

Living Woods

No.58 WINTER 2020

MAGAZINE

**THE HEALING POWER
OF WOODLANDS**

**iNATURALIST
RECORDING WILDLIFE**

**COPPICING FOR BEGINNERS
FORESTRY COMMISSION SUPPORT
MAKING AXE HANDLES**

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As the entire country reflects on what has undoubtedly been a difficult year, Living Woods wishes all our readers a very merry Christmas and a much better year in 2021.

We have asked woodland businesses how they have dealt with the challenges of 2020 and are pleased to see how upbeat they are about the future. Nevertheless, if you're stuck for a present idea, why not book a training course or buy a gift token from a local woodland business?

Woodlands have proved a salvation for many people this year and one owner reflects on the tangible effects ownership has had on their family.

Winter is the time for woodland management and Caroline Gooch from the Forestry Commission explains how the FC can support owners, while Guy Lambourne explains how to start or revive a coppicing regime. Finally, we celebrate some of the unsung heroes of the woodland world, with the Woodlands Awards 2020.

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@Woodland News



FOREST LIVE 2021

Reasons to be cheerful: Forestry England has announced a fantastic line-up of Forest Live concerts for 2021. Artists include Jess Glynne, Keane, Rag'n'Bone Man, Doves and Madness.

Performance dates are

- Westonbirt Arboretum 10–13 June
- Cannock Chase Forest 10–13 June
- High Lodge, Thetford Forest 17–20 June
- Delamere Forest 18 June–20 June

To book tickets, visit the [Forestry England website](#).

An aerial view of a concert at Thetford Forest. (Courtesy Forestry England/Lee Blanchflower)

An extraordinary year for forestry

The latest UK Forest Market Report published by Tilhill Forestry and the land agents John Clegg indicates that investment in woodland is a growth area. Although the report relates to commercial plantations and investment by corporates, it also reflects good news for owners of smaller woodlands: essentially, the value of investment in woodland is rising, despite the vicissitudes of 2020.

The factors driving this growth are three-fold:

- Corporate social responsibility is increasingly manifested by institutions exploring how carbon offsetting via woodland creation can become part of their wider commitment to Environmental Social & Governance (ESG) in corporate planning.

- Uncertain prospects for other assets and investment markets make forestry and land appear as a good long-term investment.

- The government has a commitment to increasing woodland as part of their desire to decarbonise the economy.

As Sir William Worsley, the Chairman of the Forestry Commission, noted 'It is interesting to focus on the rapidly rising profile of woods and forests in the current social, political and environmental landscape.' This interest is 'in many ways a result of the importance of the tree in carbon sequestration and climate change and this has caught the public's imagination.'

After a small dip in the market in March, the demand for mixed woodlands outstripped supply by September. The report focuses on sales of larger plots, which may be repurposed as smaller plots for amenity ownership. The drivers for buoyant

woodland sales in this market are family tax planning and the prospect of owning a small piece of private woodland for weekend enjoyment.

Read the whole report here.



Planting in the Northumberland Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, near Wooler. (Courtesy Confor)



Greening Britain

Readers could be forgiven for confusing the many different initiatives currently emerging from the government regarding tree planting.

In November, the prime minister published his **Ten Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution**, which includes ambitious aspirations for 'Protecting and restoring our natural environment, planting 30,000 hectares of trees every year, whilst creating and retaining thousands of jobs.'

Chief Executive of Confor, Stuart Goodall, welcomed the plans, but noted that the prime minister's plans are hugely optimistic. Total planting for April-September 2020 was a miserable 738 hectares.

'Confor has calculated England needs to plant at least 7,500 hectares of new woodland each year if the UK is to meet its overall target. This is roughly 10 times the figure reported

by the Forestry Commission today, so the scale of the challenge is apparent for anyone to see.'

Meanwhile, the government's **England Tree Strategy** consultation closed in September. Woodland bodies regarded this initiative as an important opportunity to influence the future of tree planting and woodland management over the next decade. The Royal Forestry Society, Confor and the Institute of Chartered Foresters issued a joint response which outlined six key priorities to support Defra. They urged government to encourage woodland management as strongly as forest creation in order to make existing woodlands more productive and sustainable:

'To meet the climate and nature crises, the strategy must achieve a huge step-up in getting existing woodlands under active, sustainable management – not focus too much on woodland creation. There is great

potential in existing woodlands to be harnessed.'

Critically, these bodies urged joined-up thinking and a clear focus, noting, for example, that the Tree Strategy needs to work alongside other schemes such as the new **Environmental Land Management** initiative. This scheme is a key part of the government's post-Brexit plans for the agricultural sector and encompasses, according to The Guardian, 'the biggest farming shake-up in 50 years'.

'The £1.6bn subsidy farmers receive every year for simply owning or renting land will be phased out by 2028, with the funds used instead to pay them to restore wild habitats, create new woodlands, boost soils and cut pesticide use.'

Trees and woodlands are definitely having a moment. Let's hope that all these good intentions translate into workable actions.



Photo courtesy Annie Spratt/Unsplash

Calling themselves unlikely owners, this is the story of how one couple purchased a woodland for the sake of their family's mental health and discovered the healing power of the wood. The author of this article has asked to remain anonymous.

When we became an adoptive family nearly five years ago, we were sold the promise that whatever our son needed to support him to process and live with the traumatic experiences that every adopted child has been through, we would be able to access. The reality for many adoptive families, however, is that you are thrown headfirst into the deep end of living with a traumatised child with no support. The daily battle to get the services that you were promised has torn hundreds of families apart across our country. For some, this struggle has put children back into the care system to experience trauma and loss all over again, from which many never recover.

I cannot imagine how it feels to get to that point. I do, however, know how it feels to very nearly get to that point!

Our family was suffering badly. We were battling for in-

school support. We were fighting with children's services to get them to realise that therapy was needed. We were struggling within ourselves and with each other.

About three years ago we had to start accepting the fact that the promised support was not going to appear. The only thing we could guarantee was that if we carried on battling with the local authority, then the stress of it was going to break our family for good. Likewise, if we did nothing, the trauma in our home was going to destroy us.

With what little energy we had left, we tried to think out of the box. Could we pay for our son's therapy? We discovered that the cost of therapy on a weekly basis long term for a family not earning much above the national average was not feasible; in fact, it makes my eyes water just thinking about it.

So, we thought further out of the box. Desperate times call for desperate measures.



We bought a piece of woodland!

Believe it or not a mortgage on a piece of woodland is cheaper than therapy from a psychotherapist.

I had read a lot of research about the therapeutic value of woodlands. As a youth worker, I had seen first-hand how being in a natural space transformed young people's moods within a short space of time, allowing them to open up more than they ever could within four walls of the youth centre. With these thoughts in mind I persuaded my partner to take a punt at some 'alternative' healing.

We bought our woodland with our hearts in our throats. We were adding another mortgage onto an already tight budget. We are not from a background where owning a piece of land that does not pay its way financially is at all feasible. It was way out of our comfort zone.

What happened to our family after we bought the woodland, however, is just magical and worth the mortgage payment each month ten times over. The effect of having our own space in a woodland has been transformative and therapeutic for us all. Our woodland has become our family therapy, our individual therapy. It has become our lifeline, our saving grace and now the glue that helps hold us together in tough times.

'Why buy?', asked some people. Why not just go to the woods anywhere?

A home in the woods

If the woodland was not ours, our son wouldn't be able to make it his 'home'. We wouldn't have been able to

build the compost toilet that enables us to spend all day or weekend there. We need plenty of time there to allow ourselves to heal.

If the woodland was not ours our son wouldn't be able to feel comfortable enough to know that he can build a number of dens which he knows won't be destroyed, chopping off branches from fallen trees, creating his version of 'home'.

If the woodland wasn't ours, we wouldn't be able to create a harbour area which becomes our 'base' within our 'home'. We wouldn't be able to build a fireplace, over which we cook our food and keep warm.

If we couldn't do all of this, we couldn't make it our home. It takes a lot for a traumatised child to feel safe. It took us buying a woodland rather than visiting a woodland to do it for our son.

Sharing the woodland

One very wet February weekend another adoptive family contacted us, after a rough week. Adoptive families can experience toxic stress, chronic anxiety, and child-on-parent violence. It had been a tough week for both families with no support forthcoming from the local authority.

Despite the very wet and cold Cumbrian weather, our two families wearily donned our waterproofs and headed for our sanctuary.

We spent six hours in our woodland that day. We heard the children throughout, but only saw them a handful of



Spending time outdoors is immensely valuable for the mental health of everyone.

times, once for the casserole that we had cooked over the fire and once for a hot chocolate, courtesy of the kelly kettle. The rest of the time they were letting go of their anxious energy within the woods.

The adults sat by the fire for that rainy six hours. Sometimes we sat in weary, yet healing silence, coffee in hand. Most of the time we sat talking, off-loading our problems and stresses.

That evening we all went home to the best night's sleep we had had in weeks. Each child slept through the night and managed to enjoy a relatively calm evening. This is the therapeutic nature of the woodland that you cannot quantify. The therapy which happens between four walls with a psychotherapist cannot do the same in such a short space of time or as cheaply.

More recently, when lockdown eased enough for us to be able to drive places, we started to camp out in the woods and meet other families there. It is very easy to socially-distance in the woods. The children finally had the freedom they craved during lockdown, whilst also being absolutely safe.

The first weekend we spent in the woods was yet again transformative for our family. Just as we thought we knew what our sanctuary could offer, it offered more again. The longer you spend in the woods the more your psychology changes.

We got in the car to drive home on the Sunday and our son burst into tears. He was sobbing his heart out because he wanted to stay in the woods.

'Why can't we live in the woods, mam?'

'I feel so free in the woods, it's so lovely.'

'I don't feel anxious when I'm in the woods.'

'I feel safe when we are in the woods.'

Hearing your child verbalise these thoughts makes the struggle to pay the monthly payments well worth it!

As a trauma specialist, I understand the neuroscience behind my son's statements. I understand how the chemicals will be interacting to make all of that happen. I also understand how teaching children practical skills such as how to chop wood, how to saw branches, how to create their own dens or how to build fires, helps with their coordination, balance and reflexes. Many children who suffered abuse don't have the opportunity to develop these motor skills in the early stages of their lives. But that knowledge pales into insignificance besides the feeling of joy I feel every time we enter our wood. It is quite simply our sanctuary and as I see my son shed his anxieties and become the child he should always be, the science suddenly doesn't matter. We are experiencing it and 'it' is amazing.

I am hoping that after lockdown schools and educationalists see the value of woodlands for mental health and as an opportunity for teaching children so many different things.

Our small piece of woodland has been our family's saviour. It has knitted us together again and healed us. More widely, it would be great if society could start valuing our woodland space and to utilise it to help knit us together, to heal us after this COVID crisis.

The healing power of our country's woodlands is immeasurable. You cannot quantify it; you just need to feel it.

COPPICING: the practicalities

New woodland owners hear a great deal about coppicing. Is it a good idea? How difficult is it? What tools do you need? In the second part of his introduction to coppicing, Guy Lambourne offers practical advice and guidance on how to get started.

What to coppice

Few conifers coppice successfully, so I'm talking throughout about broadleaved trees. If your wood has areas where there are lots of trees with multiple stems that are perhaps up to 50 years old, growing from single stumps or stools, you can assume coppicing has been carried out there in the past and its reintroduction or continuation could be a sensible option. If the wood includes areas of fairly young (again up to 50 years) broadleaf plantation, coppicing might be a workable option.

How large an area?

For several reasons, coppicing needs scale. Firstly, those newly cut stools require direct sunlight to grow vigorously, and that means cutting a reasonable area to reduce the proportion of shady edges, especially when cutting within a larger woodland. Second, if you have deer locally (and you probably do) it's the edges that suffer the worst browsing – small areas have a relatively large proportion of edges. Third, there's not much coming out of a wood that's very valuable on its own. For anything like a commercial approach, you'll need a lot of whatever you produce. Your woodland could yield a huge range of woody excitement – don't discount bean poles, pea sticks, spars or besom brooms, for example (depending on the species of trees and their past

management). But for many readers, firewood logs might be the most likely product that would have a ready use both on site and in your home. With some planning, advertising and the right dry storage, it could bring in a little extra cash.

The area of woodland you need depends on a range of factors. There are no hard and fast rules, but consider the scale of your ambition, how big your wood is, what you want out of it and what species are present. The closer the trees are together and the shorter the rotation, the smaller the

area that can be seen as viable.

For the reasons given above, very small-scale coppicing is unlikely to be greatly successful. One domestic hearth probably won't need enough firewood to justify coppicing, but if you use a lot of logs and fancy selling logs on a small scale, a small wood could do the job. Species often grown for firewood – sweet chestnut, oak or hornbeam (and of course ash until about seven or eight years ago), will need longer to grow and therefore a larger area to make a complete rotation, unlike hazel which is cut every 7-10 years. A 20-year rotation needs 20 coupes if you want a supply every year. Forest Research has suggested 0.5 hectares (1.2 acres)¹ as a minimum for a coupe, so for a 20-year rotation, 10 hectares might be required. Oaks and Mills² suggest 0.25 hectares as a minimum and my experience suggests this is about right. Make your coupes as big and as square as possible.





Old ash and field maple stools coppiced after 21 years for firewood logs and charcoal.

Coupes and mapping

The word coppice comes from the French word *couper*, meaning to cut. Historically, coppice came to mean a patch of woodland that was cut on a rotation of anything between five and 35 years. Today, woodland owners and managers are advised to make a plan of their woodland – anything from a sketch to a fancier computer-generated map – to provide details of the areas to be cut and the species of the trees within it. If the wood has a management plan, that will provide a map of the total area within the wood to be coppiced and probably the detail of the coupes.

Walk around your wood and try to design the coupes on a map, ensuring they are as equal in area as possible. Each coupe will need ride access, preferably without having to pass through other coupes, and ideally a similar tree mix in them all. By making your coupes as square as possible, you'll not only give the trees a good chance, but it will be easier to realise your plans on the ground. Mark the corners with something fairly permanent, such as large stakes, painted rocks or by spraying marker trees, and don't fret if it all doesn't go exactly to plan. It will evolve over the years and some coupes might expand or contract depending on the trees within them or the time you have available each winter.

Tools, training and safety

Don't underestimate the scale of time and effort required for coppicing: it is very labour-intensive and can become an enjoyable monster of a hobby. I would suggest spending time with someone who is working coppice before you do anything. This might be an eye-opener. As well as your time and muscle power, there is a fair amount of equipment and expertise needed. Chainsaws are noisy and smelly, but for anything other than a tiny scale, are fairly essential.

Good quality tools cost – buy the best you can afford and if you plan to use a chainsaw you must have completed the right training and acquire the appropriate personal protective equipment. And all that costs too. With or without a chainsaw you will need a few hand tools, such as a bow saw, loppers, an axe and a billhook, but you must also have a hard hat, safety boots and lots of strong gloves. If you need it, get some training in the use and maintenance of hand tools – it can look deceptively easy. A sharp tool used effectively will save an awful lot of time and strain, not to mention the potential for accidents.

Even on the smallest of scales, starting coppicing or indeed any work in a wood, brings you into the world of forestry and that can be a dangerous place. Make sure you and others involved are working safely. A site and activity risk assessment is essential for anything commercial and, at the very least, you should devise an emergency plan. First aid training and a well-stocked first aid kit are essential too.

Challenges to coppicing

Coppicing is not without its challenges. Increasing deer numbers, particularly muntjac and fallow, with no natural predators, can quickly destroy the young, tender growth in a coppice plot. At best this produces poor quality regrowth but at worse, stools will die. There is an ever-increasing list of tree pests and diseases in the UK including some, such as ash dieback and *Phytophthora*, which threaten important coppice species. Coppicing is a long-term commitment and, in common with pretty much all aspects of forestry, requires a faith in the future and a vision of continuity. It can be difficult for coppice workers to secure access and cutting rights from woodland owners,



over the required long time frames. And that's where members of SWOG and the National Coppice Federation might be able to scratch each others' backs.

Further advice and help

Any owner of a woodland should consider writing a woodland management plan, which spells out ten years' management and if the wood is over three hectares, can be developed in partnership with Forestry England (FE). If developed with FE, it also includes the felling licence you probably require for felling anything other than a small volume of wood. Contact your local FE office to find out more.

If you are keen to introduce or continue a coppice rotation in your woodland, but lack the time, fitness or expertise, contact your local NCFed group representative for advice. There is no standard form or financial arrangement for working with group members – perhaps woodlands are too variable for this to be possible – but there is a huge amount of expertise and experience among the members. There might be one just around the corner who would be able to offer advice or perhaps work with or for you in exchange for money, wood or other non-financial benefits.

References

1. Harmer, R.; *Restoration of Neglected Hazel Coppice*, pub. Forest Research, 2004

2. Oaks, R. & Mills E. *Coppicing & Coppice Crafts, a Comprehensive Guide*, Crowood, 2013

RESOURCES

Find your local NCFed group at ncfed.org.uk/about/groups

Or email enquiries@ncfed.org.uk

GUY LAMBOURNE chairs the East Anglian Coppice Network. He and his partner Jane run a small coppicing and farming business in Bedfordshire, selling hazel and willow products. Jane is also a storyteller and environmental education practitioner
wassledine.co.uk

Above: Trimming hazel hedge stakes to length in a 20 year old hazel plantation. Hedge binders to the right and pea sticks in bundles in the background.

Below: The tools of the trade: chainsaw, hand axe and billhook. Protective headgear and ear defenders are just a small part of the protective gear needed when operating a chainsaw.



What has the Forestry Commission ever done for us?



Protect, improve and expand: Forestry Commission Local Partnerships Advisor
CAROLINE GOOCH explains how the Forestry Commission can help woodland owners.

As a woodland owner, or someone interested in woodlands, you've probably heard of the Forestry Commission. If you're anything like I was two years ago, you're aware that the Forestry Commission is a government body which oversees woodlands . . . and that could be it. I've worked in the conservation and land management sector for 11 years, but prior to joining the Commission in 2019, the workings of the FC were largely a mystery. I knew it owned large amounts of woodland, most of which appeared, in the north-west at least, to be commercial conifer crops. I'd visited Grizedale Forest in south Cumbria a few times and enjoyed walking the paths and hunting down the sculptures.

It was only when I relocated south and took a job with the FC as a Woodland Officer, that my eyes were

really opened to the work the Forestry Commission does. Despite having a chainsaw licence and having felled innumerable silver birch as habitat improvement for protected raised bogs, incredibly I'd never heard of a felling licence, or the Forestry Act of 1967. Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) regulations were a dim and distant memory from university, and the only tree pest I was aware of was Oak Processionary Moth, when I had to write a risk assessment about them for a previous employer.

I should perhaps, at this point, note the difference between the Forestry Commission and Forestry England. While they are still both part of the DEFRA family, and still work closely together, they are now distinct departments. Forestry England oversees the management

Protect, Improve and Expand

The Forestry Commission follows three guiding principles for woodlands.

Protect Legislation guides the first principle. The Forestry Act and EIA (Forestry) Regulations help the FC to prevent woodland loss, with powers to prosecute those who ignore or abuse the rules. Under the 2008 Planning Act, the FC is a statutory consultee on all Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs), and under the Town and Country

Planning Act 1947, is a non-statutory consultee for all developments on, adjacent to, or within 500 metres of ancient woodland. The Plant Health department works to prevent the importation and spread of pests and diseases harmful to woodland.

Improve The assessing and granting of felling licences and woodland management plans, advising woodland owners, and promoting and processing grant schemes, all under the guidelines of the UK Forestry Standard (UKFS).

Expand The Forestry Commission is committed to the responsible planting of new, multi-functional woodlands in England. While the main objectives for a landowner planting trees may differ (it could be for home-grown, sustainable, productive timber; biodiversity; water and flood management, or recreation and public access), the overall principles of the UKFS and a wide array of assessments and consultations ensure other valuable habitats or cultural interests are not lost.

of the nation's forests, including the forestry, recreation, and public access. The Forestry Commission continues to develop woodland policy, oversee woodland grant schemes, woodland creation, tree health, and advice to, and liaison with, the forestry, conservation and landowner sectors.

Help for woodland owners

So how can the FC help the small woodland owner? Perhaps our most valuable assets are our Woodland Officers. Supported of course by our hardworking admin hubs, our Woodland Officers are there to offer site visits, advice and guidance on how you can best manage your woodland to achieve your aims. Should you require a felling licence, your local Woodland Officer can guide you through the process of what information you will need to provide, if there will be restocking requirements, and advice on suitable species to replant, especially in the

light of pests and diseases such as ash dieback. If your woodland is covered by a Tree Preservation Order, the FC will consult with your local authority on your behalf when applying for a felling licence. They will also ensure your small woodland management plan is UKFS-compliant, and your grant scheme application (be it for woodland creation, tree health, or woodland improvement) is likely to be successful. All of this support is free of charge for all woodland owners. To find your local Woodland Officer, please do look on the gov.uk website and search for **Forestry Commission offices**.

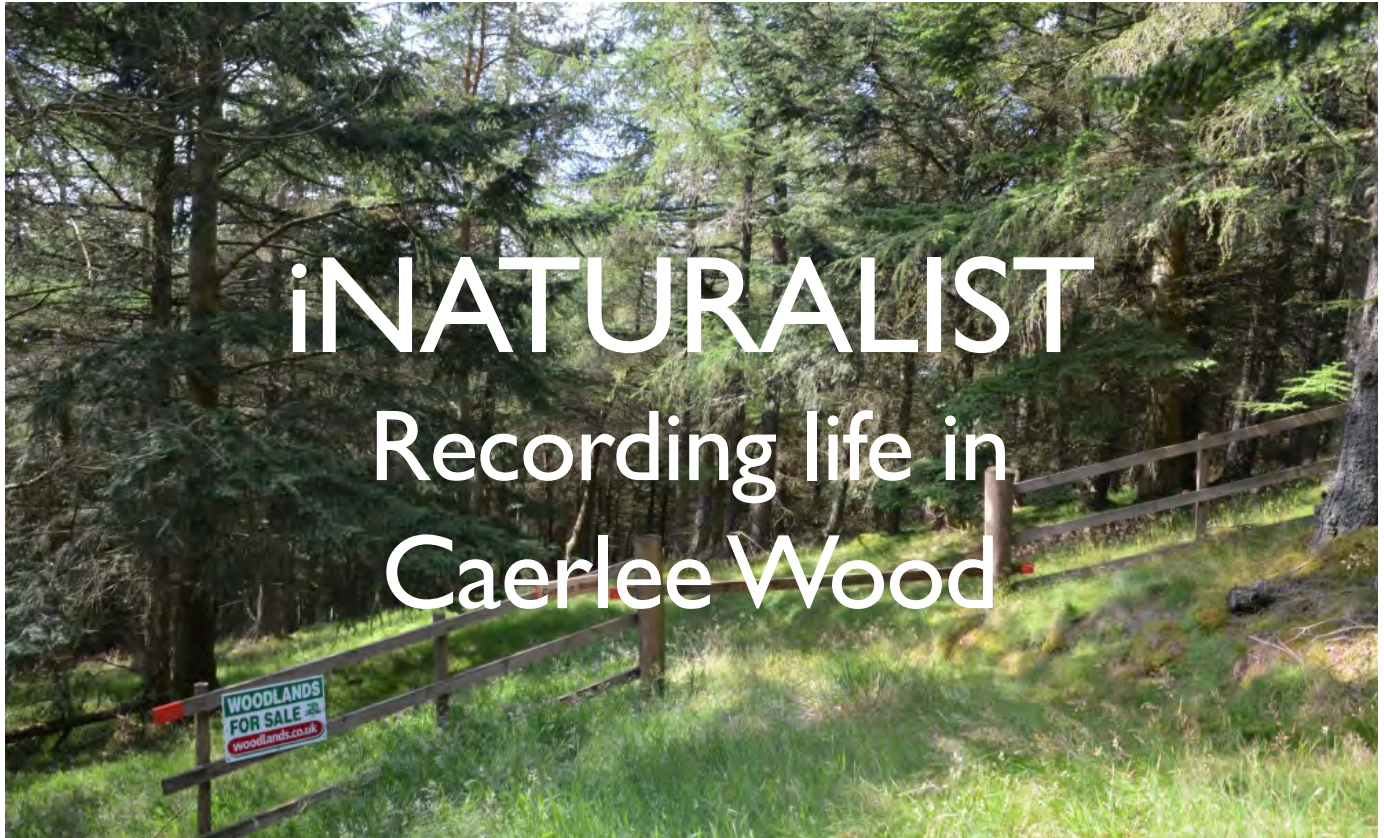
What you can do for the Forestry Commission

Can you help us? In our ongoing battle against new pests, we're looking to make contact with anyone in the Kent, Surrey and Sussex areas whose woodland contains spruce.

Following recent outbreaks of larger eight-toothed spruce bark beetle (*Ips typographus*), we're keen to get spruce back into active management, which will make it less appealing to bark beetles. We can offer a free consultation visit from our Assistant Woodland Officer, who will look for signs of Ips, and also give you a full management suggestions report, not just for protection against Ips, but for wider woodland management.

If you can help us, please email Jacob.taylor@forestrycommission.gov.uk for more information.





In June this year Mike Rutherford joined the ranks of small woodland owners with the purchase of a 7-acre patch of mixed conifer in the Scottish Borders. A zoologist by training, Mike has begun to survey the diversity of wildlife in his woodland.

Although not renowned for being the most biodiverse type of woodland in the UK, I was sure that there would be a lot of wildlife to be found in my small patch of Scottish forest. Like many other owners my long-term plans for the wood are basically to increase the biodiversity, and the methods will include planting more native local tree species, encouraging an understorey, and adding a pond. Once the habitat has improved then the animals should move in. However, with my background as a zoologist and natural history museum curator, I had the desire to be able to quantify the changes over time and see what improvements my changes made. To that end I started recording the species which were already there, or conducting a baseline assessment to put it technically.

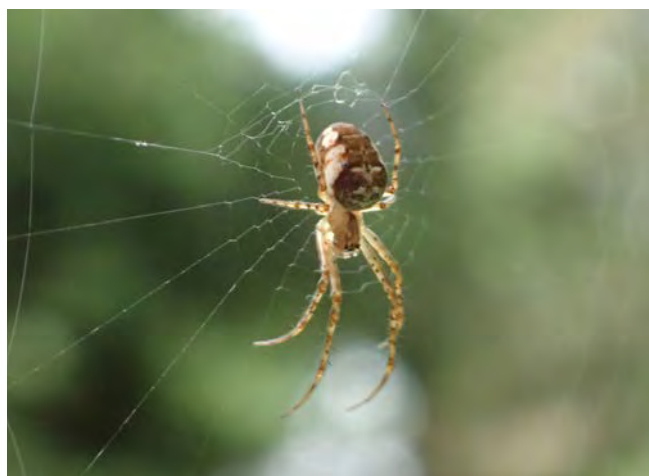
There are many options for ways to record wildlife,

from keeping a simple diary to working with the relevant specialist recording groups; my preferred method is using the iNaturalist app and website.

It is a simple app, enabling users to add just individual

records. However, you can also create a dedicated project page for a particular place which collates all the records from that site on one page. Using a Google Earth-based feature of the site, I marked the rough outline of the wood and then created a project for it. As well as the species records, you can also keep a journal on the whole project. I tend to make a monthly entry just summarising the highlights. The records of my wood can be seen here: [inaturalist.org/projects/caerlee-wood](https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/caerlee-wood)

On almost every visit to the wood I aim to photograph and record one or two things at least. It could be a fern and a beetle or a couple of types of



A long-jawed orb weaver spider (*Metellina segmentata*), so called because it builds orb-shaped (rounded) webs.



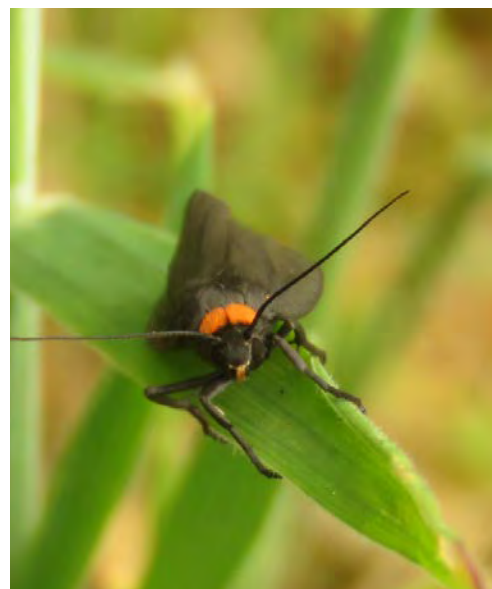
mushrooms – just whatever I come across. However, a more focused effort is made for a particular groups of organisms.

Mammals

Seeing a roe deer walking quietly by on my very first visit was certainly a strong factor in my decision to buy the wood, but I'd need more than luck to see what other mammals were around.

Camera trapping is a great way of finding out more about the, often nocturnal, mammal life in your wood. I started off with just one camera and moved it around the wood trying out different sites every few days. I eventually added two squirrel feeders and more cameras as part of the Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels project (see **Living Woods issue 52** for more information about this).

So far, I've had great success with red squirrel, mice, fox, badger, stoat, roe deer, hare, rabbit and even pine marten all caught on camera. Because of the barbaric badger baiting that still takes place in the UK, the location of badger sightings is obscured on iNaturalist and so although I have seen them in my wood they aren't included in the Caerlee Wood project.



Birds

Bird life is one of the easier groups to monitor as long as I get up to the wood early enough. Small mixed flocks of tits with a few chaffinches joining in are common, a pair of buzzards and many rooks nest on the western fringe of the wood and great spotted woodpeckers and treecreepers flit up and down the trunks. An unusual capture on my trail camera was a possible tawny owl feeding on the ground, but unfortunately the footage was too blurry to confirm the identity. I find owl pellets all over the wood, which shows that nocturnal birdlife is just as active.

Invertebrates

Although some invertebrates can be identified from a good photograph (e.g. moths, butterflies, some snails, some spiders) most of them are best confirmed to species by close-up inspection using a microscope or hand lens. To collect some, I took a few plastic sampling vials with me up to the wood one day and had a rummage around in the undergrowth, turning over



Top: caught on the camera trap, a pine marten after dark and a roe deer.
Middle: a red-necked postman moth.
Bottom: a black slug.



stones and rotting logs and found some woodlice, empty snail shells, spiders, centipedes and millipedes. I then took these home and examined them under a microscope, although a good hand lens would work as well. I have a good library on British invertebrates and a few years' experience, so identification was fairly simple.

Future plans include doing some moth trapping. I did manage one night with a white sheet and torch, but the result were disappointing. A couple of moths were seen resting during the day, but I'm sure there are many more to record once I get a power supply for my moth trap.

Plants, fungus and others

Apart from the planted trees (Scots pine, Douglas fir, larch and sitka spruce) there are only a few self-seeded ones around. These include several elders, one pedunculate oak and a tiny holly. The more obvious flowers, such as foxgloves and speedwells, were easy to identify but I need to work on my grasses and ferns. Likewise, the fungi that have been increasing in number and variety as the year progresses. They can be straightforward, such as the fly agaric, or can just be described as brownish and mushroom-shaped and require an expert eye and some more experience to identify – and this is one of the strengths of iNaturalist post a photo of something unidentifiable, and soon enough, an answer will appear.

Some of the weirdest species I've recorded have to be the slime moulds. At first glance these often brightly coloured organisms look like something artificial. A bright yellow or red splash on vegetation or an old log would catch my attention and closer inspection would reveal one of these wonderful multi-cellular protists.

These are early days, but it is great to have a baseline of what is found in the wood. I have many more plans than I realistically have time to implement, but my focus on biodiversity recording is a simple way of making my time in the wood worthwhile.

Sign up and get recording, you won't regret it!



MIKE G. RUTHERFORD

is a zoologist and natural history museum curator who has worked in Glasgow Museums in Scotland and the University of the West Indies in Trinidad & Tobago.

iNATURALIST

iNaturalist is a joint initiative of the California Academy of Sciences and the National Geographic Society. It started as a university project in 2008 and has been expanding ever since. There are over 3 million users worldwide and more than 50 million records have been uploaded. You can add records using phone apps (iPhone and Android) or do it directly on the website, **[inaturalist.org](https://www.inaturalist.org)**

Having registered for free with an email address and password, there are options about how you want your photos to be shared, from no copyright to all rights reserved. Personally I think it is best to make your records and photos licensing Attribution-Non Commercial, as this allows the data to be shared, but you still get credit for its use.

You need to add at least 50 records before you can make a project and projects need to be maintained and have a purpose. For casual users it may be better to just describe your area and search what has been seen there using filters.

For more information visit **[inaturalist.org](https://www.inaturalist.org)**



Foxglove by Andrew Clark.

The Woodlands Awards are now in the fourth year – but it has of course been a year like no other. Coronavirus restrictions notwithstanding, plenty of entries and nominations arrived before the deadline of 31 July, and there are 40 winners. The new category of Best Woodland Instagrams demonstrates what a useful, informative and visually stunning medium this is for woodlanders in all fields – producing eight winners, the most in any category. More details about the winning entries will be posted on the sponsor's website: **Woodlands.co.uk**.



SMALL WOODLAND WEBSITES

Steve and Tamara Davey for
woodlandwildlife.co.uk

WOODLAND BLOGS

Iain McNab for
centurywood.uk

Clare Mansell for
littlegreenexplorers.com

WOODLAND PHOTOGRAPHY

Andrew Clark
Sam Auger-Forbes
Peter Forster

WOODLAND INSTAGRAMS

Chris Murnin for
@chris_murnin

Toby Hoad for
@dorsethorselogging

Liz and Dan Watson for
@ellekers_wood

Joe O'Leary for
@joescraft

Johnnie the Woodsman for
@johnniethewoodsman

Jeremy Weiss for
@properedges

Steve Pike for
@Sciryuda

Karen Elliott for
@Woodlands_and_wildlife

FOREST SCHOOLS

Chichester Forest Schools
Kinda Forest School
The Oaks Day Nursery Forest School
Owl Family – Forest Schooling
Under the Canopy Forest School



COMMUNITY WOODS

Cart Wood

REGIONAL AND NATIONAL WOODLAND ORGANISATIONS

Leeds Coppice Workers

WOODLAND HUTS

Stephen Brandenburg and Judith Tolley

David East

Ray and Sally Newman

WOODLAND TOOL RECOMMENDATIONS

Stihl 2-in-1 Easy File

Husqvarna 535i XP Electric Chainsaw

WOODLAND CONTRACTORS

PN Broad & Sons

Adrian Goodall

James Malarkey

George Maxwell

WOODLAND TREE-PLANTING PROJECTS

Diggin' the Trees

Trees for Life

Sarah Axon and Susan Davis

Above: A kestrel with prey, photographed by Sam Auger-Forbes.

Below: Stephen Brandenburg and Judith Tolley's woodland hut.





Above: Beech forest by Andrew Clark.

WOODLAND BOOKS OF THE YEAR

Wild Child: Coming Home to Nature
Patrick Barkham (Granta)

50 Fantastic Ideas for Forest School
Jamie Victoria Barnes
(Featherstone/Bloomsbury)

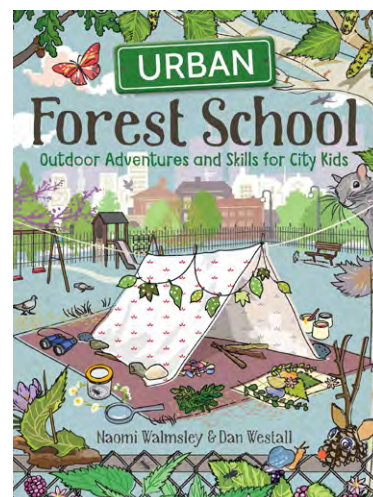
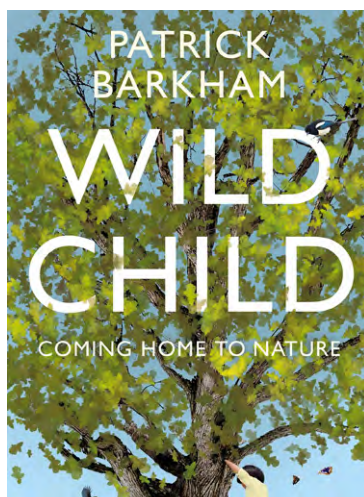
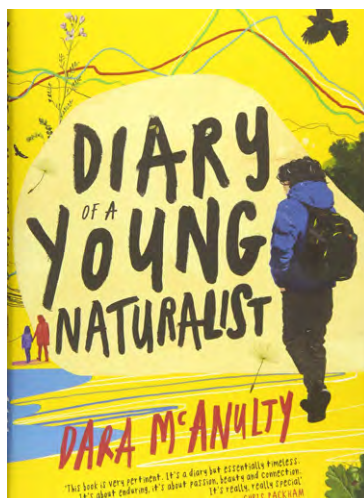
Diary of a Young Naturalist
Dara McAnulty (Little Toller Books)

Moss: From Forest to Garden: a guide to the hidden world of moss
Ulrica Nordström
(The Countryman Press/Michael Joseph)

Tree Story: The History of the World Written in Rings
by Valerie Trouet
(Johns Hopkins University Press)

Urban Forest School: Outdoor Adventures and Skills for City Kids
Naomi Walmsley and Dan Westall
(GMC Publications)

The Forager's Calendar
John Wright (Profile Books)



ARE WE OUT OF THE WOODS YET?

With social interaction either banned or severely limited, how have woodland businesses dealt with the upheavals of 2020?

We're probably all heartily sick of hearing phrases like the 'new normal', 'Covid restrictions', 'essential travel' and 'you're on mute'. It's been a tough year for everyone, in particular small businesses and events organisers. We asked woodland course providers and the organisers of the APF, the UK's biggest wood show, how their businesses have fared and how their plans are shaping up for 2021.

For Rodney Waterfield of the **Woodland Skills Centre** in north Wales:

'2020 was set to be our busiest year yet, with many bookings being made soon after the website went live at Christmas. We had planned on nearly 100 courses, as well as another year of live music and poetry in the woods.

'When lockdown came in March we started on a process for which our systems weren't designed! We got into a cycle: look ahead three weeks, decide to cancel a course, contact the tutor, contact all who have booked and ask if they want a refund, wait till the course is rearranged or switch the deposit to another course. So it went on through the spring and early summer.

'In August we were told we could have groups of up to 30 outdoors or up to six indoors with social distancing. We launched a new programme of 35 courses for the autumn and 25 were fully booked within a week.

'September was great, with two to four courses each weekend and all full. Then we went into local

lockdown in Wales with no-one allowed in or out of the county except for work. Tutors could come, but out-of-county students couldn't! We haven't been able to run a course since.

'We have used the various lockdown times to sort out the workshop, build more storage and improve the caravan and camping sites and have learned some useful things along the way. Most of our tutors rely on running courses and exhibiting at shows and festivals and have not had any income. There is a huge interest in learning traditional skills and making things. We know that the current situation won't last forever and the demand for the sort of courses we run will continue to increase. We tried to focus on the positives throughout the year and our message is be in the outdoors, use sustainable materials, make useful and beautiful objects and do all these in the company of others. We look forward to next year.'



“

Running courses this year has been a nightmare – cancel, postpone, rearrange, local lockdown, national lockdown. BUT we do what we can to keep traditional crafts alive and to support craftspeople by giving them some employment.

Rodney Waterfield

”



A mindfulness group hold a socially distanced meeting at the Woodlands Skills Centre.



“

*We have been blown away
by how supportive the
students have been.*

Pete Wood

”



Graduates of a chair-making course at the Greenwood Centre show off their finished pieces.

A challenging year

Over in Leicestershire, Pete Wood of **Greenwood Days** echoes Rod's comments.

'This year has been very challenging; we had to postpone over thirty courses during the first lockdown, but we used this time to create safe teaching areas for students to learn and tutors to teach and fortunately, have some income.'

'One of the joys of coming to the wood is the interaction between everyone; we usually have two courses running, everyone sits together sharing lunch, talking about their learning experiences which creates a great ambience and we worried this would change with distancing.'

'We reduced the number of students and mostly ran only one course at a time, providing separate tools for everyone,

and with people bringing a packed lunch. We then felt confident and glad to be able to offer a chance for people to come out and spend time creating something in a peaceful and safe setting.'

'Slowly we reopened, testing with one-one courses. We have been blown away by how supportive the students have been, happy to wait for rearranged dates this year or in 2021. A wonderful example is one student who couldn't make their rearranged dates, 'donated' their course places for others in need. Some very 'hands on' crafts were delayed until next year, but with extra courses and reduced numbers, we barely stopped teaching between the two lockdowns and nearly made it to the end of the season with just a couple of courses postponed as the second lockdown started.'



Woodsmith

Maurice and Claire of the **Woodsmith Experience** have a diverse business, running courses and a tool shop that has a strong online presence. The 2021 course programme will be published after Christmas. In the meantime, visit the website for tool orders, tips and woodworking advice.



CONTACT DETAILS

Please do all you can to support the small businesses that help enrich the whole woodland experience. For an extensive national list of course providers, visit the **SWOG website**.

Many course providers have gift tokens available and listings for courses in 2021 are on their websites.

woodlandskillcentre.co.uk

greenwooddays.co.uk

woodsmithexperience.co.uk

APF 2021

The organisers of the APF Show held out for as long as possible before cancelling the UK's biggest woodshow this year. **Exhibition Secretary Ian Millward**, who has been organising this behemoth of woodfairs for 19 years, provides an update of what you can look forward to at APF 2021.

Like most shows this year, APF 2020 had to be postponed due to the Covid situation. The good news is that we have rescheduled it for **23-25 September 2021** at the same site, at the Ragley Estate, Warwickshire.

The APF show has always been the big meeting point for all those in the forestry, woodland, arboricultural, trees and timber sectors. Every two years over 300 exhibitors and 2,000 visitors come to the show to do business, catch up with the latest machines and equipment and meet up with old friends and colleagues. A record £60 million of machines will be on display, many of them working under realistic conditions.

The show is not just about big machines but seeks to represent every aspect of the industry. As many of you know, we have a very extensive woodland crafts area displaying rarely-seen skills as diverse as Sussex trugs, oak swill baskets, coracle making, wheelwrighting, charcoal burning, hazel hurdles, pole lathe turning, clog making, hay rake making, rush seating and dug out canoes. This area has become a major feature and is situated at the heart of the show.

Focus on training in 2021

For APF 2021 we want to make the event more than just a great few days out and offer opportunities to learn new skills, update old ones and generally keep up-to-date with all the latest developments in the industry, whether that is new techniques, tools or equipment. We want to offer small businesses the opportunity to showcase their skills and hopefully secure more business.

With this in mind, and conscious of how many courses had to be cancelled this year, APF 2021 will have a real focus on training and learning new skills: whatever your interests are, there will be something for you. The events are designed to be informal, short, walk-in events, aimed squarely at the working professional.

The Forest Workers zone will feature lots of small workshops covering issues that affect the forest worker such as health issues and back problems, saw maintenance, accessing grants for woodlands and buying new machinery.

The Arb Workers zone will focus on the arboricultural industry and the tree surgeon. There will be a demonstration area, workshops on chainsaw maintenance, sharpening and repair and short presentations on a range of subjects including tree health and diseases, health and safety, training and the latest developments in the industry.

The woodland crafts area will have its usual wide array of skills and we hope to make this more comprehensive than ever before. Many of the craftspeople will be only too happy to discuss their particular skill and, in many cases, let you have a go. We want to take this one step further next year and hope to offer a number of one-day courses you can take while at the show to learn a new skill. The British Horse Loggers will once again be demonstrating their skills in the woodland area. If you have ever fancied having a go at horse logging and want to learn more, then at APF 2021 you can. They will be offering have-a-go opportunities to handle one of their horses and extract timber.

We want you to make the most of APF 2021. Spend one day updating your skills and another looking at the new machines and enjoying all the other events such as the Husqvarna World pole-climbing championships and the A W Jenkinson & Tilhill European chainsaw carving championships. This year has been awful for everyone. Let's make APF 2021 a real celebration of the woodland and timber industries.

For more information, and to book tickets, visit **apfexhibition.co.uk**. Email: info@apfexhibition.co.uk or phone: 01428 723545.



VIEW THROUGH THE TREES

With the thinning of her woodland, **JULIA GOODFELLOW-SMITH** reports on a much-changed view through the trees.



My feet faltered as I stood at the boundary of the woods. Our woods, the woods that we have got to know so well since buying them three years ago. We know when a branch has newly fallen, when a badger has been hunting in the deadwood and where to look for the cherry stones left behind by mice. Our woods have become comfortingly familiar. But now, I barely recognized them. The narrow path that, until yesterday, meandered down through the brambles into the beech trees, had disappeared completely, replaced by muddy logging tracks. There were gaps in the canopy, and piles of brash everywhere.

Professional foresters were felling trees, hauling them up the slope, snedding and cutting them into lengths way faster than we would ever have been able to do. Huge piles of logs were already stacked trackside.

The sight was shocking, but this is what we've been working towards for the last three years. In that time, we have learnt more about woodland management, grading trees, felling trees, the timber market – and our own limitations.

Our RFS mentor, assigned to us via Woodlands.co.uk, who then became a friend, wasn't sure that we would go ahead with it. He knew that every one of those trees is precious to us. I wish that he was here to see it; he would be proud of us for letting our heads rule our hearts. RIP Chris Johnson - your legacy lives on in Garland Wood.

As I thought about the impact that the felling would

have, my shock slowly turned into excitement. This is when we really start to make a difference. The remaining trees will broaden out, ready for the next thinning in 5-10 years. More logs than I was expecting have gone to the local sawmill, so the carbon they have absorbed while growing should remain locked away in furniture and other products for a long time.

Some of our daffodil and bluebell bulbs will have been damaged during these operations, but the contractors have been careful, so a lot of the woodland floor has remained untouched. There will be so much more light reaching the ground for the next few years, we are hoping that we will have an explosion of these and other wildflowers before the canopy closes again. I am looking forward to watching the chain of events unfold.

As well as thinning, we have cleared a small area for replanting. Stocking this area with different trees, including non-natives, will be the first step towards making the woods more resilient to the shocks of climate breakdown. Our beech trees will start to struggle in a few short decades, so our long-term management plan involves growing on and taking out the beech crop that covers around two thirds of our plot, while increasing the age and species diversity of trees growing there.

We have a busy winter ahead removing brash, replanting – and watching... It wouldn't do to be too busy in the woods, would it!

MEET *the* MAKER

DANIEL SMALL is a professional forester who works as a forest manager at the National Forest. He also runs Dust & Splinters, a part-time woodworking business, which sources local timber and crafts it into tool handles, and other wooden objects.

How and when did you realise you wanted to be woodworker?

My interest in woodworking developed when I used to help my Grandpa out in his workshop as a kid. He was very useful with his hands and seemingly could make anything he was asked to out of a pile of wood.

As I grew up, I studied courses in Land/Countryside Management which led to a career in forestry. This goes hand-in-hand with my woodworking interest, and I find great satisfaction in seeing the process right through from a standing tree to a finished project.

How did your style develop?

I like to think that my unique selling point is that the majority of the timber I use comes from our piece of ancient woodland. I try to show my customers how and why I fell the trees, convert it into usable timber and then finally create the item. I also like to pick up on the benefits that the woodland management provides to the woodland. For example, our woodland is suffering from ash dieback, so we are thinning the ash to increase airflow in the woods. Clearing the ash allows us to introduce alternative species into the woodland and increase the resilience to cope with pests and disease. Although all the bendy or

knotty ash is used for firewood, I am using any suitable pieces to make axe handles.

Where do you look for your inspiration?

I tend to recreate traditional shapes and styles for my tool handles. The heads that I use for the axes are all traditional styles; I particularly like the Kent Pattern, so traditional

handles suit them nicely. In other areas of woodworking, I like to make the most of the patterns and grain in the timber. Simple straight lines and facets on a piece of wood do not detract the eye from the natural grain patterns and shapes.

Where do you source your wood?

As much of my timber as possible comes from our piece of ancient woodland in Northamptonshire. Sometimes if a customer is after something specific, I will use my contacts in the milling world to source other local, sustainable timber. I have also used reclaimed timber for some work in the past, mainly because we had a load of pallets available and I couldn't just chuck them in the skip!

Using 'homegrown' timber from our woodland is my main aim though. We have ash, oak, hazel, and various other broadleaves growing in our woodland. So far, I have used



the ash for tool handles, the oak has been used for tables and chopping boards, and the hazel is woven into Christmas wreaths.

How do you start a piece and how long does it take to complete an axe handle?

For the restored axes, there are a few variables that affect the time it takes to finish a commission. I tend to cut billets of ash ready for making the handles and store them, which means that by the time I receive an order the wood is part seasoned. An axe handle needs to be well seasoned before the head is hung, otherwise the wood will continue to contract as it seasons and the head can come loose. The seasoning process can take months, hence the reason to cut the billets in advance. I will finish off seasoning in the house or in a warm car on a summer's day to make them as dry as possible. The other variable is, how busy I am.

How did you fit your carpentry into your life alongside your day job?

I have a nine-to-five job at the National Forest Company, which gives me evenings and weekends to work on Dust & Splinters projects. This limits what I can take on, but I try to work as efficiently as possible, working in batches if possible. I also make sure that the customers understand that I have to work around a day job and provide them with regular updates. Working from home during the Coronavirus pandemic has reduced my commute from about an hour to zero, which has helped to free up some valuable time to work on projects.

Tell us about your workspace and the tools you use

My workspace is a garage. I recently upgraded to this from a tiny 2m x 3m brick-built shed, so I am really enjoying the extra space. Setting up the workshop as I would like it, with a bench made from some of our homegrown oak, is still a work in progress.

I inherited a lot of hand tools from my grandfather and I love the connection familiar tools provide while working on a piece. There are definitely jobs which are quicker and easier using a nice sharp hand tool rather than setting up a power tool. Having said that, circular saws, sanders and drills are all very useful. In the woods I use a small Stihl chainsaw for a lot of work. I keep it very sharp and make sure I don't use it on anything too big and it has lasted me well so far. The hand tools that I take to the woods with me are an axe (of course!) and a Silky pruning saw. I have a selection of different axes depending on what I am doing: a carpenter's axe for carving axe billets; a felling axe for taking down trees; and a splitting maul for processing rounds into billets. The Silky saw is useful for small tasks when it's not worth starting up the chainsaw.



The start of a new/old axe. Dan shapes all his axe handles with hand tools, beginning with an axe, then using a draw knife and spokeshave to achieve the final finish. In the top picture, the old axe head still needs to be fitted further down the haft. Above, a beautifully shaped and ergonomic handle attached to a vintage head.



What does the craft mean to you?

Woodworking, to me, means that I understand wood as a material, trees when they are growing, and how to craft it into usable items which people can appreciate. In the same way that people are often disconnected from where their food comes from, I sometimes think that people also do not fully understand where timber originates. I hope that I can join some of the dots and help people to understand more about the natural environment.

I have thought about setting up some training workshops, as I would really enjoy sharing my woodworking knowledge with others. Coronavirus has spoilt that a bit this year, but keep your eyes peeled on my Instagram account if you would like to make an axe handle or weave a wreath in an ancient woodland.

What is your proudest achievement?

I am currently working on a waney edge dining table made from sycamore. It's definitely my biggest project so far, but it is a bit special. The commission came from a family friend who originally sparked the idea of selling some of the things I was making, which led to the creation of Dust & Splinters over four years ago.

To see more of Daniel's work, follow him on Instagram [@dustandsplinters](https://www.instagram.com/dustandsplinters), or visit his Facebook page, [facebook.com/dustandsplinters2016](https://www.facebook.com/dustandsplinters2016)



From tree to table: sycamore boards prepped and ready to be cut for a table commission, above. Leaving the waney edges in place, Dan joined the boards together, sanded them meticulously, then applied varnish to produce the spectacular bespoke table seen below.



Woodland owner and farmer **GUY LAMBOURNE** ponders the value of wilding as a form of land management.

BOOKREVIEWS

If I was writing a review for the back of this book I think 'thought-provoking' would do nicely. Given freedom to add another word, I'd go for 'extremely thought-provoking'.

Written by the owner of the Knepp Estate, a large Sussex farming business, it is an account of Isabella and Charlie Tree's experiences since the late 1990s of changing the family business from intensive arable and dairy farming to lightly controlled wilderness, funded both from the public purse and by a growing wild meat and tourism business.

On first reading, I was pretty shocked by the author's demands that DEFRA and English Nature (as was), should fund a project that would not only take land out of production, but allow it to scrub up to become incapable of food production. Their proposal required the whole to be fenced to keep in deer and other stock. Bearing in mind that the whole estate is 3,500 acres, that's one long fence – something like 9 miles and over £250,000-worth in 2009. The original scheme also proposed a land bridge to allow animals to cross the A272 safely. No figures were suggested for the cost of that and it hasn't happened so far. A significant reason for choosing to withdraw from intensive agriculture was the problem of making a profit from the estate which lies on claggy Sussex clay.

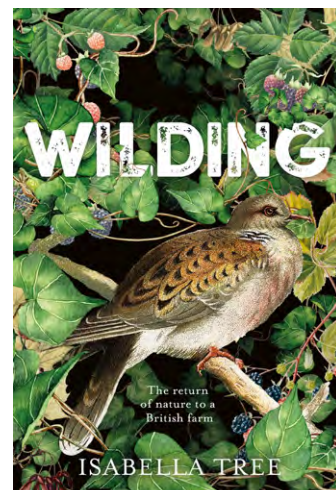
There are mentions of a stud manager and polo ponies, descriptions of castles and ancient deer parks. I became outraged. Not because they wanted to take their farm out of food production, but because they wanted the government and EU to pay for it through Environmental Stewardship and were highly critical of those government bodies that didn't move immediately to do their bidding. Moreover, I was angry because they felt entitled to receive funding and had the contacts and self-confidence to stir things up at a high level. So I had a bit of jealousy and class struggle going on beneath the surface.

I read the rest of the book in a bit of a lather and skimmed a whole lot of interesting things. These included the chapters about nightingales, butterflies, the Oostvaardersplassen, beavers, turtle doves, renewable power, ragwort, coppicing and forestry management. I wasn't fully concentrating.

Luckily on second reading it all sunk in.

The book is full of amazing stuff and the research, both rigorous and more empirical, is building a wealth of knowledge. I hear wilding has reached *The Archers* and that's about as mainstream as these things get. It has changed the way we are looking at the future of some of the land we look after and that's quite an achievement.

I've calmed down a lot, but my initial unease remains. Should some wealthy landowners be paid large amounts of taxpayers' money to abandon their 3,500 acres of farmland to nature? Or, to look at it another way, to allow their farm to become a haven for weeds and other vermin. Maybe we should look at it from a third way – the Knepp Estate has become an amazingly dense patchwork of habitats that attract wildlife on a scale and of a diversity not seen in England since the 17th century. So on balance I think I'd say yes, it's money well spent.



WILDING THE RETURN OF NATURE TO A BRITISH FARM

Isabella Tree

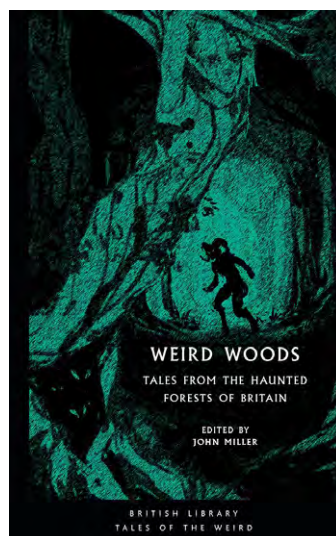
Picador

ISBN 978-1509805105

Paperback 384 pages

RRP £9.99

ANGUS HANTON switches on his torch to absorb a thrillingly terrifying collection of short stories.



WEIRD WOOD – TALES FROM THE HAUNTED FORESTS OF BRITAIN

Edited by John Miller

British Library Publishing
ISBN: 978-0712353427
Paperback 288 pages
RRP £8.99

At school I learnt by heart Kipling's, 'The Way through the Woods' and reading these short woodland stories brought that poem flooding back. Being in a wood and realising what a rich past it must have had, and how, as Kipling said 'if you enter the wood of a summer evening late ... you will hear the beat of a horse's feet ... but there is no road through the woods.'

Woodlands stir up deep emotions and are supernatural in both senses of the word – abundant in nature and places where weird things happen. John Miller has selected a dozen stories written by authors born in the 19th century which will grab your attention and make your spine tingle. As he explains, 'the tales gathered here take us from England's South Downs to Scotland, and from Wales to London.' They are also set in Yorkshire and in Hampshire's New Forest and sometimes in unnamed locations. Time is the critical element, not just in the progress of the storylines, but in the way trees almost force you to reflect on their age and origins. With roots running deep into the earth, trees encapsulate the tension between history and the present day. Many trees are immensely old, predating the Magna Carta of 1215 and the oldest tree, the Fortingall Yew in Scotland, probably predates Christ by 1,000 years.

As well as tinkering with our emotions, these stories often play on our phobias: many people have a fear of trees, of forests, and of forests at night (also known as nychtohylophobia). Instinctively such fears lead to a desire in some people to cut down forests, whilst others point out that it's good for humans to feel a bit less at home in the world and less entitled to impose their will on nature. These tales prod us out of our familiar assumptions and complacent belief that we fully understand and control trees – in Miller's chosen tales the trees fight back. Nowhere is this more true than in the story by the well-named Algernon Blackwood (apronymic, to offer another candidate for word of the day). It's called 'Ancient Lights' and centres around the idea that trees can be cut down under ancient rights where a landowner can claim the unobstructed passage of light and air from adjoining land. Here, a house-owner wants to assert this right in order to have his views of the South Downs, but the woods, in Blackwood's haunting story, have other ideas.

People can disappear in woodlands and 'The Whisper in the Wood' is a tale of the weird loss of Ronald Harris, a newly married man who goes walking alone in Dartmoor on his honeymoon. There is a legal twist in that he carries with him the only copy of his uncle's will, bequeathing him an estate. But Ronald disappears, never to return, until miraculously, 20 years later, his son finds his father's body along with the uncle's will which allows him and his mother, Ronald's widow, to live in comfort. The central idea in this, as in many of the tales, is that the woods take whom they want and give up their secrets only when they choose to.

Anyone who has camped in a woodland – and that, surely, must be most readers of this magazine – will know how noisy and spooky woodlands can be at night time. I recently camped in a Scottish woodland beside Loch Ness and in a spot that is said to be enchanted. It was great reassurance having my son with me, but less comforting having this *Weird Woods* book in the tent – I decided to save this book on haunted forests to read it when I was safely home. That was a good decision, as there is a ghost story element with these tales that deliberately plays on that wobbly line between reality and illusion, between security and fear. 'A Neighbour's Landmark', written by Montague James, one of England's finest ghost story writers, starts with a fragment of verse in a country house library: it culminates with a terrifying experience in the grounds. Supernatural energies and entities are harboured in the woods and James shows how questions of land ownership can become part of the spirit of the land.

Twenty-five years ago we bought a woodland in the Kent village of Pluckley which has been described as the most haunted village in England. Such claims could be made of some of the villages portrayed in this collection, such as St Faith's in the New Forest where Edward Benson tells a kaleidoscopic story with sensuality, hypnosis time running backwards and mysterious night-time happenings. It's a very good read. Buy it for Christmas. But don't read it in a tent.

SYMBOLS IN TREES

CLARE GIBSON looks forward to gin o'clock with this study of the juniper tree.

For most people, the juniper (*Juniperus communis*) symbolises just one thing: gin! The very word 'gin' is derived from the Dutch for juniper, *genever*, which is also the name of a distinctive Dutch spirit, a precursor of the perennially popular London dry gin. So vital, in fact, is the tree's contribution to gin, that the EU Spirit Drink Regulations of 2008 stipulate that its predominant flavour must be juniper.



Portrait of Ginevra de' Benci (c.1474) by Leonardo da Vinci. Ginevra is surrounded by the sprigs of an abundant juniper bush. (Public domain Google Art Project.jpg)

The parts of the juniper that are macerated as part of the gin-making process are its berries, and dried, peppery juniper berries have long been used for flavouring food. The purplish-blue berries (actually the cones developed by the tree's female flowers) have also been used for therapeutic purposes. In his *Complete Herbal* (1653), for example, Nicholas Culpeper extolled the virtues of 'this admirable solar shrub', recommending juniper oil as a remedy for all manner of afflictions, including poisoning, pestilence and piles, flatulence and forgetfulness. Another of juniper's uses, according to Culpeper, was aiding the safe and

speedy birth of children. That said, in centuries past, the oil obtained from the shoots and leaves of the savin tree (*Juniperus sabina*) was sometimes used by women who wished to terminate a pregnancy, which is why the juniper was once called the 'bastard-killer' in Somerset. In some places, moreover, it was popularly believed that drinking a decoction obtained from juniper sprigs, or else slipping sprigs of saffron into one's shoes, would prevent pregnancy.

Juniper's association with chastity (one of the seven Christian virtues) is mainly down to the sharp, needle-like leaves that protect its berries – 'forbidden fruit' – by deterring birds and beasts from eating them. The potentially injurious leaves are another reasons why the juniper is also regarded as a symbol of protection. It was once believed that juniper smoke would purify the air and drive away evil spirits, disease and other malevolent forces or harmful agents. In parts of central Europe, homes were fumigated with smouldering juniper twigs before the night of 30 April to protect them from the witches and warlocks that were said to pose an especially dangerous threat on this, Walpurgis Night. Juniper was similarly burned on Hallowe'en to ward off evil, while juniper boughs were traditionally hung above the doorways of homes and cowsheds to keep their inhabitants safe.

It is thought by some that the Latin name *Juniperus* is an amalgamation of the words junior ('younger') and parere ('to produce' or 'to create'), suggesting that the tree was considered an elixir of youth. The juniper is a symbol of eternity, too, partly because it is an evergreen whose leaves never appear to die, and partly because its wood is so durable,

as well as being resistant to decay.

Renaissance artists incorporated juniper sprigs in portraiture, as both a symbol of chastity and a pun on the sitter's name. Leonardo da Vinci's portrait of Ginevra de' Benci (c.1474) and Antonio Pisanello's painting of Ginevra d'Este (c.1435–49) both include juniper sprigs which allude to the virtue of chastity, and to the Christian belief of eternal life after death. More negatively, the juniper's

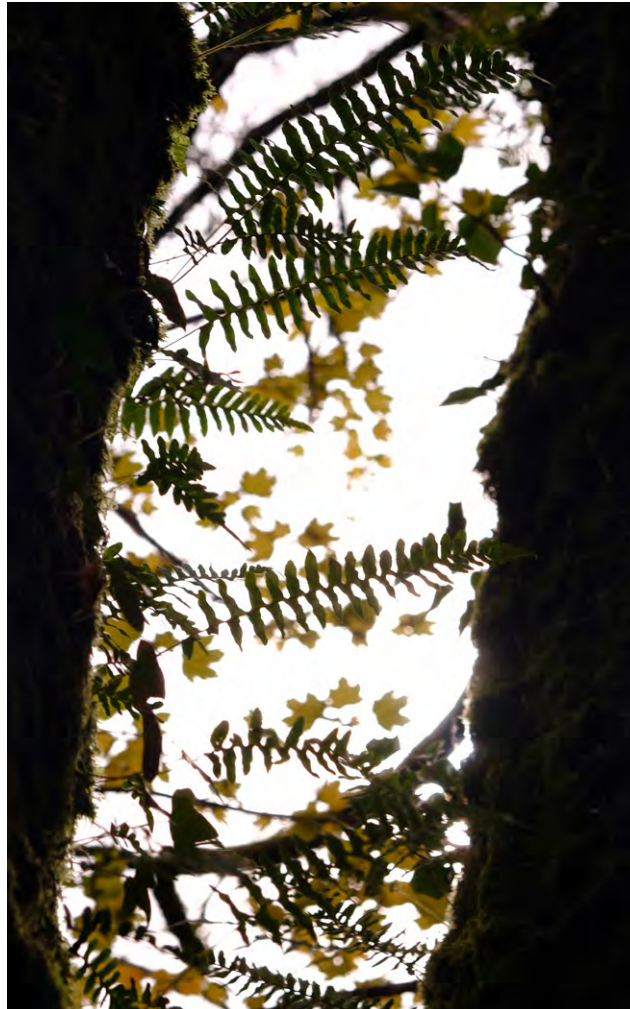


Portrait of Ginevra d'Este (c.1435–49) by Antonio Pisanello. Pisanello has included juniper sprigs on Ginevra's shoulder. (Public Domain, commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.)

berries and prickly leaves caused it to be associated by some with the crown of thorns that Christ was forced to wear before his crucifixion.

In some interpretations, the juniper is said to act as a portal between the physical and spiritual worlds. When juniper branches were burned, the smoke that rose into the air was thought to carry supplicants' prayers to the divine realms.

A symbol of chastity, protection, eternal life and more, the juniper provides much to ponder on, so when savouring the junipery flavour of your gin come gin o'clock, take a moment to consider all that it represents.



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(Pictured: Silhouette by Woodlands Awards winner Andrew Clark.)

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