

A close-up photograph of a forest floor covered in brown, frost-covered oak leaves and a small patch of green moss. The leaves are scattered across the ground, with some showing intricate vein patterns. The moss is a small, bright green cluster in the lower right quadrant.

# Small Woodland Owners' Group

NEWSLETTER FEBRUARY 2014

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It's been a busy month in the woodland world. We have finally uploaded a searchable listing of training and courses to the SWOG website. With reviews from SWOG members, the listing is searchable by subject or location and we hope it will be useful. It is available at [www.swog.org.uk/courses](http://www.swog.org.uk/courses). We are keen to hear your feedback – if we can improve it, please let us know!

Last month's report on the management of PAWS woodland has provoked debate and we would be delighted to hear from other owners on how they manage their own patches of PAWS – to restore or not?

The Small Woodland Owner's Group has been formed to aid the enjoyment, diversity and conservation of British woodland. The company [Woodlands.co.uk](http://Woodlands.co.uk) sponsors the group, so membership is completely free and events are free of charge unless otherwise stated. SWOG is open to anyone interested in the management or the enjoyment of woodland.

## In this issue

- **News** 3  
SWOG meeting 2 March 2014  
New edition of Badgers, Beeches and Blisters  
Grey squirrel threat  
Report from Sylva Conference  
Woodland Management Conference  
ForestLive Concert dates
- **Marston Thrift** 8  
– an ancient community woodland
- **Woodlands blogs and TV** 10

Newsletter February 2014  
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## SWOG meeting Sunday 2 March 2014 Marston Thrift, Cranfield, Bedfordshire

Marston Thrift is a community ASNW woodland on the borders of Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire. It has been worked by a dedicated group of volunteers since 1973 and it is thanks to them that the woodland has been brought back into management and now thrives.

The Wardens of Marston Thrift, Clive and Angela Bucknall, have kindly offered to show SWOG members around the wood to demonstrate what they have achieved over the years. Clive and Angela lead a working party that meets on the first Sunday of every month between October and March – and they are keen for more help.

The timetable for the day is as follows:  
11.00 am meet at Marston Thrift car park.

Guided walk through the wood with Clive and Angela.

12pm Meet the volunteers for a chat and coffee.

After this, members might like to join the working party or are free to explore the wood further.

1.00 pm Drive to Marston Vale Forest Centre for lunch and talk about the regeneration of the Forest of Marston Vale.

The Marston Vale Forest Centre has a café where members can buy lunch and warm up! Providing a contrast to the ancient trees of the Thrift, the Forest of Marston Vale is one of the 12 community forests created in 1991, and over the past 20 years the rather bleak industrial landscape south of Bedford has been transformed and regenerated by tree-planting.

This meeting is free. For more details and a map, please visit the SWOG website here. Email [judith@swog.org.uk](mailto:judith@swog.org.uk) to sign up.

## Badgers, Beeches and Blisters – new edition 2014

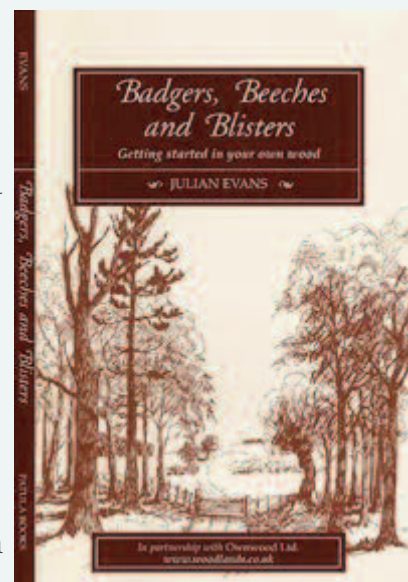
Many SWOG members have no doubt read and enjoyed Julian Evans' instructive book on woodland ownership. Full of sensible and useful advice, it is still available to purchase, or as a free download from [Woodlands.co.uk](http://Woodlands.co.uk) here.

Now President of the Institute of Chartered Foresters, Julian was the Forestry Commission's Chief Research Officer, and has owned a small woodland in Hampshire for many years. This combination of technical knowledge and hands-on grittiness makes the book a great practical guide for the new woodland owner.

It was first published in 2006 and was written collaboratively with the [Woodlands.co.uk](http://Woodlands.co.uk) team, to address the concerns and aspirations of the hundreds of people who have bought woods of their own.

As well as being a handbook for the new owner, *Badgers, Beeches and Blisters* includes sections on sources of advice, tax information, a glossary, and a tree-species guide. One of our favourite features of the book is the line drawings illustrating many private woodland activities from camping to padlocking.

It will be updated as a second edition this year, with new chapters that deal with growing wood fuel sustainably and (perhaps) profitably. We would be delighted to hear from readers with any suggestions for additions to this well-loved volume. Please email any comments to [judith@swog.org.uk](mailto:judith@swog.org.uk)



## Grey squirrels – the biggest risk to our woodland heritage?

The Royal Forestry Society (RFS) is calling on the Government and Forestry Commission England to put control of grey squirrels on a similar level of importance to that of tree diseases.

It is pressing for more research, effective support for woodland owners and managers, and for a programme to increase public awareness of the threat to the health of our broadleaved woods caused by grey squirrels.

A recent online survey was completed by 750 people; 60% of survey participants were woodland owners and 40% managers, consultants or agents whose message was clear:



Stripped bark on this young pedunculate oak is a clear sign of squirrel damage.

grey squirrels represent the greatest threat to broadleaf woodlands, marginally ahead of tree diseases and well ahead of deer.



One respondent wrote, 'I replanted the major part of my woodlands in 1987 with 80% English oak. The bark stripping by grey squirrels over those 26 years has seriously damaged an estimated 40% to 50% of the crop, in many cases fatal.'

The RFS would like to see more support for woodland owners to control grey squirrels and adapt woodland management practice, and for the lessons learned from collaborative approaches such as the Grey Squirrel Control Groups within Red Squirrel areas and the work of the Deer Initiative applied more widely.

### How grey squirrels damage trees and woodlands

- From April until the end of July (early September in high-risk years) grey squirrels strip bark around a trunk, preventing the trees from growing properly. Up to 5% of damaged trees may die and many more will have degraded timber value through stem deformation, rot and broken tops
- Planted or naturally regenerated trees aged between 10 and 40 years, especially sycamore, beech oak, sweet chestnut, pine, larch and Norway spruce, are most vulnerable to damage
- In addition, grey squirrels carry a squirrelpox virus which proves fatal to red squirrels.

The survey results are being submitted by the RFS to Forestry Commission England's review of its policy, *Grey Squirrels and England's Woodlands – Policy and Action*, and a copy has been sent to Environment Minister Owen Paterson. A copy of the survey findings can be found at [www.rfs.org.uk/grey-squirrels-survey](http://www.rfs.org.uk/grey-squirrels-survey)

## Sylva Conference December 2013 – An extraordinary year for British woodlands

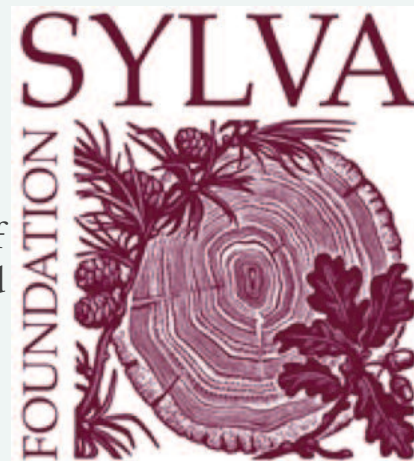
Readers of this and other publications could be forgiven for thinking that ‘extraordinary’ is some kind of euphemism – in 2013 we heard more about pests and diseases, along with manmade threats to our woods and forests than almost anything else. But ‘extraordinary’ is the right word, and speakers at Sylva’s conference in Oxford last December demonstrated why.

The public awareness of the value of trees and the timber industry has undoubtedly risen, thanks to a number of campaigns such as Grown in Britain week, the publication of government reports on the future of forests, and TV programmes such as Rob Penn’s *Tales from the Wildwood*. There is a dedicated body of scientific research into combating pests and diseases, which is gradually providing answers to some of the more pressing problems. A growing culture of corporate social responsibility for environmental matters has allowed elements of the forestry community to work with businesses to communicate their ethos to the wider community. In short, more people are aware of the importance of trees and woodlands to society, the economy and the environment.

The speakers – among them, Gabriel Hemery, Rob Penn, and Alistair Yeoman – provided a

realistic and cautiously positive overview.

Attendees heard how England’s woodlands have provided for mankind’s needs for many centuries, leading to a strong culture of appreciating and using wood, yet in recent decades the care and



management of England’s woodlands has declined. With unprecedented threats from environmental change, pests and diseases, the sustainable management of our woodlands need to be embraced as part of a revitalised wood culture for the 21st century.

Throughout the day, delegates were introduced to many examples of agents for change, such as books, art, television, research and web technology. It is these vehicles that are needed to infuse the importance of trees and woodlands into the heart of society. Hopefully all of these efforts will contribute to the wood culture that will shape a future where society cares for our tree and woodland resources in the best way possible. To read more of this fascinating debate, visit [www.sylva.org.uk](http://www.sylva.org.uk)

## Award for OPAL tree health survey

The OPAL tree health survey has been recognised at Defra’s annual Team Awards, winning the department’s Civil Service Reform Award. The project was praised by Defra as a ‘unique, highly innovative partnership’. The survey was developed last year by OPAL partners working with the government agencies Fera (the Food and Environment Research Agency) and Forest Research.

Thousands of people across the UK signed up to take part and survey the health of trees in their neighbourhoods, while checking for evidence of potentially harmful pests and diseases.

You can take part in the 2014 survey – visit the OPAL website, [www.opalexplorenature.org/treesurvey](http://www.opalexplorenature.org/treesurvey)



### Places available at UKFS and Woodland Management Plan Workshops

The ICF is hosting a series of workshops in partnership with Forestry Commission England (FCE), to introduce the UK Forestry Standard (UKFS) and new FC England woodland management plan templates. The events will be particularly valuable for forestry practitioners, agents and woodland owners.

FC England management plan templates aim to support more woodlands into UKFS compliant and sustainable management. FC-approved, UKFS-compliant management plans will be an important eligibility criteria for funding under the next Rural Development Programme.

This series of seminars will provide an insight

on UKFS, hands-on workshops and the introduction of new mapping functionality that supports management planning. Attendees will learn more about templates enabling them to improve their plans, for both short and long term woodland management.

The remaining workshops are as follows:  
Mon 24 February Haldon Forest, Exeter  
Tue 25 February Westonbirt Arboretum, Gloucestershire (sold out/waiting list)  
Thurs 27 February Flimwell, East Sussex  
Fri 28 February Horndean, Hampshire (sold out/waiting list)

Price: £30 (inclusive of lunch and refreshments). Online booking is essential. For more information visit the website [www.charteredforesters.org](http://www.charteredforesters.org) or call the Institute of Chartered Foresters 0131 240 1425.

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### Scotland's national tree

The Scots Pine has been named as Scotland's national tree following a three-month consultation. Angus MacDonald, SNP MSP for Falkirk East, has lodged a motion that 'recognises the importance of designating a national tree of Scotland as an important

symbol of the country's commitment to woodlands, biodiversity and reforestation, and understands that the Scots pine is the most widely distributed conifer in the world, with a natural range that stretches from west Scotland to the Okhotsk Sea in eastern Siberia, and from north of the Arctic Circle in Scandinavia to southern Spain.'





## ForestLive 2014

Back by popular demand, a series of concerts in forests around the UK this summer.

**Paul Weller** has confirmed five forest gigs, appearing as part of the Forestry Commission's Forest Live concert programme in spectacular woodland locations across the country during the summer of 2014.

Following his two sold-out Forest Live dates last summer, Paul said of the 2014 shows, 'It's a favourite summer jaunt for me so I look forward to performing in a few of the forests that I haven't played in a good while'. Paul will be appearing at five gigs:

- Sat 14 June Sherwood Pines, Edwinstowe, Mansfield, Notts.
- Sat 21 June Bedgebury Pinetum & Forest, Tunbridge Wells, Kent.
- Fri 27 June Dalby Forest, Pickering, N Yorks.
- Sat 28 June Cannock Chase Forest, Rugeley, Staffs.
- Fri 4 July Delamere Forest, Nr Northwich, Cheshire.

**Katherine Jenkins** last played the venue to a capacity crowd in 2008, and said, 'I am really looking forward to returning to Westonbirt Arboretum this summer to perform again in such a beautiful location.' The concert will include a selection of Katherine's favourite works as well as classic proms repertoire.

- Sun 20 July Westonbirt Arboretum.

**Jessie J** and guests will be performing at four concerts. 'I made my Forest Live debut this summer with just one show which I loved, so it's great to be taking in another four Forest Live dates!'

- Fri 13 June Sherwood Pines Forest, Edwinstowe, Notts
- Fri 20 June Bedgebury Pinetum, Tunbridge Wells, Kent
- Fri 27 June Cannock Chase Forest, Rugeley, Staffs
- Sat 5 July Delamere Forest, Delamere, Cheshire

**Boyzone** have announced their Forest Live debut this summer. In a continuation of the celebration of their 'BZ20' anniversary, Ronan, Keith, Shane and Mikey will be performing in four spectacular woodland locations as part of the Forestry Commission's annual concert series. Commenting on the shows, Ronan Keating said, 'We're pleased to be part of the Forest Live tour this year for the first time. It's going to be great to perform our hits in such beautiful locations'.

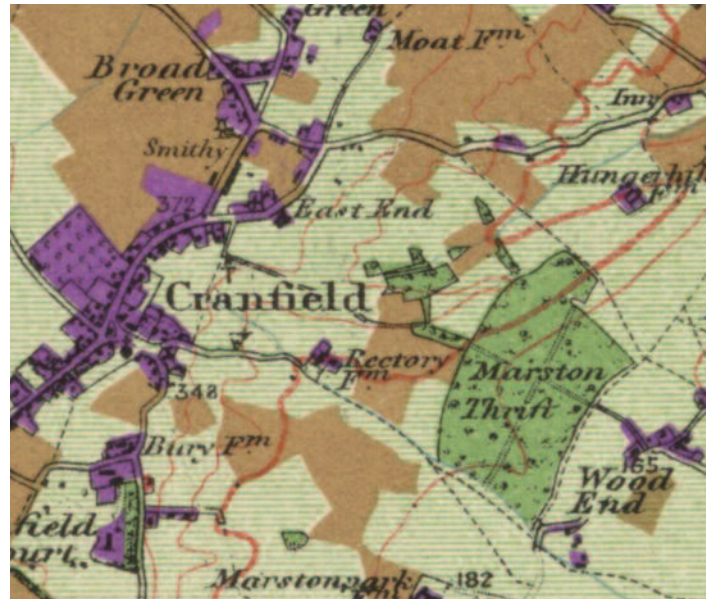
- Thurs 12 June Sherwood Pines Forest, Edwinstowe, Notts
- Sun 6 July Delamere Forest, Northwich, Cheshire
- Fri 11 July Thetford Forest, Brandon, Suffolk
- Fri 18 July Westonbirt Arboretum, Tetbury, Glos

To book tickets, visit the FC website, [www.forestry.gov.uk/music](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/music)

# Marston Thrift – an ancient community woodland

*Marston Thrift is a community woodland near Cranfield in Bedfordshire, which has been tended a group of volunteers headed by Clive and Angela Bucknall, the Wardens of Marston Thrift, for some 40 years. It is 140 acres of oak, ash and maple ancient semi-natural woodland. Mentioned in Domesday Book, the Thrift is a beautiful woodland that thrives today almost entirely thanks to the work of volunteer enthusiasts.*

The woodland of Marston Thrift was neglected from the second world war until the 1970s. It is located on the borders of Bedfordshire's 'Brickfields', an area of former clay pits stretching ten miles between the M1 motorway and the southern fringe of Bedford, and as local industry declined in the post-war years, the surrounding landscape became rather bleak. Large parts of the Thrift became overgrown and in the 1950s the Forestry Commission planted conifers on higher ground, which reduced the levels of sunlight in areas already afflicted by unmanaged growth. In 1971, Clive and Angela joined the Bedfordshire Wildlife Trust and in the same year hosted a meeting to discuss the future conservation of Marston Thrift. Both had



a keen interest in wildlife, and Angela would have chosen a career in conservation if this had been possible when she left school. Instead, she became a teacher. For three years the future of the woodland was discussed by Bedfordshire County Council, the Forestry Commission and a nominal owner who was keen to retain the shooting rights.

## A secure future

Finally in 1974, Bedfordshire County Council bought Marston Thrift, and the new wardens held their first working party. Since then, on the first Sunday of every month between October and March, Clive and Angela have met with a group of volunteers to work in the Thrift. None have a professional background in conservation or forestry but are driven, like so many of us, by a sheer love of the natural world.

Initially, the county forestry officer came along to teach the group basic skills such as coppicing, tree felling and fire lighting, and over the years the county council has supplied tools such as axes





and loppers, as well as a constant supply of leather gloves.

Every summer, the council sets targets for the coming season – clearing vegetation, or cutting a swathe through broadleaved woodland to provide a flyway for breeding butterflies, for example. The work is all carried out by volunteers, although major works, such as mowing the main rides or large-scale felling, is dealt with by the council.

## SSI recognition

The satisfaction derived from working the same wood for 40 years is immense. Clive and Angela know that they and their colleagues have sustained and conserved the wildlife of the Thrift for another generation. They have undertaken ditching, pond clearance, felling, and coppicing, which has improved the habitat for woodland plants and ensured that the main rides remain accessible. In 1984, the SSI was expanded considerably, largely as a result of Clive and Angela's efforts. The Thrift is a popular spot for local walkers, a habitat for the rare Black Hairstreak butterfly and a real success story in the world of volunteer conservation.

Over the years, many people have worked at Marston Thrift, but recent changes in legislation now make it difficult for youth organisations to help out and the Wardens face the challenge of



recruiting more helpers.

**We will be holding a SWOG meeting at Marston Thrift on 2 March** – see page 3 for details. Members will have the opportunity to meet Clive and Angela and help out with some light woodland work. If anyone would like to become a regular volunteer at the Thrift, please email [judith@swog.org.uk](mailto:judith@swog.org.uk) and your details will be passed on.



*Page 8, top: Marston Thrift has been a well-defined feature on maps of the region for centuries*

*Page 8, below: The volunteers at Marston Thrift take a well-earned break after a morning's coppicing.*

*Top right: Clearing vegetation to allow more light on to the forest floor.*

*Left: Hazel, originally coppiced in 1981.*

## Blogs and videos from Woodlands.co.uk

Visit [Woodlands.co.uk/blog](http://Woodlands.co.uk/blog) or click on the title to read the full blog.

### Wood – ‘Dirtier than coal’

Angus reports on the RSPB’s controversial new campaign regarding wood fuel.

### Amazonian trees

Chris surveys the myriad tree species of the Amazon rain forest.

### Potential for firewood and woodfuel from South East England

Matthew Woodcock of the FC is optimistic about the potential for more wood fuel from south-east England.

### The redwoods

Chris reflects on the giant coniferous trees transplanted by the Victorians.

### ‘Grown in Britain’ campaign could help smaller woodland owners

The Grown in Britain campaign has taken off and is apparently good news for small woodland owners.

### Gin and juniper

Chris discusses the impact of the loss of juniper trees on the natural world. (Gin drinkers can breathe easy – most berries come from Europe.)

## Woodlands TV

Follow the links on the titles to see the latest videos, or visit [www.woodlands.co.uk/tv](http://www.woodlands.co.uk/tv)

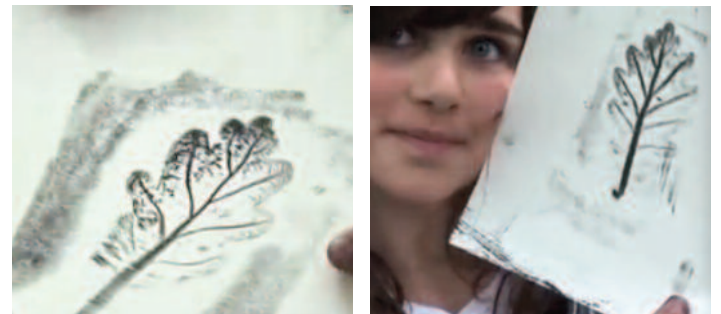
### Bentwood chair-making



At Wilderness Wood, East Sussex, expert weaver Dominic Parrette teaches a group the craft of making bentwood chairs from coppiced willow.

### Leaf printing in the woodlands

Artist Stef Mitchell, who specialises in working in the natural world, explains the process of leaf printing.



## SWOG COURSE LIST JANUARY 2014



We have removed the extensive list of course providers from the newsletter because we now have a more useful list of companies online. This includes reviews from SWOG members and is completely searchable by key words, area or course subject. It is very much a work in progress and will be updated regularly with new reviews. We would welcome feedback – if you think we can improve it, please let us know. It is available here: [www.swog.org/courses](http://www.swog.org/courses)