

Small Woodland Owners' Group

NEWSLETTER APRIL 2014



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This month, the SWOG newsletter is overflowing with news and articles. Woodland owners David Beaton and Rosemary de Moura report on the success of using volunteer workers to help them manage their wood sustainably. We review Dr Gabriel Hemery's long-awaited book, *The New Sylva*, and are delighted to offer SWOG members 30% off the purchase price. Finally, there is a report from the SWOG meeting at Marston Thrift.

Articles, news and photos are all very welcome – please send them to Judith@swog.org.uk. In addition, if you would like to host a meeting in your wood, please get in touch.

The Small Woodland Owner's Group has been formed to aid the enjoyment, diversity and conservation of British woodland. The company 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.

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SWOG website and forum

rich@swog.org.uk

SWOG co-ordinator and newsletter editor

judith@swog.org.uk

Follow us on Twitter @ [@_swog](https://twitter.com/_swog)



**National Community Woodland
Gathering, Fri 11 April 11.30–5.30 &
Sat 12 April 8.30–3.30.
Plas Newydd, Anglesey**

Join fellow community woodlanders and interested friends from across Wales for this year's Gathering, with a lively mix of practical demonstrations, thought-provoking workshops, good food, good company and inspiring site visits.



It is hosted by the National Trust estate Plas Newydd, with stunning views over the Menai Strait and 15 minutes from Bangor. Plas

Newydd regularly collaborates with local community woodlands, and hosts the area's annual Woodland Festival. The programme includes workshops on community woodland enterprises, practical hands-on green woodworking opportunities, tool-sharpening, and discussions on non-timber forest products. The sessions will be hosted by community woodlands in collaboration with guest organisations including the Woodland Trust, Natural Resources Wales and National Trust.

Visitors can camp overnight, and on Friday evening will be entertained by woodland instruments and a jam session with SoundWood Links.

Saturday's programme continues the celebration and learning themes, starting with a shared breakfast followed by woodland workshop and talks at Plas Newydd, and a visit to a unique local greenwood building project. After lunch, there will then be a visit to the UK's first community owned farm and woodland, Moelyci.

Day passes start at £10 for members. Download full

details from the Llais y Goedwig website here. To book a place, contact Rosie Strang 07966 071073 info@llaisygoedwig.org.uk



Track a tree project

Dr Albert Phillimore from the Institute of Evolutionary Biology has sent us news of a very interesting project. They are looking for volunteers to record the seasonal timings of individual trees and flowering plants in our woodlands.

Woodland owners love to chat about this subject, and this is a good chance to put our woodland knowledge to use. Track a Tree is

looking for volunteer recorders to collect observations of woodland trees and flowering plants during successive springs. Your records will shed light on the seasonal timing of UK woodlands, and how changes in climate could affect them. For more details and to register, visit www.trackatree.org.uk

There is also a Facebook page and website blog where regular updates will be posted: www.facebook.com/trackatree and <http://trackatree.bio.ed.ac.uk/blog>



**flora
LOCALE**

17th annual Flora Locale Training Programme

Events are tailored to the needs of land managers and others involved in the design, management and restoration of wild plants and habitats for biodiversity, landscapes and people, whether on a farm, smallholding, village green, city park or garden.

Each event is led by an individual with practical experience and provides an informal opportunity for participants to learn from an expert and each other. The mix of structured and unstructured training can normally contribute towards professional requirements for Continual Professional Development. Attendance certificates are provided. Of particular interest to woodland owners are:

- An introduction to identifying and improving

woodland ground flora, Flimwell, Sussex 15 May 2014

- Woodland ground flora identification and establishment, Fife, 20 May 2014
- Woodland wild flowers, LathkillDale, Derbyshire 20 May 2014
- Habitat management in new and established woods, Chulmleigh, Devon 22 May 2014
- Ponies and biodiversity, Llangadog, Carmarthenshire, 9 August 2014
- Managing woodlands for wildlife and sustainability, Chippenham, Wiltshire, 23 September 2014
- Using horses to manage woodland sites, Chippenham, Wiltshire, 7 October 2014
- Managing veteran trees: implications of ageing and decay, Slough, Berkshire, 5 November 2014
- Propagating and planting tree seeds for woodland creation projects, Cranfield, Bedfordshire, 19 November 2014

For more details, visit www.floralocale.org

Managing your woodland for wildlife and wood fuel, 16 April 10–3.30 Parkwell, Somerset TA21 9NP

The Blackwell and East Devon Woodland Association have organised a day course designed to help the small woodland owner manage their woodland for woodfuel and wildlife. It will examine how the woodland at Park Farm is

managed, and the woodfuel installations, methods of extraction, measurement, valuing trees / volume, grants, pest management, biodiversity, and striking a balance.

Cost: £70 non members; £55 for members to include coffee/tea and a light lunch. Some short walks in the woods are involved, outdoor clothing advised.

Chainsaw Safety Awareness day, for owners and users by Lantra trainer Park Farm, Wellington, TA21 9NP 17 May 2014 9.30 am to 4.00 pm

The day is intended to help the small woodland owner/chainsaw owner who is already working with chainsaws. It will cover safety, fuels and oils, maintenance, risk assessment, lone working, site hazards, cutting and felling and lots more.

Cost: £90 non members; £75 for BEDWA members to include coffee/tea and a light lunch. Short walks to the woods and saw yard are involved, so outdoor clothing advised.

For more details for either of these courses, and to book a place, contact John Greenshields on 01823 660764 or email parkfarm@tinyonline.co.uk



The *Vigilant* re-visited

Readers may remember our report on the restoration of a Thames barge in the December newsletter. Stuart Brooking, the Woodlands agent in Devon, has visited the *Vigilant* in Topsham, where she is awaiting work to restore her to her former glory.

Benjamin Squirrel, the project co-ordinator, said that the timber contribution from Woodlands has given the *Vigilant* Project in Topsham a much needed boost following the rejection of their bid for funding by the Heritage Lottery Fund. The team behind the *Vigilant* have vowed to battle on despite the setback and were delighted to secure a supply of Japanese Larch that was felled under a compulsory felling order. Stuart has kindly arranged for the movement and the supply of 20 larch trees which will be sawn to provide planks for the outer skin and for the decking. The timber is gradually being processed and stacked in storage to season prior to use. The boards are 24 ft long and will be cut into 6 x 3 inch planks for use inside the boat.

Benjamin said, 'Obviously we are disappointed to lose the certainty that HLF funding would have provided. This decision means that we are not able to train an apprentice shipwright or to operate the boat for the benefit of the public in the way that we had envisaged. However, we will seek to restore this historic registered ship on an extremely limited budget, and this act of generosity by Woodlands makes that a more realistic prospect'.

Subject to funding, work will be recommence in earnest on the *Vigilant* in September at Topsham, Devon. If you would like to volunteer or contribute to the project contact info@Vigilantbarge.com.



Helping hands – volunteer woodland workers

SWOG members David Beaton and Rosemary de Moura explain how volunteers have made an impact on their woodland management.

We bought Ramshaw Woods and Meadow almost by accident five years ago. Both 60, we had retired and just had an offer accepted on a house in Rudyard in the Staffordshire Moorlands. The plan was to put into practice many of the green technologies we had been experimenting with at our beach house in Cumbria. Wood as a fuel for cooking and heating was high on our list. And only two miles from our new home Woodlands.co.uk had Ramshaw for sale. . . .

Ramshaw Wood and Meadow is a six and a half acre plot – half wood and half meadow complete with a stream. It is part of the larger Backhills Wood near the market town of Leek. The site is designated a Site of Biological Importance, and the whole wood is, unusually, subject to a Tree Preservation Order. The wood is on a slope running down to the meadow and tends to be wet and boggy.

The wood we inherited

Backhills Wood has been neglected for some time. Mainly ancient woodland with some previously managed planting (larch and hazel) the wood was in a sorry state with holly straggling everywhere, making much of the wood impassable. We had dead, dying or just plain old oak, beech, rowan, silver birch and sycamore, with very few young trees; an area of previously coppiced but now overstood hazel; but fortunately only one small patch of rhododendron. The woods were dark, with anything trying to grow at ground level thwarted by the holly. However, we loved it and bought it.

Using our grant towards woodland management training, we both took a week-long course in sustainable woodland management led by Ben Law, and David did the



SWA home user chainsaw course. Both courses were excellent and gave us the confidence to tackle the task in front of us. A site meeting with the council's tree officer clarified the position regarding the TPO. Thus prepared, we set out our plans for Ramshaw Wood.

It was obvious that three acres of wood on a boggy slope were never going to have commercial potential. Therefore our aims are:

- To conserve the woodland and secure its future
- Increase biodiversity
- To provide all our domestic firewood
- Manage the woods with sensitivity.

Early tasks

Our early tasks included clearing paths to gain access, clearing some fallen and standing dead wood and clearing areas of holly to allow alternative ground cover. We also got rid of the patch of rhododendron, and re-coppiced the hazel.

Our needs for firewood are being currently met by removal of dead and fallen trees. As management continues, this source will decrease. To secure fuel supply, we have given over a quarter of an acre of the meadow to willow on a planned four-year rotation coppice. We will be taking our first crop next year.

We have made steady progress with our plans over the last four years. Our biggest mistake,

however, was not to have started this when we were ten years younger. Then we discovered WWOOFers.

WWOOFers

WWOOF – Worldwide Opportunities on Organic Farms – is a charity which matches volunteers with potential hosts. Volunteers work (about 25 hours a week) in return for food and accommodation. (You do need proper insurance, however.) Our first WWOOFers arrived in June 2013, and have had a steady flow since then. We have been delighted with the scheme. The majority of our volunteers have been young people from overseas (France, Spain, Korea, USA). Many are from urban backgrounds, but relish the chance to work outdoors. What they lack in experience, they make up for in energy and enthusiasm. Youthful energy is just what we needed.

Having two or three young people working meant jobs were done quicker, which leads to greater satisfaction for all and less back ache for us. Careful planning is the key – allot jobs within their capabilities, variety and appropriate supervision. With our WWOOFers' help we cleared a backlog of work. Tasks they undertook

included clearing holly and undergrowth, moving and loading cut timber, building brash fences, planting hedges around the meadow and splitting and stacking logs (the hydraulic splitter was everybody's favourite machine!) They also helped out in the organic veg garden.

We get a lot out of them, and have met some lovely people. What they get out of it is best summed up by Pauline and Lucie, both 19 and from France.

'We do not often have the opportunity to be loggers. So we are very happy to try this at David and Rosemary's in a nice village. Moreover, we are urban, so the change of scene was total. Beyond the very rewarding work, we discovered a ecological way of life. This trip allowed us to meet and share the life of a couple in another country and another generation with whom we sympathized well'.

There are other organizations which source volunteer help, but however you get your volunteers, they represent a valuable resource to the small woodland owner. Using volunteers has shown us a way to actively manage our woods for a considerable time to come.

For information on WWOOF visit www.wwoof.org.uk



SWOG meeting at Marston Thrift



At the beginning of March a small group of SWOG members met Clive Bucknall, the honorary Warden of Marston Thrift, who took us on a muddy but very enjoyable tour through the community woodland of Marston Thrift just outside Bedford.

Marston Thrift is an ancient woodland that somehow survived the depredations inflicted on the landscape around it, as the local clay pits were plundered by brick companies and the Bedfordshire landscape was stripped bare during the late 19th and 20th centuries. Happily, since the 1990s, Bedfordshire Country Council have made restoring Marston Vale something of a priority, and Marston Thrift now stands out as the grand old lady in a landscape of younger woods.

The Thrift stands on the edge of the village of Cranfield and has been managed by the same group of volunteers since 1973. It's a shining example of a well tended community woodland, where volunteers have been supported by the local authority in their conservation work. And in the process, they have saved local government a sizable sum of money.

A beautiful ancient wood that is managed as coppice with standards, the Thrift sits on a ridge overlooking a valley punctuated by old brickwork chimneys and the enormous green hangars at Cardington, which were once used to build airships such as the ill-fated R101. It

forms part of the rolling countryside between Milton Keynes and Bedford, where old brick pits have been detoxified and filled in, either with landfill or with water, to form attractive lakes, and the Forest of Marston Vale is slowly transforming the area.

The bulk of the Thrift is composed of native species such as oak, ash, blackthorn and hazel. It is home to any number of muntjac deer and has provided a habitat for butterflies. The volunteers have cut flyaways to encourage the rare purple hairstreak butterfly *Quercusia quercusto*.

The Forestry Commission planted a few acres of conifers on the edge of the Thrift about 60 years ago, which are now gradually being felled. Clive took us to the site, which just a few



months after the clearance, was recovering well. The FC had also left the few broadleaved trees in this area, and it is hoped that some will self-seed.

Clive and his wife Angela have organised a group of about ten volunteers to visit the Thrift once a month during the winter – and they have done it for 40 years. This working party has a list of tasks to attend to, which they agree in advance with the local authority. Looking back on their work – creating rides, coppicing, pond creation, strimming and clearing – they feel a great sense of satisfaction and have had a tangible effect on the life of the woodland.

While the volunteers loved the idea of being able to own your own woodland, they seem to have a good deal: they admit that they feel quite territorial about ‘their’ wood, but for much of the year they have it mostly to themselves. After working it for so long, they know it far better than casual walkers and have made a real impact on it. It was interesting for us woodland owners to see the practical challenges faced by community volunteers. Unlike small woodland

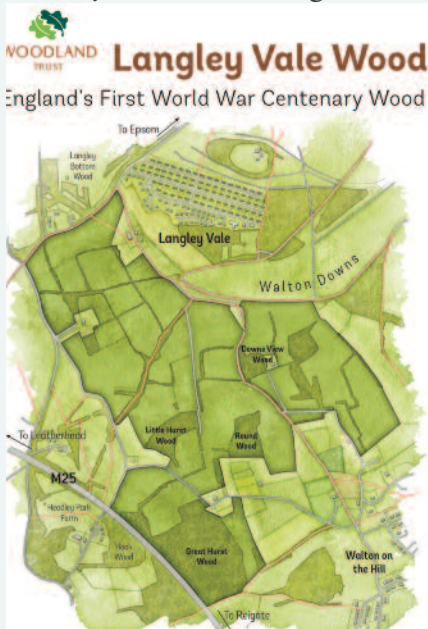
owners, they cannot just drive a vehicle down a track to park where they wish. Nor can they rely on having a shed or store for their tools – every time they visit, they have to carry every bit of kit with them and then take it away again. They have one small advantage – the council pays for very sturdy leather gloves and hand tools!

After our tour of the Thrift, we went to the nearby Marston Vale Forest Centre for lunch and enjoyed a chat with Andy Brocklebank, one of the volunteers. He explained how the forest was funded (lottery funding initially, but undertakers are also keen sponsors, apparently) and how the planting of new areas is progressing. It’s now ten years since the creation of Rectory Wood, 70 acres of formerly arable land which adjoins the Thrift. It has been planted with a mix of native trees and shrubs, and much of the planting was grown on from seed produced by the trees of the Thrift.

SWOG’s thanks are due to Clive and Angela Bucknall for their hospitality and to the wonderful Visitor Centre at the Forest of Marston Vale.

First World War Centenary Woods

The First World War, ‘the war to end all wars’, is unlikely ever to be forgotten and over the next



few years, as we ride the centenary of the battles, we will all be more aware than ever of the senseless loss of life. The Woodland Trust is marking the centenary in a positive and permanent manner, with

the launch of the First World War Centenary Woods project. Four flagship woods will be created in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, over 1,000 acres of new woodland in all. In addition, there will be over three million trees available to schools and community groups.

A 640 acre site has been set aside near Epsom in Surrey. Karl Mitchell, Woodland Trust Project Director said: ‘The trees planted during the course of this £12 million project will stand for hundreds of years, providing a lasting tribute to all those involved in the First World War. We hope to see many thousands of people getting involved by planting their own tribute or dedicating trees in memory of loved ones’.

To learn more, visit the Woodland Trust website, www.woodlandtrust.org.uk

The New Sylva – review

The New Sylva A Discourse of Forest and Orchard Trees for the Twenty-First Century by Gabriel Hemery and Sarah Simblet. Published 10 April, Bloomsbury Publishing

It's 1664: Charles II has been on the throne for four years, England has just captured New Amsterdam in North America and renamed the town New York, and the scientist and polymath, John Evelyn has published *Sylva*, a significant work on the state of England's forests.

Of *Sylva*

John Evelyn was a founding member of the Royal Society, a friend of Samuel Pepys, Sir Christopher Wren and a loyal courtier with the ear of the King. Alarmed by what he regarded as the parlous state of England's woods and forests, notably the shortage of timber available for shipbuilding, Evelyn put his considerable arboreal and botanical knowledge to good use, and in 1662 presented a paper to the Royal Society, which became the basis for one of the world's most influential books on forestry.

350 years on, Dr Gabriel Hemery is similarly worried about woodland management and forestry practice in Britain and has used the anniversary of *Sylva*'s publication to produce a fascinating book that examines both the tradition and past practices of forestry in Britain, and looks forward to question whether this generation can make forestry and the timber trade more sustainable. He has paid homage to Evelyn's *Sylva* by using the same structure, peppering his text with quotations from the original and adhering to the style of the original chapter titles. A silvologist and founder and chief executive of the Sylva Foundation, Hemery has set out to make the art, science and practice of forestry more accessible; his extensive knowledge and love of British woodlands illuminates this work.

Like a sturdy old tree, the roots of this book spread way beyond the immediate subject

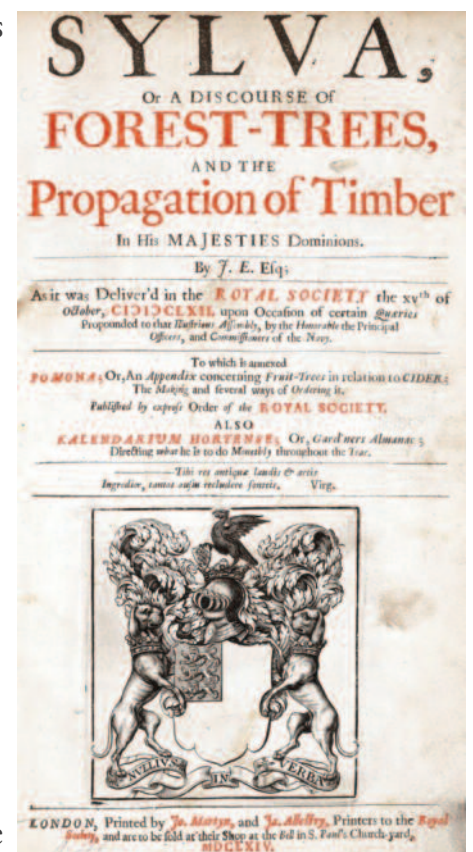
matter of 'forests and orchard trees'. In *The New Sylva*, Gabriel Hemery has produced a comprehensive work that takes in silviculture, ecology, botany, history and economy, and touches on genetics, agriculture, literature, philosophy, cultural beliefs and politics. The

heartwood, however, is devoted to trees, how and where they grow, their life cycles, management and use to humankind in the past, present and future. Hemery's erudite text is complemented by 200 beautifully composed line drawings by Dr Sarah Simblet.

Of the book

To this general reader, it appears that Hemery has left no stone unturned. The book is divided into five chapters. The first deals with John Evelyn, forestry in the 17th century and what prompted Evelyn to write *Sylva*. Along the way, we learn that building the average 16th century ship, such as the *Mary Rose*, consumed about 1,200 trees and such a rate of attrition could not continue. The second chapter goes back to basics, by discussing the environment – soils and ecosystems, and the fact that true 'native' trees are those that were present some 8,200 years ago, before the land bridge between the British Isles and the Continent disappeared.

The longest part of the book is, rightly, given over to the trees. Hemery examines 44 groups of tree species in detail, covering many of those



that Evelyn wrote about, but also including many which have been introduced to the British Isles since his death, such as the sitka spruce, the redwood, and the Douglas Fir. They are illustrated, often in minute detail, and while some may think that gorgeous photographs might be more appropriate, the line drawings fit the spirit of the work exactly and reveal plant structures in perhaps greater detail.

The fourth chapter deals with silviculture and forest produce and describes forestry practices, both ancient and modern. It contains useful practical advice about thinning, planting felling and coppicing, among other things, even noting the best type of forester's spade.

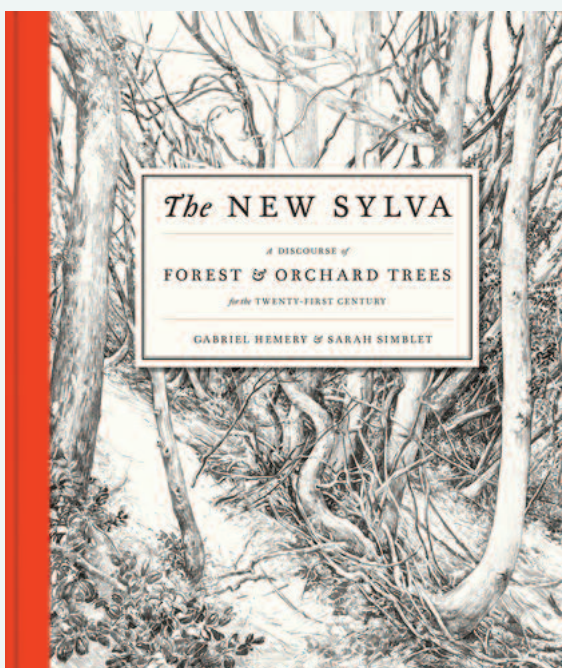
While Evelyn concluded with a practical section and 'some encouragement and proposals for the planting and improving of His Majesty's forests', Hemery takes this concept further with a discussion of future forests, climate change and the green economy. He saves a heartfelt plea until the end: 'All human beings should plant one tree for every year they live on Earth.' If we all did that, perhaps our commitment to woodland industry and culture would be strengthened.

The New Sylva is a fine-looking book, carefully designed, beautifully illustrated and



John Evelyn by Sir Godfrey Kneller, 1687. Evelyn was one of the great diarists of the 17th century, and the author of some 20 books, but he is perhaps best remembered for Sylva. In 1685, his friend Pepys persuaded him to sit for his portrait, and it is significant that he was depicted holding a copy of Sylva.

written with intelligence and charm. It is impossible to do justice to the range and breadth of research in this short review, but suffice to say that this thought-provoking book will be both useful and absorbing to foresters and casual readers alike.



Special offer for SWOG members

The New Sylva Hardback, 400 pages, 290 x 245 mm
ISBN: 9781408835449 Price £50 (RRP)

The New Sylva will be published on 10 April. SWOG members can order the book direct from Bloomsbury Publishing at 30% discount (which includes free p&p). Please visit www.bloomsbury.com/uk/the-new-sylva-9781408835449/ or call 01256 302 699 and enter the discount code Sylva30 at the check-out. Offer ends 31st May 2014.

Exhibitions of Sarah Simblet's artwork will be exhibited throughout the country during the year. Visit the New Sylva blog for more details.

Visit Woodlands.co.uk/blog or click on the title to read the full blog.

Nitrates, land use and fresh-water systems

Chris discusses the problem of build-up of soluble forms of nitrogen, particularly nitrate, in water.

VOCs and pine trees.

How rich woodland scents from pine forest might help to mitigate the effects of climate change/global warming.

Cats as predators

Lewis writes about a study into domestic cats as killers. There are 10 million cats in Britain, and even well-fed felines are predators.



Spoon Carving – with Barn the Spoon

Liz improves her spoon-carving skills on a course in Hackney with ‘Barn the Spoon’.

Native dominants or ‘thugs’ in the woodland

Invasive species – are they all bad?

Woodlands TV

Woodlands TV (www.woodlands.co.uk/tv/) is a fantastic archive, with a video on every conceivable subject relating to forestry: woodworking, practical guides, crafts, survival skills, conservation and much more. Subscribe to the channel for email updates on the latest releases.



The origins of Woodlands for sale

How it all started – an interview with Margaret and Alistair Hanton, the founders of Woodlands for Sale. Like many great ideas, it began with simple thought – why can't everyone have their own wood?

Making Willow baskets

Expert basket maker Jackie Sweet shares her passion for this craft and speaks of the historical, practical and artistic significance of basket weaving.

Woodchip boiler

Clive Jones tells us about the processes of the chip wood-fired boiler system his family use with great success on their land at Moonfleet Farm in Dorset. Clive explains how they manage their coppiced woodland and how the efficient wood chip boiler system supplies the heating and hot water for the farm house and cottage using waste wood fuel, hedge cuttings and prunings from the farm.

How to dowse for water

With an academic background in physics and a range of expertise in hydrology, geology and mechanical engineering, Guy Hudson talks about his work as a professional water dowser. He discusses the historical and current need for water divining and the potential technical difficulties when drilling for water. He also demonstrates introductory training methods.



This is not an exhaustive list, so if you know of any others, please let us know!

Woodlands.co.uk and SWOG will be exhibiting at Woodfest Wales, Treefest and Bentley.

Weird and Wonderful Wood

17–18 May 2014 Haughley Park, Wetherden, Stowmarket, Suffolk
www.weirdandwonderfulwood.co.uk/

Royal Highland Show 2014

19–22 June 2014 Edinburgh
royalhighlandshow.org

Blackdown Hills Woodfair

21 June 2014 Wrangway, Wellington, Somerset
www.woodbiz.co.uk

West's Wood Fair

21–22 June 2014 East Dean, Chichester, West Sussex
westwoodfair.co.uk/

Woodfest Wales

27–29 June 2014 Caerwys, North Wales
www.woodfestwales.co.uk

South Downs Woodfair

12–13 July 2014 Horndean, Petersfield, Hampshire
www.woodlandcrafts.co.uk

New Forest and Hampshire Show

29–31 July 2014 Brockenhurst, Hampshire
www.newforestshow.co.uk

Treefest at Westonbirt Arboretum

23–25 August 2014 Tetbury, Gloucestershire
www.forestry.gov.uk

Stock Gaylard Oak Fair

23–24 August 2014
 Sturminster Newton, Dorset
www.stockgaylard.com/oak-fair

National Forest Woodfair

25 August 2014 Beacon Hill Country Park, Leicestershire
www.nationalforest.org

Wychwood Forest Fair

7 September 2014 Charlbury, Oxfordshire
www.wychwoodproject.org

Lincolnshire Firewood Fair

7 September 2014, Revesby Estate
www.lincolnshirefirewoodfair.co.uk

APF Wood Show

18–20 September 2014
 Ragley Estate, Alcester, Warwickshire
www.apfexhibition.co.uk

Chilterns AONB Countryside and Food Festival

14 September 2014
 Ashridge Estate, Hertfordshire
www.chilternsaonb.org/

Bentley Weald Woodfair

26–28 September 2014 Lewes, East Sussex
www.bentley.org.uk/events

Surrey Hills Woodfair 2014

4–5 October 2014 Birtley House, Bramley
www.surreyhills.org