

Small Woodland Owners' Group

Newsletter June 2014



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www.swog.org.uk



There's more news about ash die back, with many ways for woodland owners to help in the search for a cure. Thanks to Mike Pepler for letting us turn another video into a 'how-to' guide, and and Mark Janes for his contribution about 'downshifting' to a 60-acre wood in Ross-shire. Please keep your news flowing in – we're delighted to hear from you all.

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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In this issue

- **Events and News** 3
 - Charcoal-making course
 - RFS Winners
 - Chalara – new guidance
 - Woodland Grant revived
 - National Forest Way opens
- **SWOG Forum** 7
- **Make a mallet with Mike** 8
- **Tarrel Wood** 10
- **Woodlands blogs and TV** 11
- **Woodfair listing** 12

SWOG COURSE LIST APRIL 2014



SWOG Course Listings

Anyone who buys a wood from Woodlands.co.uk is given £300 towards a woodland course to help towards owners' enjoyment and knowledge. These courses can encompass anything from basket-weaving, green woodworking or pole lathe turning, to chainsaw tuition and woodland management. Members are asked to write a short resumé of their course, noting how effective they

found it, and whether they would recommend it to others.

We are gradually incorporating all these valuable comments into a database listing which can be searched by area or course topic. We hope it will be useful to anyone searching for help and guidance in choosing a woodland course. Technological gremlins have bedevilled progress, but version two is now on the SWOG website here: www.swog.org.uk/courses-4

Charcoal-making course, Guildford

Ian Baldwin is a woodman based near Guildford in Surrey who, as part of his business, makes charcoal. This is an excellent, if rather labour-intensive use of wood which may have little other value. Small diameter wood which is unsuitable for firewood can go in the kiln, for example. If you're managing your woodland and are looking for something to do with all the materials you've cut, you could consider turning it into charcoal.

Ian is happy to offer a free course to those willing to come lend a hand for half a day, helping to empty a kiln, refill it and set light to it. A simple barter swap of labour for training, based within 8 miles of Guildford.



He has trained a few folk over the years and is very keen to encourage more people to make better use of their woods.

Visit his website to contact Ian directly if this is of interest: www.weyvalleywoodman.co.uk

RFS Winners – Excellence in Forestry Awards

The Royal Forestry Society has announced the winners of the Best of England Excellence in Forestry Awards, together with the first Woodlands for Climate Change Award. Judges in all categories were awed by the quality of all entries.

Once again, SWOG stalwarts Sarah Walters and Stephen Briggs have won the Small Woodland category and we send them our very warmest congratulations.

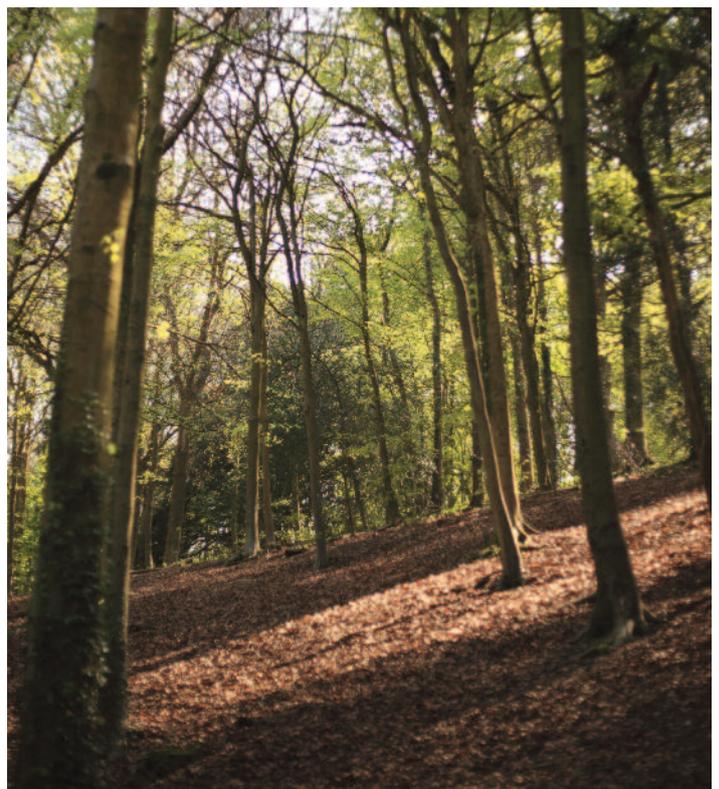
RFS Co-ordinator Trefor Thompson said: 'The quality of the field was evidence of the strength of woodland knowledge and management throughout England.

'All those who entered the woodland and schools categories had already proved themselves as excellent winners in their regions in previous years, and they were all therefore competing against the very toughest of competition.

'The introduction of an England-wide Woodlands for Climate Change Award, sponsored by the Forestry Commission in partnership with the Environment Agency Climate Ready project, reflects the need to build

resilience into our woodlands for the future. Those who have won awards are all demonstrating how management can be adapted to meet the challenges of today and of tomorrow.'

A full list of winners can be seen here: www.rfs.org.uk. The Awards will be presented at a special event at the Hay Barns, Upton, Oxfordshire, on 9 July 2014.



New Chalara guidance



The ash trees are finally in leaf and chalara is back in the news. The RFS has issued new guidance and in Suffolk, the Living Ash project is running a workshop for

woodland managers and concerned landowners.

RFS advice

New chalara (*Chalara fraxinea*) ash dieback management guidance notes have been issued for woodland owners and managers. New cases of chalara ash dieback are expected to be reported over the coming months as trees come into leaf.

Chalara Workshop

Lawshill Village Hall, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk. 19 June 9.30–4 pm

This free workshop will bring together managers of ash research sites, concerned landowners and managers of woodlands experiencing or threatened by Chalara ash dieback. The aim is to share information and experience and to renew partnerships in ash genetics and tree improvement research.

Speakers at the workshop will be:

- Dr Jo Clark, Earth Trust – The Future Trees Trust ash improvement programme and the Living Ash Project.
- Ted Wilson, Silviculture Research International – The biology of *Chalara fraxinea*, identification and reporting of infected ash trees.
- Dr Ian Bancroft, University of York – The genomics of ash and current research on

The Society is urging woodland owners affected by the disease to consider their woodland objectives and local circumstances before deciding on which actions to take. Following FC principles, the RFS has listed management options for:

- unaffected stands
- young infected stands
- stands where timber collection is not a consideration
- older stands
- coppice stands
- urban, parkland hedgerow trees.

Download the guidance [here](#).

RFS Development Director Simon Lloyd said: “We are urging owners to take a measured and responsible approach to outbreaks, taking into account local circumstances. A great deal of research is ongoing both into identifying disease resistant trees which can be propagated and planted in the future, and into ways to control and slow the spread of the disease, and we will be keeping members updated.’

markers for disease resistance

- Dr Gabriel Hemery, Sylva Foundation – Getting people involved! The AshTag citizen science project.

- Ted Wilson, Silviculture Research International. Silviculture and management of ash – best practice advice for managers.

After lunch, we will visit two local woodlands to see Chalara ash dieback – Frithy Wood, a mature woodland and Golden Wood, a young woodland where ash dieback was first reported in Suffolk.

Numbers are limited. To reserve your place contact Tim Rowland on 01453 884264 or e-mail him at: Tim.Rowland@futuretrees.org

The Living Ash Project is a DEFRA-funded five-year project to identify resilient ash trees and to develop techniques to rapidly reproduce them. Learn more about the Living Ash Project at www.livingashproject.org.uk.



Woodfest Wales, Caerwys, North Wales, 27–29 June

Woodfest Wales is back for three days of timbersports, crafts, and exhilarating displays. Woodfest has seven different event arenas, showcasing traditional skills and hi-tech forestry. There are over 150 outside stands of demonstrations and trade, of which Woodlands.co.uk will be one. There are also six main marquees full of interesting and unique goods produced in this country.

New for 2014, Woodfest Rocks on Saturday 28 June.

Woodfest Wales makes for a fantastic day out – don't miss it! Visit the website www.woodfestwales.co.uk for more details.

Woodfuel Grant revived

Just as we finished the newsletter, the Forestry Commission announced that the Woodfuel Woodland Improvement Grant would be revived. This new grant supports the sustainable production of woodfuel and other timber products. Work will need to meet the UK Forestry Standard.

The grant offers 60% towards the cost of work, and doesn't take account of the timber income that results. The main operations supported focus on roads, tracks and other infrastructure to assist the extraction of timber from woodland. For more information, visit the Woodfuel WIG page on the FC website.



Ash Tag project

If you are interested in tracking the health of your ash trees and contributing to a research project into chalara, it is worth signing up with the University of East Anglia's Ash Tag project.

Having worked to produce a smartphone app last year, which enabled the public to submit photos of diseased trees, they have now reverted to a more traditional method for woodland owners to record the health or otherwise of their ash. Owners can buy a cheap recyclable pack of tree tags that will enable you to physically tag any ash tree with a numbered aluminium AshTag and then geo-tag it online to become the 'steward' of that tree.

Participants can track the progress of their trees over time as they and others submit photos of them. You can also use the live map of all tagged trees to go 'AshTag hunting', and see how many tagged trees you can find.

The photo gallery users will create for each tagged ash tree will help scientists to identify how the disease progresses and, crucially, the characteristics of trees which don't get the

disease and appear to be less susceptible.

By physically tagging ash trees, we can build up a clear picture of how ash dieback affects trees in the long term, and hopefully track down resistant trees that can be used to fight back against this devastating disease. Together, we can ensure that ash trees continue to thrive in the UK for generations to come.

Professor Allan Downie of the John Innes Centre is leading a network of research groups in a project called Nornex, which aims to provide tools that can help understand, and ultimately limit the impact of ash dieback.

Ashtag will be feeding our data into this group and Allan has said, 'it will be of great help to engage the

public in identifying trees that do not show chalara-induced disease symptoms in situations where adjacent trees are severely diseased'. To order a pack, visit the website www.ashtag.org



National Forest Way

The new long distance walking trail, the National Forest Way, was launched in May, bringing a wonderful new forest walk to the Midlands. The trail, which has been three years in the making, uses public rights of way and permissive paths to take walkers on a journey of discovery through the length and breadth of the National Forest.



The 75-mile trail extends from the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire to Beacon Hill Country Park in Leicestershire, and can be walked west to east or east to west. The Way is divided into 12 stages with directional leaflets available for each stage. Walkers can dip in for a day, walk for the weekend or take on the whole 75 miles in one go.

Catherine Graham-Harrison, Chair of the National Forest Company, said: 'The opening of the Way is like a coming of age for us. Many years' work has gone into creating the Forest, with more than 8 million trees having been planted and new habitats created and

maintained – meadows, grassland, wetland, and, of course, woodland. There's still more to do, alongside our partners and local communities, to create and maintain this wonderful forest for everyone, but the opening of the long distance trail is a marvellous way to show how far we've come.'

The website www.nationalforestway.co.uk is really useful and allows walkers to find walks according to scenery, such as ancient woodland or great views, length, or simply location. Users can also download OS maps, find accommodation or pubs and learn a little about the area they are going to visit.

SWA meetings

The Small Woods Association (SWA) are running a number of meetings around the country in June. You must be a member of the SWA to attend – see the SWA website for details of how to join.

Saturday 10 June 10 am-12.30 New England Wood, Cuckfield, West Sussex

Fascinating historic 10ha ancient woodland (ash and oak), managed by a community group for wildlife and access. When the group acquired the woodland 30 years ago it was thick with rhododendron. This they have now removed, and the ground flora has recovered well.

14 June 2-4.30 pm Foulsyke, Wasdale, Cumbria

Examining thinning, use of tree shelters, encouraging natural regeneration and deer damage in a 1ha wood of mature oak and 1ha of newly planted mixed broadleaves in the Lake District.

19th July 2014 10.00 am - 4.00 pm Berry Wood, Ashurst Wood, West Sussex

Coppicing with wildlife in mind. Philip Glyn will use five coppice cants, cut during each of the last five years, to show how active traditional management greatly enhances wildlife.

The Forum has taken on the tone of an episode of CSI, with long threads on woodland safety, in relation both to humans and tools.

Oldclaypaws' close encounter with his billhook prompted an outpouring of sorry tales and a widespread reflection on safety while using woodland kit, both powered and traditional.

In fact, if the tools don't get you, the vegetation might – **TerryH** now wears steel mesh-lined gloves after an injury caused by a hawthorn needle.

The general tone was one of ruefulness, as several users realised that injuries are often caused when people are in a hurry. The difference between pausing to put a glove on or not bothering can be a stretch in A&E or at worst, the loss of a digit. **Davetb**, a consultant anaesthetist by day, noted that he has seen some nasty injuries caused by chainsaws, 'which frighten me enough to be a bit more careful'.

Perhaps the most gruesome tale came from **Greyman**, a health and safety officer, who has caught his left knee with his chainsaw not once, but twice.

For those in search of cautionary tales, visit the thread marked 'Oop's on the Forum.

Vandalism, theft and fire are also subjects under discussion. Vigilance and preventative action will usually protect woodland owners and

their possessions and this thread is full of good advice.

Zathras, who has only owned his wood for six months, arrived in May to find that despite its remote location away from tracks and roads, the wood had been invaded and thieves had broken into a locked box of kit. Items were stolen and some things were burnt. Bitter lessons have been learnt – think twice about storing fuel in your wood, and take anything of value home. As **SitkaSpruce** said, 'None of us really knows what happens to our woods when we are not there though some of the trail cameras others have used have shown unwelcome visitors'.

Among the expressions of sympathy were some useful suggestions. **Jennysmate** wrote, 'The only way I can see to keep tools secure in the woods is to bury them out of sight. This could be as simple as digging a hole and putting a dustbin in it'. Read the thread here: www.swog.org.uk/forum.

On a happier note, members have been waxing lyrical about their favourite tree species here. Opinions vary, but **Lincswood** summed it up well, 'For me, it's anything that has been standing for at least a century before I was born, and will still be around for well over a century after I've gone'.



Zatharas Wood, - thanks to Mike for the wonderful photo.

Make a mallet with Mike

Mike and Tracy Pepler's blog (peplers.blogspot.co.uk) about their activities in Chestnut Coppice in Sussex will be familiar to many SWOG members. It includes a number of really useful videos on a variety of woodland subjects. Mike has kindly allowed us to turn a couple of them into step-by-step guides. This month, Mike demonstrates how to make a simple but effective mallet from a single log.

You will need:

- one log about 45cm long and 15cm in diameter
- a side axe
- a draw knife
- a chainsaw (Please exercise caution and have full regard to health and safety when using a chainsaw.)
Note that if you don't have a chainsaw you can use a bow saw - it just takes a bit longer!



1. Choose a hardwood log. Mike has used birch, which has been seasoned for two years so it is pretty hard. You can make the mallet from green wood, but the wood may split as it dries. Other woods, such as hornbeam or ash, can be used, but avoid species such as sweet chestnut which tends to split.

2. It's easiest to begin with a long log. First cut a slot around the log about 10 cm from the end. This will mark the edge of the mallet head. Use the chainsaw or bow saw to make a shallow cut about 2 cm deep all the way round the log.

3. Next move another 20 cm towards the middle of the log and cut through. You will be left with a log 30–40 cm long.



4. The next stage is to form the handle, using a side axe. Gradually chip and slice down the length of the log. The slot cut for the mallet head will stop you going too far. This isn't an especially quick process, and you'll need to turn the log around to make the handle as even as possible. It's worth saving all the chippings, as they make excellent kindling.



5. Once the handle is formed, it needs to be more finely smoothed and shaped using a draw knife. At this point, you can also smooth off any rough edges or splinters.



That's all there is to it! The video can be viewed on YouTube [here](#).

For those wondering how best to use their new mallet, try Mike's neat way of making kindling.

Take a small log, a froe and your new mallet. Tie an old rubber inner tube from a bike around the bottom of the log. Make several cuts across the log, then turn it through 90° and repeat.

The inner tube holds everything together, and the sticks can be tipped into a bucket. The video can be viewed on YouTube [here](#), or on Mike's website, peplers.blogspot.co.uk.



Tarrel Wood – downshifting in Scotland

Mark Janes and his wife moved to Scotland and have taken over a 60-acre wood on the Moray Firth coastline in Ross-shire. Mark says they are down-shifting, but they seem to be working hard in the wood and have a 15-year plan in place for both management and production. Mark has been kind enough to write about the work they have undertaken and their plans for the future.



The area is 60 acres on the Tarbat Peninsula, which has quite a benign microclimate given its latitude. It is surrounded by lowland agricultural land and is very different from what you'd find further west (or even south) on the higher ground.

The woodland is a plantation of Noble Fir, which was planted and has been managed for foliage production. The product is used in the festive decoration trade, to make wreaths, etc. It is 25 years old and we have had it for six years. For most of that time we have managed it as 'business as usual', although on a smaller scale compared to the previous owners, who drove it quite intensively, using artificial fertilisers, herbicides, etc.

During our ownership I've had a chance to observe and have a good think about the



woodland's potential. We have a 15-year plan to diversify it, both from species and product viewpoints. I'd like to introduce some native broadleaves and end up with a range of outputs, including fruit, nuts, timber products and fungi. I envisage coppicing the broadleaves. The ultimate aim (when it's time for me to hang up the chainsaw!) is to compartmentalise the wood into four sections, each of which is capable of yielding this diverse range of products, so that they represent a potential livelihood for someone who wants to make their living from working a wood. At this point, we'll offer the compartments for lease, rent or maybe croft them. I'm 55 and would like to get to this point by the time I'm 65–70. I think the wood will always be predominantly conifer, but it would be great to tip the balance slightly.

Immediate plans

- Thin the existing plantation by about 10%
- Establish a tree nursery so that we can transplant and 'bring on' some of the naturally regenerating seedlings in the wood.
- Expand some of the natural glades and start edge-planting these with coppice and shrubs.

We've just recruited a labour-force of hens to help us clear areas in preparation for planting!

When we bought the woodland we were completely new to woodland management, and although we're on a steep learning curve, we still have a long way to go.

Future planting

Native trees that thrive here include Scots Pine, Birch, Rowan and Alder. Our block of Noble Fir is surrounded by a shelterbelt of mixed species, including oak, alder and whitebeam. They all seem to do OK. Many of the local farmers and crofters are planting willow as a fast-growing biofuel crop. Some of the naturally open areas that I want to open up and replant are in relatively low spots. I wonder if the ground is damper here, and maybe that's why the Nobles haven't thrived so much in those areas. I'm targeting Alder and Willow for these.

I'd like to try Hazel and I'd love to grow Chestnut. I know we're out of its range but wonder whether things may be different in five to ten years with climate change.

Woodland products and timber use

Currently, the main product from our wood is Noble Fir foliage. This is an established product



within the Christmas Tree industry, and is used for festive decorations such as wreaths, table centres

and garlands.

We harvest the branches using normal extending loppers and bundle them into 5kg bundles (roughly 7–8 branches per bundle). Large wholesale orders are put onto pallets and taken away by lorry.

Obviously, one has to be careful not to take too many branches from each tree, otherwise the tree's health will suffer. We only take the tip of the branch, leaving the residual amount on the tree to regrow. The previous owners were harvesting on an industrial scale, taking upwards of 70-80 tonnes a year out of the woodland. This required a lot of input of artificial fertilisers and weedkillers to maintain the health of the trees. When we took ownership in 2008, we



decided to make two major changes.

First, reduce the annual amount harvested. We now take around 15 tonnes a year. I work with a partner who buys the bulk of the foliage 'on the tree' from me. He brings up his own team of contractors and they handle the cutting, transportation and sale. I help with the extraction. We cut the rest ourselves for some smaller customers, and for our own use. We've now divided the woodland into four quadrants, and work one quadrant each year on a four year rotation, a bit like coppice, I suppose!

Second, we now produce our own wreaths. We use a Mitchell Clamp Ring system, which is a very time-effective way of making wreaths. The foliage is assembled onto a wire ring and clamped in place using a foot pedal-operated jig.

We sell these decorated and undecorated to local outlets in the season, and directly to consumers on line. There is far more value in a wreath than just in the foliage and, given our remote location, it makes more sense both commercially and environmentally to make the wreaths locally and send them out, rather than transporting large quantities of foliage.



Thanks to Mark Janes for his account and images.

TV and Blogs

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

Tree planting

Bangers, steaks and whips – no, not a barbeque, but tree-planting with Stuart. A fantastic blog with plenty of advice on how to do the job properly.

Restoring an old lake

A practical guide from Dick. He explains how and why he decided to reinstate a lake in a boggy area of woodland.

Noises of a didgeridoo maker

Hedge-layer turned didgeridoo maker, Stuart Murdoch explains how he learnt this ancient Australian craft.

Woodland and forests in Shakespeare's plays

Perhaps in honour of Shakespeare's 500th anniversary, Angus muses on the symbolic uses of woodland in Shakesperean literature.



Soil seed banks

Chris explains the importance of seeds stored in the soil of most ecosystems. Transient seeds last for only one season, but persistent species can remain dormant for up to 40 years.

Sharing tools and skills: streetbank.com

Angus reports on a new free website for sharing tools and skills locally.

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.

Planting bluebells in the woods

Ron Baxter leads a team of conservation volunteers (Convols) into planting a spectacular bluebell forest in Scarborough.

Combating chalara

Biochemistry Professor Anthony Moore of the University of Sussex shares his research passion for the AOX enzyme which he believes has numerous real-world applications – one of which could be to produce a specific fungicide, to lessen the environmental damage caused by repeated applications of more generalised

fungicides, to help fight Ash Dieback disease.

Buying, owning and living with your wood

This month, the Woodlands TV team have gone into over-drive and uploaded nine videos of interviews with Woodlands and SWOG staff. They address the questions most often asked about buying and owning a wood, from how to do it, whether it is a good investment, how to manage it, and what support owners can expect.





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.

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
westswoodfair.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 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

Enchanted Forest

3-26 October 2014, Perthshire
www.enchantedforest.org.uk

Surrey Hills Woodfair 2014

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

Tweed Valley Forest Festival 2014

24 October-2 November 2014, Scotland
www.forest-festival.com