

Small Woodland Owners' Group

NEWSLETTER MARCH 2014



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The recent storms and flooding have undoubtedly posed a challenge to many woodland owners. We hope that you have not suffered the loss of too many trees, or worse, been affected by the immensely wet weather.

This month, in a short feature about management plans, Sarah Walters reports on the new woodland management planning templates introduced by the Forestry Commission and Institute of Chartered Foresters. Richard Hare has written about the trials and tribulations of managing a small coppice alongside a tenacious deer population.

Articles, news and photos are all very welcome – please send them to Judith@swog.org.uk

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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Forestry Commission wind blow survey

The tempestuous winter has left few woodlands completely unscathed and many owners have reported damage to their trees.

A thread on the SWOG forum reports a wide variety of damage, ranging from ‘a few extra twigs and leaves on the ground’, to Rod’s ‘the count is up to 12 large conifers so far and several assorted broadleaves brought down with the domino effect’.

Forestry Commission England is keen to work with woodland owners and managers to understand the cumulative impact on England’s forests and woodland of the storms during the 2013–14 winter. The FC has already collected information about the damage caused by the St Jude’s storm in October 2013, and further information will help them consolidate and extend this data. They have set up an online survey and will be grateful if as many SWOG members as possible can file a report.

The survey is very accessible and only takes a minute or so to complete. It asks owners to assess damage as high (extensive areas of

windblown trees); medium (small/medium pockets of windblow or where existing windblow has worsened due to recent winds); or low (isolated trees/very small groups of scattered windblow).

The survey asks you to estimate the percentage of trees damaged and the estimated volume of wood blown over – both these sections are optional (which may be a relief to those unsure as to how to calculate volumes of timber).

You can access the survey here: englandconsult.forestry.gov.uk and we are promised results in due course.

Simon Fisher with a mature beech tree that blew over in December, squashing his deer fence and blocking the nearby road.



Over-stood coppice blown over in Terry Hogan’s wood.



National Forest Inventory: forestry cover expands in UK

The Forestry Commission has published new maps and statistics showing that Great Britain has about two and a half times more forest and woodland than it had 100 years ago.

They show that Britain has almost 3 million hectares (7.5 million acres) of forest and woodland, representing 13 per cent of the total land area, and equivalent to almost 4 million football pitches. It is estimated that a century ago, woodland cover was between only 4 and 6 per cent.

The new reports and maps form part of the National Forest Inventory (NFI), and show that, at 31 March 2011:

- Great Britain had 2,979,354 hectares of woodland
- England had 1,292,372ha (10 per cent of the land area)
- Scotland had 1,383,410ha (18 per cent)
- Wales had 303,572ha (15 per cent)
- 42 per cent of woodland comprised mostly conifer species, 37 per cent mostly broadleaved species, and the remaining 21 per

cent comprised mostly mixed conifers and broadleaves;

- The Forestry Commission managed 807,288ha, or 27 per cent, of Britain's woodland, with other owners managing the remaining 2,172,066 hectares, or 73 per cent.

These are admirable statistics, but the Woodland Trust has noted that there is no measurement of how much ancient woodland has been lost in recent years, and although forestry cover in Britain has expanded considerably, we are still one of the least wooded countries in Europe.

The National Forest Inventory can be downloaded [here](#). It is an incredibly detailed document and it is interesting to note the different types of woodland in public and private ownership. For example, only 8% of broadleaf woodland is in the hands of the Forestry Commission. 47% of woodland in private ownership is broadleaved, with 33% being conifer. The report has been produced in part as the FC's commitment to improving Britain's timber resources and provides a useful baseline from which to move forward.



Medieval Woodworking Techniques and Demonstration

High Weald AONB Saturday, 15 March 2014
10:30–16:00 Flimwell, East Sussex

Ancient woodwork specialist Dr Damian Goodburn will lead a presentation on the archaeology of the transition between early and later medieval woodworking techniques and the changes in woodlands in this period. It includes examples of tools and samples of preserved wood.

In the afternoon there will be a demonstration of medieval woodworking techniques and the opportunity for 'hands on' experience of using medieval woodworking tools. To book a place, visit www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/medieval-woodworking



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

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 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

Woodland management plans

Woodland management plans are not for everyone. Some owners may simply want to enjoy their woods, happy just to fell the odd tree or clear small areas for recreation. Others, however, may want to ensure that their wood is productive and sustainable, or managed so that wildlife can flourish. Many new owners just want to see what their wood will produce over the first year or two of ownership and only then do they consider a more structured approach. Whichever route you favour, there is plenty of support and advice available.

Management plans can be as simple as a sketch of your woodland with a list of tasks. Or they can be drawn up by professional foresters and include a comprehensive tree survey with detailed maps, and a plan for management over several years.

The Institute of Chartered Foresters (ICF) and Forestry Commission (FC) have introduced a new template to make the process of applying for Woodland Management Plans (WMPs) easier. Sarah Walters joined the workshop at Rutland Water to find out more about the new system and the revised UK Forestry Standard (UKFS).



The new WMP templates are being introduced following consultation to

- Integrate management planning within the grants system
- Automatically incorporate felling and thinning licenses within the plans
- Align the plans more closely with the UK Forestry Standard
- Introduce a new, simpler system for owners of small woodlands

The aim is to get more woodlands into management and thus improve the quality of and sustainable production from UK woodlands and in particular the large proportion of unmanaged small woodlands.

New templates

There are essentially two routes into getting a WMP under the new system. The first is the full set of templates, the second the abridged Small Woods template. There is some crossover – you can use the full set of templates for woods over

3ha (7 acres), and can use the small woodland set for any size of wood, but it is tailored specifically towards woods under 10ha (25 acres). A small woodland over 3ha (7 acres) thus has flexibility to use either template. If you want to apply for a woodland planning grant, you must use the full set of templates.

The main difference between the two is the level of detail in the woodland inventory and survey required, as well as in the operational plans. Both run for ten years and come with a ten-year felling license (aligning the duration of the plan with the duration of the felling license, which does not occur at present). The felling license is easy to apply for, and means small woodland owners do not have to worry about the 5m³ limit on felling; it provides more freedom to manage woods flexibly.

Good intentions

Although at first sight the plans look quite prescriptive, that is not the case – the plan is a

statement of intent, not a contract. You can also write plans that focus on any vision and objectives for your wood, and that doesn't have to be timber production – the plan for our own woods is based around improvement of habitat for wildlife and use by community groups. Having a plan also guarantees compliance with certain standards that may open up markets for your products.

The new templates are not perfect: in particular it is relatively difficult to deal with coppicing which, although given a code as one of the possible categories of management, subsequently makes it difficult to deal with plans for regeneration and restocking (in both templates) which seem geared more towards re-planting. I was told simply put 100% restocking with same species and they will note that it is coppice.

Improved system

Overall, the new scheme for small woodland owners seems to have made the system much more accessible. A management plan can help

you plan your work, and help reassure the public who may walk by or through your woods that what you are doing is approved and sustainable. It helps you think about all elements of what you are doing in the woods alongside the UKFS (which includes general forestry management, biodiversity, soil, water, climate change, people and landscape and historic environment). These are things that are definitely worth thinking about before wading in with a chainsaw. Plans will also provide links in with other initiatives such as Grown in Britain and their licensing scheme.

The workshop was well organized and very relevant, although sadly hardly any small woodland owners attended – the audience was mainly forestry agents and consultants, or large management companies. If you can catch a workshop near you before the series ends, it is well worth going.

See www.forestry.gov.uk/ewgs-wpg for guidance on applying for Woodland Planning Grants and to download the new templates.

Other sources of information

Sylva have recently updated and streamlined their MyForest website, which offers free mapping tools and plenty of advice for woodland owners. Just this month, they have launched new mapping composer software,



which should make it easier for owners to map their woods accurately. The mapping composer is a simple Geographical Information System (GIS), allowing you to

add layers and labels to a map which can be printed off or saved on your computer in PDF format.

If you are planning extensive work in your woodland, you may consider applying for grant aid to assist with the cost of the work. The main source of grants is the Forestry Commission. Grants are designed to cover between 25% and 75% of the cost of having work done, at commercial rates. Even if you are doing the work yourself, the grant can be claimed.

There are a variety of articles on the SWOG website offering a broad overview of the process (but please check with the FC regarding grants, as the situation changes regularly).

Woodlands.co.uk commissioned *Managing your Woodlands for Wildlife* in 2010 and it is still available for sale. You can download a copy for free from the Woodlands website here.

Coping with deer

Richard Hare explains how he has managed a small mixed coppice in East Sussex and dealt with the challenge of one of the largest populations of fallow deer in the country.

Deer numbers are at their all time high in many parts of the country. Managing a coppice in one of these areas is hard work and can be extremely frustrating. Groups like the Deer Initiative are proactive in educating woodland owners and



the public about the issues involved. The main problem is that deer are a natural 'prey' species without any natural predators. The limiting factor to their population

increase is likely to be the available food, and unfortunately that means that our woodlands and parks and gardens are coming under increasing pressure from their numbers.

Protecting coppice re-growth

When I first cut a cant of over-stood coppice stools, I was aware that I would have to protect the re-growth from deer browsing, but I never thought I would end up having to put so much time and effort into this part of the job. There are deer everywhere in the wood and grazing the adjoining paddocks, and their hoof marks or 'slots' have worn tracks all over the place. Another sign of their high numbers is a distinct line where all foliage on the trees below about chest height is browsed off.

Coppice workers have traditionally protected the new growth by piling up all the brash into dead hedges around the cant. This is very

labour-intensive, so nowadays, most people will use temporary mesh fence. This seemed like the easiest option to me too!

Deer-proof fencing

I used a brand called tenax, it is tough, woven, plastic mesh 2 metres high. You hang it on posts at about 3 metre intervals. The proper spec is to butt a tensioned plain gauge line wire top and bottom and hang the netting from this to stop it sagging and preventing the deer from jumping over or squeezing underneath. It's a lot of effort and expense to do it this way, so with only a small area of coppice at first, I just strung it up between the posts and pegged it down in places, where I thought it looked like it needed it.

The trouble is the fence takes a lot of attrition. Other wildlife, such as rabbits and badgers, probably quite rightly, take a personal affront to this kind of barrier blocking their path. The netting will soon fray where these animals have pushed or chewed their way through it. Fallow deer will follow along testing the fence. It wasn't too long before hungry deer had found their way in and started decimating the regrowth.

Damage caused by browsing deer.



Each year with each new cant, I would put more and more effort into keeping the deer out. I started piling the brash into rough hedges on the outside of the fence. This stops the deer getting close enough to the fence to jump over. They tend to like a standing start and won't usually jump over something where they can't clearly see the other side. I did put the line wires on, and this, in combination with the piled up brash, did stop them from getting underneath . . . for a while!

Any fence is only as strong as its weakest point and this is usually the gates. I resorted to doubling up on them and constructing brash arches over the tops to deter the deer from jumping over. Eventually, I worked out a system which I thought would keep them out and it did for a while, but I soon discovered that it doesn't end there. The perimeter needed to be checked on an almost daily basis, as they would get in through the slightest chink. Once that happened, just one or two animals could ruin a whole season's work.

I suppose it's all about getting the equation of *Tenax fencing used to deter deer.*



effort vs reward balanced about right. If you're not too bothered about the end product and are coppicing to increase the habitat for wildlife, a certain amount of browsing could well be tolerated or even encouraged. But if you've got some valuable chestnut or hazel coppice which you want to get back into rotation, then you'll probably want to have a zero tolerance and that means putting in a lot of effort into managing coppiced woodlands in those areas where the population balance of deer has got out of control.

For more information about what you can do, including managing deer numbers, look at the Deer Initiative website.



On the forum

Inevitably, there is a **weather watch thread**, and boy, we've had a lot of weather recently.

Wordsmith reports that he has lost five sweet chestnut in his wood, but much of this thread discussed the actions of the government and the Environment Agency in dealing with flooding.

Steve Medlock posted a picture of a **hung up conifer** and asked for advice on how to deal with it. This ranged from, 'wait for an even stronger storm' to 'phone a friend' and 'find a tree surgeon'.



Woodland wedding cake image courtesy of raescakestudio.com.

A thread which began as a request from William323 to **rent a wood for a wedding** provoked considerable comment. Oldclaypaws stated baldly, 'Woods are not ideal for huge functions, and huge functions are not good for woods'. He was concerned not

only by the sheer logistics of managing many people and their cars, but also the potential

damage to wildlife. Hotel owners Patandsam, reported that when they host weddings or large functions, they ask guests to keep away from unlit or dangerous areas and take no responsibility for the consequences if guests wander off. The debate became a little heated, and so far William the wedding planner has had no takers.

A revival of the **death and taxes thread** has seen a discussion about the effects of woodland ownership on eligibility for social security benefits, notably ESA (Employment Support Allowance). There is a fair bit of speculation and accounts of personal experience – but it seems fair to say we need the intervention of a tax expert for a definitive answer!

Smojo asked, **how much work is involved in managing a small wood?**, and prompted several owners to wax lyrical about the joys of woodland ownership. But despite their evident enjoyment, there is also lots of practical advice about access, both for vehicles and the public, as well as cost, the need to maintain paths and borders and proximity to home. In the end, owners agree that there's as much or little work as you want, and you'll probably end up doing more than you ever thought.

On a related note, Smojo also asked about **buying a wood of predominately ash trees** and how this might affect the price. SitkaSpruce pointed out that 'You may have resistant ones, or may have a lot of firewood but that's in the future'.

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

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

What a difference a wood makes!

Chris Wise, Development Manager of the West View Project Hartlepool discusses using woodlands for outdoor learning provision.

Reforestation the Uplands / Drying out the Lowlands

Donald McPhillimy advocates reforestation the uplands to give the lowlands some protection from flood water. And he says we should copy the beavers!

Autism and Nature – local guides for parents/carers and teachers

Margaret writes about new guides produced by Autism and Nature. The guides provide really detailed information about facilities at many



outdoor venues in Kent and Sussex, so that children can be told what to expect in advance and their anxiety about an unfamiliar place lessened. The guides are also really useful to anyone taking a family for a day out.

Winter weather and its effects

Chris discusses how the exceptionally wet winter throughout most of Britain has affected wildlife.

Woodlands TV

Making a rake

A fascinating video in which Ian Barnett demonstrates the craft of making a wooden rake from ash wood, skilfully using traditional tools and techniques in his workshop at the Amberley Museum and Heritage Centre.

Carved wooden games

Sculptor Johnny Woodford shows us the traditional outdoor wooden games he has carved himself on his private woodland using a chainsaw. He explains the process of making the giant bowl, balls and skittles from a range of wood – elm, chestnut and Scots pine.

Make a gate hurdle

Ian Barnett gives a tutorial on how to make a wooden gate hurdle from scratch using traditional tools and craft.

Shakespeare in the Woodlands

Inter-generational community-based theatre



group, The King's Troupe, rehearse in the woodlands for the Shakespeare Outdoor Festival in Stratford-upon-Avon. Mary Coaten directs and embraces disorganized chaos.

How to make trugs

Dominic Parrette deftly demonstrates how to make trugs using sweet chestnut and white willow. There are only a handful of professional trug makers working in the UK and Dominic and fellow expert Pete Marden use traditional trug-making techniques at the Herstmonceux Truggery in East Sussex.