



# **Small Woodland Owners' Group**

**Newsletter February 2015**

**Ancient forest appears off  
Norfolk coast**

**Put new life into your woodland –  
coppice!**

**Basic bushcraft tools**



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John Clark continues his bushcraft tips, with an article on that most basic implement, the knife, and Chris Letchford of the Sussex and Surrey Coppice Group, explains why coppicing is so useful and how to go about it.

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



## SWOG COURSE LIST APRIL 2014



Courses are listed by location. You can search the lists by entering a key. Press CTRL F or CMD F (Mac users) and enter the search term.

## 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. Buyers 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. View it on the SWOG website here:

[www.swog.org.uk/courses-4](http://www.swog.org.uk/courses-4)

## Signs of spring

It's cold outside, but anyone who has been working in their woods lately has probably seen some unmistakable signs of spring. Your suspicions have been officially confirmed by the Woodland Trust, who report that if Mother Nature is an accurate barometer, spring is just around the corner. Snowdrops, hazel catkins and even ladybirds and butterflies have been recorded across the UK on the Woodland Trust's **Nature's Calendar website**.

The Trust has been monitoring the arrival of the seasons for the last 15 years, backing up their findings with historical records dating back to the 18th century. So far in 2015 the conservation charity has already received sightings of snowdrops at 120 locations across the country, 74 records of hazel catkins and even sightings of ladybirds, and small tortoiseshell, peacock and red admiral butterflies.

The recent freezing weather may have temporarily paused the advance of spring, but it causes less of a problem than a late cold spell, when many more species may be awake from hibernation or flowering – as happened in 2013.

Dr Kate Lewthwaite, Woodland Trust Citizen Science Manager, said: 'People still seem surprised to see snowdrops and butterflies in early January, but our warmer climate in recent years means this is now pretty common.'

'Records added to Nature's Calendar by the public have enabled scientists to learn how trees, plants and wildlife adapt to our changing climate. If we can ensure our natural environment is diverse, resilient and interconnected it will make it easier for wildlife to adjust too.'

According to the Met Office, 2014 was the warmest year on record, and three of the last four years have seen some of the earliest spring averages that the Trust has compiled from public records. Over the last 25 years flowers have bloomed up to 12 days earlier than previously, according to a report published by the Royal Society in 2010.

Spring activity normally first occurs in the south-west of the UK and works its way north in the following weeks and months. In November the charity received a record of



frogspawn on the Lizard Peninsula in Cornwall, the earliest such incidence for nine years. The Trust will be working in partnership with the British Science Association to estimate the rate of spring progresses this year.

Nature's Calendar is a resource compiled from the recordings of thousands of volunteers around the country who note the signs of the seasons where they live. More than just amateur notes, their findings are a crucial source of evidence of how climate change is affecting UK plants and wildlife.

Join in or look at the results on the website, [www.naturescalendar.org.uk](http://www.naturescalendar.org.uk)

## Ancient forest appears off Norfolk coast

April Fool's Day is still some way off, so this rather wonderful story must be true.

A prehistoric forest has been discovered by scuba divers exploring just 200 metres off the coast of Norfolk. Dawn Watson was diving at the relatively shallow depth of 8 metres when she swam over what appeared to be a long blackened ridge. On closer inspection, Dawn realised she was looking at wood and at first, thought it might be a wreck. However, after swimming along a little further, it became clear she was looking at entire trees with their branches still attached.

Geologists believe that the ancient forest was part of the prehistoric Doggerland, which stretched along a land shelf from Norfolk to the Continent. It was gradually flooded by rising sea levels at the end of the last ice age, and the trees were probably felled by a 5-metre tsunami that



*Ancient forest. 'Biogradska suma' by Snežana Trifunović (Wikimedia Commons)*

swept down the North Sea some 8,000 years ago. The storm surge during the 2014 winter appears to have shifted thousands of tons of sand and exposed the trees.

Dawn has been diving in the North Sea for 16 years. 'It was amazing to find and to think the trees had been lying there completely undiscovered for thousands of years. You certainly don't expect to go out for a quick dive and find a forest.'

Rob Spray, Mrs Watson's partner, has started surveying the forest with her. He said, 'At one time it would have been a full-blown Tolkien-style forest, stretching for hundreds of miles. It would have grown and grown and in those days there would have been no one to fell it, so the forest would have been massive.'

The trees have provided a rich ecosystem for marine life, which has flourished in the wooden reef, highlighting once again the value of dead wood for biodiversity.

Dawn and Rob continue to study the area and their photographs and film are available via the BBC here: [www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-norfolk-30944708](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-norfolk-30944708)



*Doggerland by Max Naylor (Wikimedia Commons)*



*The nights are still long and the days icy, but we are starting to receive dates for the woodfairs and shows that brighten up the summer.*

*Woodlands.co.uk and SWOG will be at Woodfest Wales, Westonbirt and Bentley. Please send us details of your event.*

### **Weird and Wonderful Wood**

16–17 May 2015 Haughley Park, Wetherden, Stowmarket, Suffolk  
[www.weirdandwonderfulwood.co.uk](http://www.weirdandwonderfulwood.co.uk)

### **The Bushcraft Show**

23–25 May 2015 Beehive Farm Woodland Lakes, Rosliston, Derbyshire  
[www.thebushcraftshow.co.uk](http://www.thebushcraftshow.co.uk)

### **Royal Highland Show 2015**

18–21 June Edinburgh  
[royalhighlandshow.org](http://royalhighlandshow.org)

### **Woodfest Wales**

26–28 June 2015 Caerwys, North Wales  
[www.woodfestwales.co.uk](http://www.woodfestwales.co.uk)

### **Woodlands Country Show**

11–12 July 2015 Royal Victoria Country Park, Southampton, Hampshire

[www.woodlandcrafts.co.uk](http://www.woodlandcrafts.co.uk)

### **New Forest and Hampshire Show**

29–31 July 2015 Brockenhurst, Hampshire  
[www.newforestshow.co.uk](http://www.newforestshow.co.uk)

### **Treefest at Westonbirt Arboretum**

29–31 August 2015 Tetbury, Gloucestershire  
[www.forestry.gov.uk](http://www.forestry.gov.uk)

### **Stock Gaylard Oak Fair**

29–30 August 2015  
 Sturminster Newton, Dorset  
[www.stockgaylard.com](http://www.stockgaylard.com)

### **National Forest Woodfair**

31 August 2015 Beacon Hill Country Park, Leicestershire (*early bird ticket discount until 5 May*) [www.nationalforest.org](http://www.nationalforest.org)

### **Wychwood Forest Fair**

6 September 2015 Charlbury, Oxfordshire  
[www.wychwoodproject.org](http://www.wychwoodproject.org)

### **Confor Woodland Show 2015**

10–11 September 2015  
 Longleat Estate, Wiltshire  
[www.confor.org.uk](http://www.confor.org.uk)

### **Bentley Weald 20th Anniversary Woodfair**

18–20 September 2015 Lewes, East Sussex  
[www.bentley.org.uk/events](http://www.bentley.org.uk/events)

### **Surrey Hills Woodfair**

3–4 October 2015 Birtley House, Bramley  
[www.surreyhills.org](http://www.surreyhills.org)

## **SWOG Meetings**

The meeting in Braffawd Wood near York has proved really popular and we would like to run a few more meetings at venues around the country. To do that we need your help or more specifically, YOUR woodland! SWOG meetings are a great way of meeting other woodland owners, of sharing stories and expertise and of discovering what went right or

wrong in other woodlands. The meetings usually take up half a day – Saturday or Sunday works best – can be completely informal, or might include a talk or a demonstration of some sort. I will help to organise numbers and send out details to visitors, so the only thing required by owners is perhaps the provision of a cup of tea – but even that's optional. If you would like to host a meeting, please get in touch.

## Put new life into your woodland

*Chris Letchford, Chairman of the Sussex and Surrey Coppice Group explains why coppicing is so valuable in small woodlands.*

Christmas has passed and the New Year now begun. No doubt many woodland owners are looking forward to spring, a time of regeneration, an awakening of the woodland life. How about taking this further and really improving your woodland by undertaking some coppicing?

### **The greatest benefit for biodiversity**

Coppicing, usually of hazel or chestnut (but it will work with any broadleaf / hardwood species) is one activity that brings the greatest benefit for increasing biodiversity in your woodland. There are, no doubt, various definitions of what coppicing actually is, but all will revolve around cutting and clearing areas to open up the woodland floor to daylight, bringing with it warmth from the sun and triggering re-generation of the woody species you have cleared.

The woodland floor is also a seed bank. Within it will be seeds blown in or deposited there years ago, probably before your hazel, willow, birch or chestnut established themselves and closed the canopy over them. By opening up that seed bank to more light and warmth some of those seeds will germinate. Many of the plants

*This cleared area of chestnut and birch is in Verdley Wood, Midhurst, West Sussex. After one year the ground was a riot of colour with dog violets growing in patches and foxgloves amongst the many varieties of flowers that grew. Numbers of the rare pearl border fritillary butterfly have increased dramatically and have done so each year since.*

that follow will be annuals or bi-annuals like red campion and foxgloves or possibly perennials such as dog violets or bluebells. Apart from a riot of colour, all will be nectar generators that will benefit insect life and, as a direct result, increase the level of bird activity and, probably, variety of species.

To the forester, coppicing is means of harvesting a sustainable material that will re-grow and in years to come, provide another harvest. Often that forester, or coppice worker will use the product of the harvest for making a variety of products, from walking sticks to fencing panels, hedge-laying stakes and binders, to living sculptures and in some cases, charcoal. In a future article, I will explore some of the many products that can be made very simply.

### **How to start coppicing**

So how do we go about coppicing? Depending upon your woodland and your management plan, you will probably be able to divide your area into a number of 'coupes' – areas which will receive attention on a rotational basis. If, for example, you have hazel you might consider cutting it on a seven-year rotation, which would be ideal if you plan to use the produce for



hedging stakes and binders. Divide your area into seven coupes and work on one the first year, the one next to it the second year and so on. Working in a rotation allows the wildlife that comes in after the first cut to move around your woodland as you cut. It creates a mixed age range of plants which in itself will benefit wildlife.

### Cutting

Once you have sorted out the areas and timing you need to cut each plant or 'stool' close to the ground. Cut ALL stems if there are a lot coming from a single base. That way, the plant has the best chance of re-generating evenly. You may be one of the many whose woodland has not been managed for years and might have hazel that is of a considerable thickness. Don't worry – go ahead and cut all the stems. Hazel makes good logs! It is important to angle your cuts to let rain run off the stems. In doing so, try to make sure the run-off is away from the centre of the stools to help minimize the chances of water retention on the stool itself. It will minimize the chance of the stool rotting.

### Using the coppice

So you now have a lot of cut material and a cleared area. You can use the tops and side shoots for pea sticks if you have enough, but better is to use them to protect the cut stools from deer. Deer absolutely love nice fresh new growth of most coppiced species. If you are unable to fence your plot to keep little Bambi out, then one way you can help is by creating protection for each stool. Do this by trimming the side shoots from your produce and pushing them into the ground about a foot from the stool and about 3 to 4 inches apart (enough to make it difficult for a deer to get a head between them). Create a circle then weave additional material into your circle and form a bee-hive shape over the stool. Doing this will help the plant establish shoots and, with a bit of luck,



*The picture above shows a simple structure made from brush that will help protect the stool from deer in the early stages of re-growth.*

keep the deer at bay long enough to let the fleshy shoots grow above deer munching height. After a couple of years the structures will rot down and provide nutrients for the stools.

You should now have plenty of produce of varying thicknesses and lengths. You have also given your cut area the best medicine it can have to help biodiversity and trigger regeneration. You will be able to enjoy the fruits of your labour for years to come as you watch the increase in butterflies and other insects, birdlife and, of course, wild flowers.

*There are several organisations for those interested in learning more about coppice and coppice products. The Sussex and Surrey Coppice Group, is in the south-east, [www.coppicgroup.org.uk](http://www.coppicgroup.org.uk). Chris is a director of the National Coppice Federation, [www.ncfed.org.uk](http://www.ncfed.org.uk), which can put you in touch with a local group.*

## Basic bushcraft tools

*This month John Clark takes a look at some basic tools, exploring the cutting tools that might be needed.*

A traveller or hunter adept in bushlore and bushcraft carries the bare necessities of equipment, relying instead on essential knowledge and skills to gather and manufacture what is needed to sustain themselves in the field.

There are, however, some fundamental bits of kit without which, the challenge is unnecessarily great.



### The knife

This is probably the most important piece of equipment in our armoury. With a knife, and accompanied by a little knowledge, there is little that can't be accomplished: building shelters, creating fire, sterilising water are all tasks that are made a simpler. There is an overwhelming choice of knives but a few key elements will help you choose something suitable.

**Type of metal** There are many different metal technologies applied to knife construction. The two most common steels used in blade making are high carbon steel and stainless steel. Both have advantages and disadvantages.

*Stainless steel* blades contain chromium, which prevent corrosion. If you are fishing or working in damp conditions, a stainless blade may be a good choice. They can be slightly harder to sharpen, and depending on the metal type, the edge retention may not last as long as high carbon steels. The latest stainless blades can be exceptional and in some cases out-perform high carbon blades.

*High carbon steel* is considered ideal for a bushcraft blade – the higher the carbon content of a blade, the harder and tougher the blade will be, making the edge retention much greater.

The disadvantage is that it can be brittle and susceptible to corrosion. These blades are often coated to stop corrosion and require a regular coating of oil or lubrication to stop rust.

**Blades – fixed or folding?** There are some good folding knives on the market today. Perhaps the most useful is the multi tool – a pair of pliers plus multiple blades can be very useful.

However, folding knives are generally not tough enough to cope with heavy-duty bushcraft tasks. Fixed blade knives are generally preferred – but not all fixed blades are equal!

**Length of blade** Blade length and style are important aspects of a bushcraft knife. A good knife is a multi-functional tool that will be expected to undertake a variety of tasks, including splitting logs, intricate carving, skinning game, cutting cordage, and striking a spark from a ferrocerium rod.

With such a diverse range of tasks there is no perfect blade. A 7-inch blade may be an excellent wood splitter, but is really too long when trying to carve a spoon. Conversely, a 3-inch blade makes all those intricate jobs (e.g. skinning and carving) easier, but you really need something bigger to split logs.

One option is to carry two knives, but you could choose a good quality knife with a 4-inch blade as a 'jack of all trades' that will cope with all tasks adequately.



(If you are just starting out choose a 3–4 inch blade as it will do almost all jobs satisfactorily and you will find controlling the blade far easier. Blade control is important for safety).

### The edge or 'grind'

Serrations on a knife blade provide a sawing function that can be useful. However, with most designs the serrated edge takes up too much of the primary part of the knife.

A serrated edge on the spine (back) of the blade is unsuitable as we use this part of the blade as the striking point when 'battening' (we will talk about cutting techniques later).

Additionally serrated edges are harder to sharpen in the field. The perceived advantage of the serrated edge of easier cutting is matched by a well maintained 'straight' edge which should be kept sharp and therefore just as capable at cutting.

A straight edge is preferred for a bushcraft knife as it can be kept razor sharp and is the most functional edge for most jobs in the field.

### The saw

There are three types of saw of particular use in the bush:

- Locking folding saw
- Bow saw
- Buck saw

Locking folding saws save space and the blade won't attack your kit while packed away or holstered by your side. It will outperform the axe when making clean straight cuts through logs and sticks.

Bow saws are larger and more powerful. Commonly used by gardeners, they are available in most hardware stores and can be fitted with interchangeable saw blades for green wood or dry (dead) wood.



The folding buck saw is similar to the bow saw, but is a collapsible version. They are

popular with bushcrafters because they are easy to carry and they can be repaired easily. Buck saws can also be fitted with interchangeable saw blades.

### The axe

Although relatively heavy, a good quality axe offers effectiveness and versatility in bushcraft. In the right hands, it will make light work of most jobs, even delicate jobs like carving and cutting or butchering game.

The blade of an axe should be maintained in the same way as the knife and should be as sharp as the knife blade.

Wielding a heavy metal lump with a razor's edge is dangerous! When using an axe, keep the angles small by lowering your body closer to the ground. This way, a missed target drives the axe into the floor/stump, not your foot or leg. A small forest axe can be more dangerous than a larger felling axe.

### The machete, parang and kukri

These are large heavy duty blades that tend to be heavier at the tip than near the handle and the extra weight is what makes them highly effective slashing and chopping tools.

Commonly used in the Far East, they also have a limited role to play in bushcraft, as they provide a tool that is halfway between the knife and the axe.

Once again, the blade should be as sharp as a knife's; it is good practice to sharpen the front two thirds of the blade, leaving the narrow section near the handle blunt. This makes the tool safer to handle and allows the blade to be grasped above the handle for delicate work.

When using a machete, keep the blade away from the body and use a wrist action to cut, rather than a full swing from the shoulder.

See John's website [bowjibushcamping.co.uk](http://bowjibushcamping.co.uk)



## Woodlands blogs and TV

### Woodlands blogs

*Click on the titles to be taken to the full blogs or videos on the Woodlands.co.uk website.*

#### A model for sustainable woodland ownership



A student of Forest Management at the National School of Forestry in Cumbria, Tom explains how his love of the natural world led him to a course in forestry and

what he hopes to do with his qualifications in the future

#### Camping in woodlands for blind and visually impaired people

One of woodlands.co.uk's community projects in Kent organises bushcraft days for young people who are blind and visually impaired. Karen Little, who runs a forest school there, says, 'we are starting with bushcraft sessions for visually impaired 8–16 year olds with their parents or carers. It's amazing how much they get out of it – as we concentrate on tactile stuff.'

#### A brief history of the Forestry Commission

At the start of the 20th century, only 5% of Britain was forested after centuries of unsustainable timber usage. Nearly 100 years after the formation of the Forestry Commission, coverage is up to 13% – a tribute to the Commission's work.

#### Emily Carr – painter of trees and woodlands in Canada

Handy for the Woodlands office, this exhibition

at the Dulwich Picture Gallery showcases the work of Emily Carr, 'Canada's Van Gogh'. 'From the Forest to the Sea', is an exhibition of Carr's remarkable paintings of the landscapes of her native Canada.

#### A guide to social and therapeutic horticulture

A brief explanation of the benefits of horticulture – or indeed woodland work – on mental and physical health.

### Woodlands TV

#### Finding hedgehog mushrooms in the woodlands

Fraser Simpson continues to forage for weird and wonderful mushrooms in the woods and explains why mushrooms gathered from dry woodland conditions will probably taste better than soggy roadside varieties. Hedgehog mushrooms have small spikes under the cap, rather than gills, hence the name.

#### Turbo saw mill – making an oak gate post

Rich demonstrates his new portable turbo saw mill, cutting an oak log to produce a gatepost. Although this cutting is being done indoors, it could be done in a woodland.

