taking a small branch that most would discard as firewood and shaping it into a functional and useful object using nothing but the most primitive of tools. It felt like magic and my urge to carve became insatiable. Before long, my hunger for woodcarving led me to start embellishing the pure functionality of my spoons with decorative elements inspired by the woodland environment.

I had begun to document my 'rewilding' journey on Instagram early on and I guess my story struck a chord with others. To my astonishment, the

number of followers of my account grew and grew, from nothing to nearly 10,000 within the first few months. At the same time, through the encouragement of friends, I nervously began to sell my spoon carvings online, initially just in the UK but, noticing the growing interest elsewhere, I was soon shipping them around the world. It wasn't really until this time that I dared to dream of turning my back on my everyday life and of becoming a wood carver.

Almost exactly a year after I had first picked up a stick and started whittling, I resigned from my job and started my new life as a full-time wood carver.

How did your style develop?

The style of my early spoon carvings was very contrived, often attempting to form the wood into the conventional man-made shapes that I had been required to use in my design work and informed by my naive understanding of typical spoon design. This period was short lived as, by limiting myself to the use of only naturally fallen timber, I didn't have the luxury of selecting perfectly straight, knot-free material with which to carve. I realised that, as I couldn't change the nature of the material, I had to change my design approach to suit the characteristics of the individual piece of wood that I was working with; a realisation that led me to the organic and free-flowing style my work has today. As my understanding of wood as a medium has grown and my skills, techniques and methods improved through experience, so my style has become more intricate, delicate and refined.

Where do you look for your inspiration?

Thematically, my inspiration is almost always the natural world and is most often limited to the flora and fauna of the woods within which I work, as well as the nature of the environment near my home. I feel most drawn to carving subjects with which I have had personal contact, whether that contact be physical or visual. Being surrounded by such a wealth of natural subjects it is impossible not to be inspired and, through such personal immersion and contact with the subject matter I feel more able and free to artistically explore the animals and plants in my carvings without falling into abstraction.

Beyond the natural world, I'm also inspired by mythology and folklore which is often tied in with nature. Folkloric legends are a rich source of inspiration, especially the Norse and Celtic traditions which open up a world of creative opportunity.

Stylistically, my pieces have always been influenced by Art Nouveau and the nature-inspired Arts & Crafts movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Where do you source your wood?

Almost all of the wood that I use for my carving is naturally fallen and found either locally in Lancashire or in my family's woodland in North Wales. Although I forage for much of the wood, I also regularly receive donations of fallen timber from friends and individuals in the local community who know of my work and very kindly support me in this way.

I have in the past been given some wood reclaimed from old buildings and furniture which I do use occasionally though as it has usually been machine cut and processed in its past life which can present challenges when working with it. I definitely prefer to work with wood in its natural unprocessed state.

How do you start a piece?

All of my carvings start by splitting the log; until I have split the wood and seen the individual character of the piece I have



no idea what I will carve from it. My designs are inspired by the wood itself, its grain, its knots and its shape.

Your carving is incredibly intricate – do you ever produce larger pieces?

As all of my work is created using just a small carving knife and an axe. There are physical limits to the size of the pieces I can produce within reasonable timescales. The largest pieces I have created to date include a horse sculpture at around 30cm tall and a selection of spoons the winter solstice spoon and a lion spoon and each one took more than 600 hours to carve.

What's your favourite type of product to make and why?

I primarily produce art spoons and pendants/necklaces and I really couldn't choose my favourite between the two. Each offers me great creative freedom and opportunity whilst challenging me

with practical constraints around their functionality. Which one I choose to create is usually decided by the wood that I have available and my creative whim at the time. For me, it is less about the type of product I am creating and more about the pleasure of the carving process.

Tell us about your workspace and the tools you use

My pursuit of wood carving as both a hobby and a profession is founded on my love of being in the outdoors or more specifically in the woods. The woods are my favourite place to work and the tools I use are chosen primarily for their portability and the ability to use them without the need for electrical power or any other modern amenities. My four main tools are a small carving knife, a small forest axe, a hook (or crook) knife and a folding saw, all of which can be easily carried into and around the woods either on a belt or in a small backpack. With such limited equipment, not only can I

Giles Newman

FINE ART WOOD CARVING

GILES NEWMAN'S pieces are available for sale via his website,
www.gilesnewman.com

carve in the woods but when weather, daylight or time don't allow me this freedom, I carve in a small shelter in my garden and in a very small studio space in my home which is overflowing with books, old sketches and pieces of wood waiting to be carved.

What does the craft mean to you?

For me, wood carving is about connecting with wood as a natural material and allowing yourself to slow down and work so that carving becomes a meditative and mindful activity. When I teach wood carving, my aim isn't simply to train people to carve towards an end product, but rather to enjoy and lose themselves in the process. In every workshop and course that I run there is a point where, once the students have been taught about the wood, shown the knife techniques and set on their individual projects, the whole group naturally falls silent save for the sounds of their knives on the wood. It is at this point that they start to connect with the mindful nature of the craft and begin to experience the simple pleasure of slowing down and working with their hands.

What's your proudest achievement?

It is so hard to say what has been my proudest achievement because I am constantly trying to move forward with my work. I could be trite and say that every new piece I carve is my proudest achievement (or at least, that's what I aim for) but in reality it has been reaching a point with my craft and my art that has enabled me to escape the nine-to-five, office-bound existence in order to pursue my dreams. It has allowed me the freedom to be creative and to be out in the woods everyday. I think that will be quite hard for me to top as far as achievements go.



TEACHING TIMBER

With opportunities to learn craft skills using wood vanishing from our education system, **JOSEPH BRAY**, Head of Wood School at Sylva Foundation, reports on the launch of a new teaching programme designed to fill the gap.

Furniture craft courses in colleges and universities are fast disappearing and enrolment in GCSE Design Technology has plummeted over the past 20 years. The Sylva Wood School has developed a programme of courses which, it is hoped, will encourage young people to engage with woodworking in the future.

Having spent the past 14 years guiding students on the UK's foremost furniture craft programme at Rycotewood in Oxford, I joined Sylva last year to head up the new Wood School. My experiences in working with a wide range of students, as well as a recently completed Churchill Fellowship on 'The future of furniture craft education' will certainly help us take our plans forward. We have also recruited some inspirational guest tutors from across the country.

After significant interest from parents we have recently delivered pilot sessions with children aged seven to fourteen. We set up half-day courses for parents and children working together to make coat hooks or serving boards to take away. We hope that by making high quality products they will be inspired to engage with woodworking in the future. The workshops proved to be very successful and we look forward to running more during school holidays, as well as other sessions aimed at home-educated families.

The Wood School also plans to increase support for recent graduates and others who are starting out in their woodworking careers, supported by a business development programme and incubation opportunities.

We are currently developing a former grain store at the Sylva Wood Centre to offer further sheltered workshop opportunities for two start-ups and to provide a much

larger teaching space. This workshop will be furnished with industry-standard machinery, allowing us to deliver programmes of training that we hope will give students the skills to find employment within the furniture industry or stride out into the world of self-employment.

Our weekend courses have been very successful with overwhelmingly positive feedback. Steam-bending guru Charlie Whinney recently delivered a one-day course introducing students to the exciting world of bending wood. They were treated to a series of impressive demonstrations that demystified the process and the

day culminated in everyone making a vase or light shade to take away. We look forward to Charlie's next courses in March 2020 that will include some new maker-sessions perfect for beginners – these half day classes will guide participants to make timeless creations.

We are pleased that we will be joined again by expert green-woodworker Peter Wood, spoon-carver Martin Damen and renowned boat-builder Colin Henwood. Students leave these courses with hand-crafted stools, carefully carved spoons and beautifully shaped paddles respectively, as well as an enjoyable experience while learning new skills. All these short courses are delivered in our well-equipped Teaching Barn, a recent addition to the Sylva Wood Centre.

To learn more, book a course, or purchase a voucher visit our website at sylva.org.uk/courses.





Forest of Bialowieza, Poland (Jacek Karczmaz /Wiki)

There isn't much that **PROFESSOR JULIAN EVANS** doesn't know about silviculture. He shares a few secrets about trees and British woodlands that may be less widely known.

1. There is no truly pristine woodland

No woodland or forest in Britain has wholly escaped human influence. Even our ancient woodlands are known as 'semi-natural' because although they may never have been cleared for agriculture, practices such as pollarding, coppicing, or running livestock through them will have occurred over the centuries. Their soils may be undisturbed and thus offer the rich seed bank that gives rise to such fabulous wildflower assemblages we associate with Ancient Semi-Natural Woodlands (ASNW), but as an ecosystem they have undoubtedly been disturbed in times past. The nearest truly untouched, primeval forest is the Forest of Bialowieza in Poland.

2. No London plane tree has yet died of natural causes

This claim was made by the late Alan Mitchell (author of the *Collins Guide to Trees of Britain and northern Europe*). The point he made is that the London plane tree only arose as a hybrid in the 18th century and has proved very long-lived and astonishingly tolerant of big city conditions and climates. It is the urban tree par

excellence, every bit the equal of the ginkgos of New York. And it seems true – you rarely find a London plane that has died of 'natural causes'; its biggest enemy is de-icing salt in winter. But that's lethal to most species.

3. Britain has some of the best collections of trees in the world

The superb botanic gardens and arboreta dotted around the British Isles are unrivalled in number for such a small country. In the 18th and 19th centuries, explorers, collectors and scientists criss-crossed the globe to bring back exotica. Many introductions failed, but a great many succeeded: the cedar of Lebanon arriving in 1630s, Douglas fir in 1820s and southern beeches in the early 1900s. Hundreds of tree species have been tried and our stately homes, parks and gardens bear witness to their success. A cornucopia of variety and interest, they are the legacy of the fashion to collect, as the nobility of earlier generations vied to acquire the most exotic specimens from around the world.

Not only do we benefit today from beautiful parks and gardens, but as alternatives to Norway spruce for Christmas trees, we enjoy Nordmann's and Caucasian firs

which generally don't shed their needles in our centrally heated homes.

4. Most home-grown timber comes from introduced species

Another legacy of the many great tree collections is that when afforestation began in earnest 100 years ago, the evidence was there for what to plant. Sitka spruce from western north America takes first place, but Norway spruce, Douglas fir, larch, and Corsican pine are introductions too. And, disease notwithstanding, all grow well in our climate. Our native species, with just three conifers (juniper, Scots pine, and yew) simply cannot furnish industry with the softwood timber it seeks.

5. Britain is the fifth windiest country in the world

Weather has to come into it (!) but it really is true that we are a windy country. Our island is on the western fringe of the great Eurasian land mass and thus in the path of the general atmospheric circulation of West to East. Of course, wind is often bad as trees blow down and something like 10 per cent of our annual harvest is from storm-flattened forest. The good news is that we can harvest the energy of wind with turbines to generate electricity and it is why we have invested more in this renewable technology than any other country.

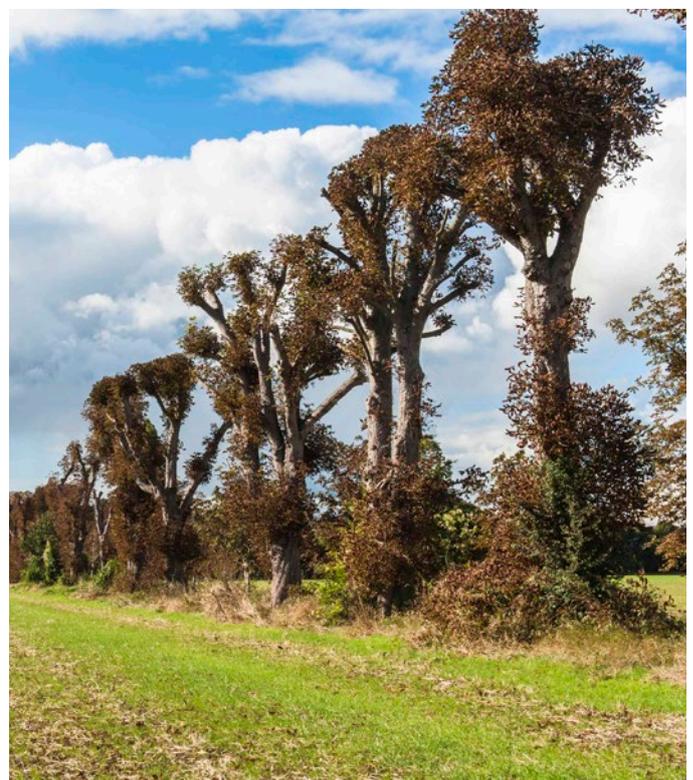
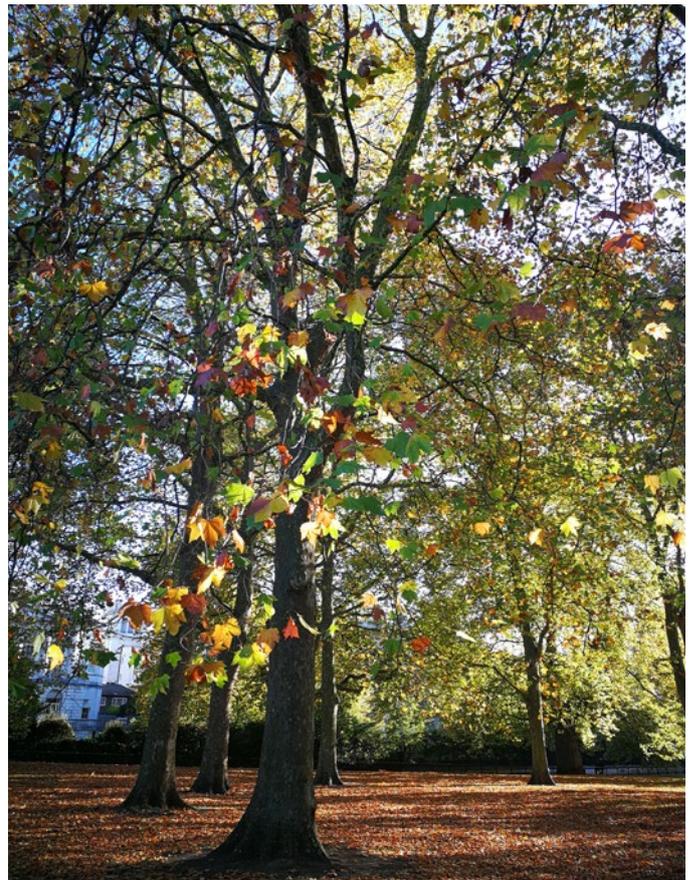
6. Tree guards are a British invention

Graham Tuley, a Forestry Commission researcher at Alice Holt in the late 1970s, invented tree shelters, the plastic tubes which protect newly planted trees through their early years. Today they are ubiquitous, but other researchers at the time, like me, initially poo-pooed his idea. However, Graham was right and the rest of us were wrong. If you want to plant a small group of trees use tree shelters: they provide protection from browsing animals, they show you where the tree is (invaluable when the site is smothered in weeds) and they allow you to do a little chemical weed control around the shelter without harming the principal beneficiary.

Tree shelters are now used in many countries and not just for growing trees, as even vineyards use a form of them.

7. Coppicing and pollarding were once the main method of tree management

In the past most woodlands were managed as coppices and most farm trees as pollards. Indeed, pollards in hedgerows would commonly number 20 per hectare. They provided the poor with fuel and sticks for their homes and holdings. The growing of what we are familiar with, what foresters call 'high forest', came to the fore in Victorian times partly because coal emerged as the fuel of choice.



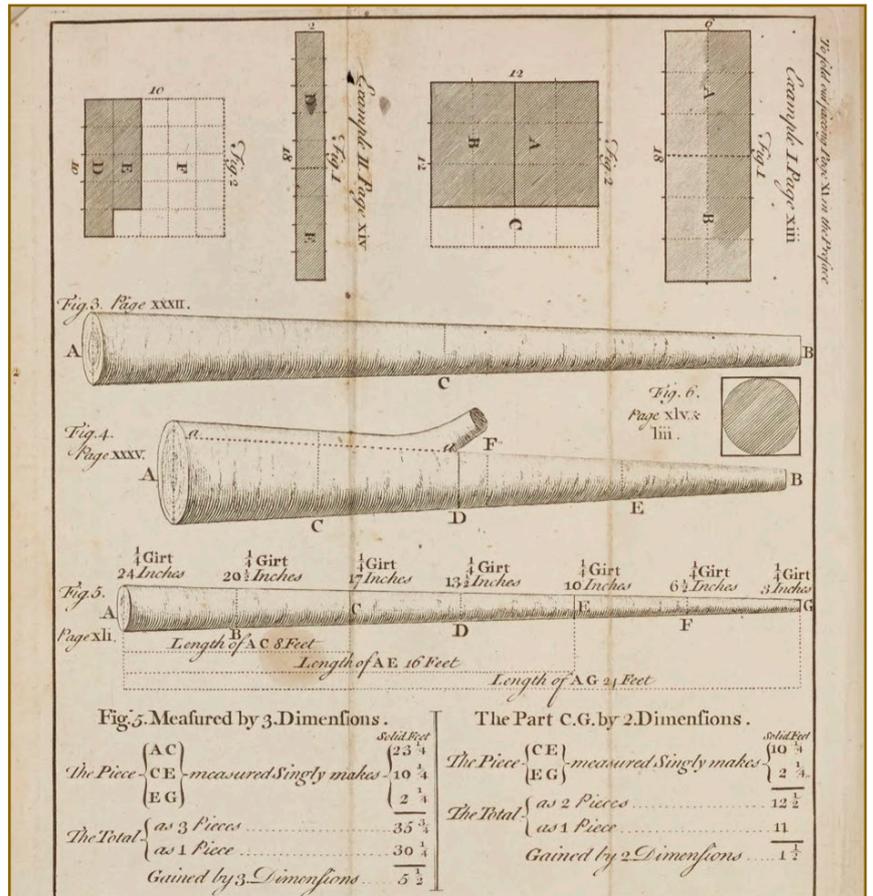
Top: tough London plane trees in St James's Park, London.

Above: first mentioned in Roman times, pollarding is an ancient technique to restrict growth, or to harvest leafy fodder or wooden poles. (Andy Fewings/Flickr)

8. Edwin Hoppus's legacy

When you sell quality hardwoods such as oak and ash, the trees are felled and logs readied for inspection for potential buyers. This lets the buyer look for defects and cracks etc., but they will also want to know the quantity. Timber is sold by volume not weight and the unit for hardwood logs 'hoppus feet'. A log will be so many 'hoppus', which measures the solid content and value of any piece of timber, stone, or other building material which is square or round.

It all arose in the 18th century when there was much fiddling and cheating when estimating the cubic contents of a log. In 1736 surveyor Edwin Hoppus devised a simple plan to avoid doubt. He decided to call pie 'π' equal to 4. Thus by measuring the log's diameter in quarter-girth inches and multiplying by length you get to cubic footage content of the bulk with the four sides squared off. The hoppus measurement is still used today.



9. Truffle-hunting

Our mouths water at the thought of black Perigord truffles from France or dining out on the delicacy in Italy, but today the English summer truffle is making comeback. While not quite in the first division, it is sought-after and truffle hunting days are available (for a price!) Beech woodland on chalky soils is where truffles may occur, but before rushing out to your nearest patch to seek your fortune, you will need a trained dog to sniff them out. The truffle is an underground fungus typically 5–10cm (2–4in) below the surface and a dog's super olfactory senses are vital to show you where to dig.

10. More ancient trees than the rest of northern Europe

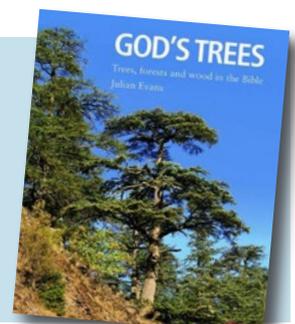
Britain may have a poor coverage of woodland at just 13% of land surface, but our silvicultural history has retained an exceptionally high number of veteran and ancient trees. We celebrate them as fabulous for wildlife, and rightly do so. There are a mighty 3,400 ancient oaks in Britain, compared to just 2,000 in the whole of Europe.



Above: Explanatory diagrams from Hoppus's Measurer: A Book of Early Wood Frame Construction Tables & Guides for the Mathematically Disinclined, published in 1736.

Left: the 1,000-year-old Allerton Oak, voted Tree of the Year 2019, a fine example of a British veteran tree. (Jill Jennings/Woodland Trust)

JULIAN EVANS is the author of *God's Trees*, the first authoritative book to focus on trees, forests and wood in the Bible including how they were used in both practical and symbolic terms. Illustrated with over 200 images, it is available to purchase for £25 from Dayone Publications, www.dayone.co.uk 01568 613740



Chair maker and wood worker **ROB DUCKMANTON** learns the secrets behind making folding spoons.

MAKE A FOLDING SPOON
JANE MICKLEBOROUGH
 Crafty Little Press
 210 x 297mm 45 pages £12.20

Jane is one of the most experienced spoon carvers out there, having recently received the Wille Sundqvist and Bill Coperthwaite Slöyd Fellowship in recognition of her work researching the spoons she describes in her books. She is a regular at the annual UK gathering of spoon carvers, Spoonfest, and her courses there always fill very quickly. She is also very well respected amongst her peers. For the last few years she has meticulously researched the spoon-making history of Brittany, the region of France she lives in, which has led her to write this wonderfully presented book on the folding spoons of that area and how to make them.

Jane chose to lay the book out in a graphic novel style which looks fantastic and adds clarity. The illustrations and explanations are excellent, making what could be a tricky piece of craft accessible to everyone who has a basic understanding of the required tools.

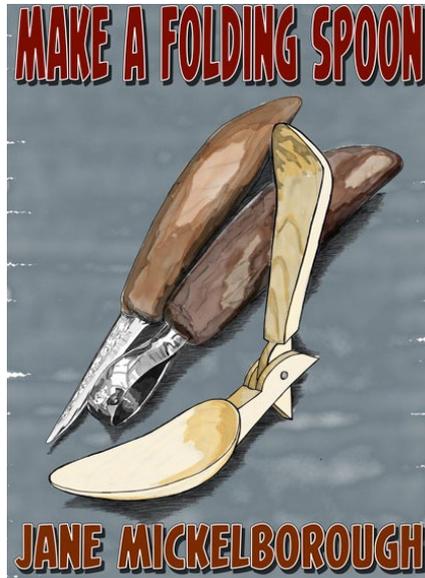
Each stage of the making process,

“

Through years of dedicated practice Jane has not just mastered the techniques of carving spoons but has spent many hundreds of hours researching this specific style of folding spoon found where she lives, in Brittany.

”

Barn the Spoon



the necessary tools and the wood, are clearly explained in a book which should be in the library of every spoon carver.

The book begins with a foreword by Barn the Spoon followed by Jane's introduction, in which she describes the evolution of the Breton party spoons that she has been researching. Then it takes you straight into the making of the spoons. The instructions are very clear, with illustrations to demonstrate every procedure.

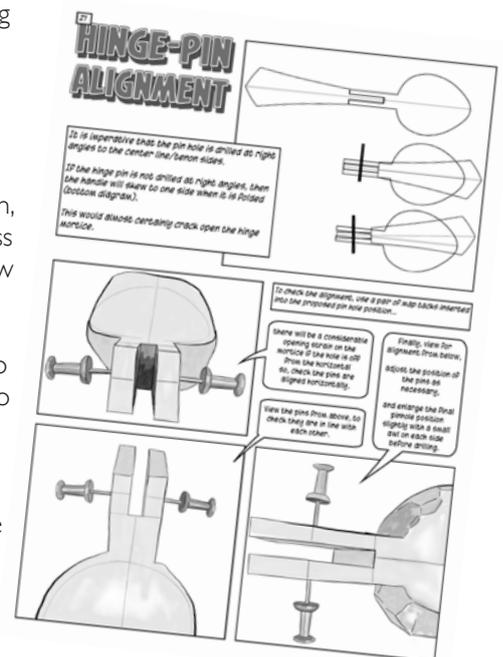
The trickiest part of making a folding spoon is getting the hinge to work well. This part is described very well, with tips on trouble-shooting any problems that may arise.

Having followed Jane's meticulous instructions and made a folding spoon, readers are taken through the process of designing a spoon and learning how to incorporate the hinge into your idea.

The final few pages are dedicated to actual-size templates for the reader to use during the making process.

This book really is an excellent addition to any craft person's library and I would recommend it to anyone who likes to carve or would like to learn to. It is about as comprehensive a guide to making an item as you will see. I would definitely recommend it.

BOOK REVIEW



SYMBOLS IN TREES

Taxus baccata or yews are sacred trees of death and life.

CLARE GIBSON delves into their symbolic properties.

What does the yew symbolise? Most people's response would probably be 'death', partly because the European yew (*Taxus baccata*) is so commonly seen in graveyards, and partly because all of its parts (apart from the arils, its berry-like fruits) are poisonous. Yet its ancient significance is the exact opposite to death, the yew having been long revered as a symbol of immortality. Not only that, but because the yew's needles are a source of taxanes, chemicals used to make docetaxel, or Taxotere, a chemotherapy drug, the yew may also be regarded as a life-saver. (The Pacific yew, *Taxus brevifolia*, provides the taxanes used in paclitaxel, or Taxol.)

Tree of life

There are many reasons why the yew symbolises eternal life. Perhaps the most obvious is its evergreen, needle-like leaves, which endure throughout the winter when leafless, deciduous trees appear dead. Another is the vibrant colour of its arils: bright red, the colour of lifeblood. Perhaps the most compelling explanation, however, is the slow-growing yew's extreme longevity – it has the potential to live for many hundreds of years, and a few extraordinary examples, such as the Fortingall yew in Perthshire, are believed to be thousands of years old. In addition, mature yews have a habit of sending out new shoots that gradually merge with the older wood, the contrasting combination of old – even decaying – and new growth symbolically suggesting death and rebirth. Furthermore, should the tips of yew branches come into prolonged contact with the ground, they may take root, creating new trees. All of these considerations contribute to the yew's symbolism as a tree of life.

Although documentary proof is lacking, it seems certain that yews were venerated in pre-Christian Europe. (That the Norse rune *eiwaz* and the Anglo-Saxon rune *eoh* both mean 'yew' attests to the tree's early European cultural importance.) The presence of yews in churchyards may be explained by early Christians' appropriation of the pagan sacred sites on which they grew, as well as by the tree's

apparent promise of immortality or, in Christian belief, resurrection after death.

Its associations with immortality, as well as its toxicity, may account for the protective qualities ascribed to the yew, especially in warding off evil influences, such as witchcraft. Enabling the dead to sleep in peace may therefore be another reason why yews were planted in graveyards, and why, in times past, yew twigs were often tucked into funeral shrouds, as described by Shakespeare in *Twelfth Night*: 'My shroud of white, stuck all with yew, / O! prepare it'. (The may have been to safeguard the dear departed's spirit and ensure eternal rest.) In some parts of

Britain, when a building's completion is marked with a topping-out ceremony, a yew tree may still be positioned on a high point to appease or avert malign forces.

The hardness and water-resistant quality of its wood – once described as 'iron wood' – meant that yew was regarded as a symbol of strength. Iron-hard yew was used to make tools for hunting and war. The Palaeolithic spear discovered in Lehringen, Germany, for example, was crafted from yew, as was the 'Clacton spear', which is estimated to be 420,000 years old.

Millennia later, when longbows became the weapon of choice on the battlefield, the best were made from yew wood.

Like many evergreens, the yew had special symbolic significance on the winter solstice, or Midwinter (22 December this year).

Writing to his wife in 1799, the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge reported that on Christmas Eve, in the German duchy of Mecklenburg-Strelitz: 'a great yew bough is fastened on the table at a little distance from the wall, a multitude of little tapers are fixed in the bough . . . and coloured paper etc. hangs and flutters from the twigs'. Prince Albert is often credited with introducing the Christmas tree to Britain in the 1840s, but after Charlotte of Mecklenburg-Strelitz married King George III in 1761, she brought first a yew branch, and then a yew tree, into the royal household to decorate at Christmas, arguably introducing Britain to its first Christmas tree.



The Fortingall yew, Perthshire, Scotland. The markers show the original extent of the trunk. (Photo courtesy Mogens Engelund/WikiCommons)

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(Photo courtesy Olia Gozha/Unsplash)