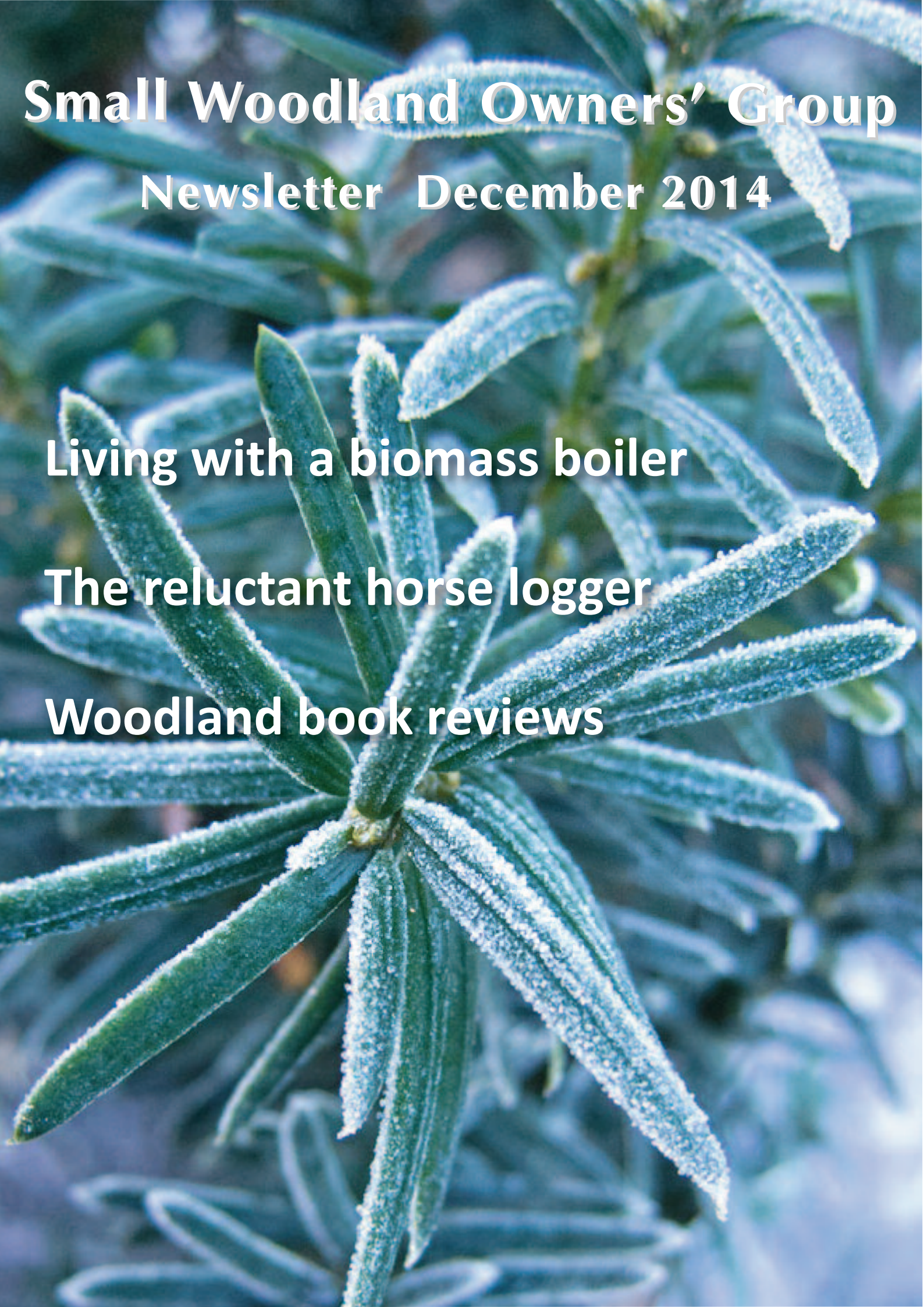
Small Woodland Owners' Group

Newsletter December 2014



Living with a biomass boiler

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Small Woodland Owners' Group

www.swog.org.uk

While reading a 16th century will recently, I came across an interesting bequest: a man left his wife 'halff the fyer wode within my yard where I now dwell'. I'm sure his wife was delighted, but this is a small reminder of the value placed on firewood by our ancestors – and increasingly by modern society.

Six months after the introduction of the Renewable Heat Incentive, one SWOG member explains how they have achieved a payout for their log biomass system.

Dan Gould of Lyndwood Forestry relates how he came to be a horse-logger, conquering a fear of horse to do so.

Finally, in honour of the festive season, we have an array of book reviews, a selection of fine books to add to your Christmas lists.

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.

Everyone on the SWOG team wishes all our members a very merry Christmas and a peaceful 2015.

Picture credits Cover: Woodlands.co.uk; p 3 Bill Rigby pp 4, 9 Woodlands.co.uk; p5 Dan Gould; pp 6–7 Joyce Gibbard

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In this issue

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

SWOG meeting, North Yorkshire, 28 February 2015, 10am-1pm

Grateful thanks are due to Bill and Shan Rigby who have agreed to host a SWOG meeting in their wood in North Yorkshire. Relative newcomers to the world of woodland ownership, Bill and Shan own a 5-acre wood just 20 miles from York. They're keen to chat to fellow SWOG members and to discuss their plans for their wood.

The meeting will consist of a walk and talk through their woodland, which is mainly a mixture of beech and pine, and is home to a rich diversity of flora and fauna. The woodland floor is relatively flat and easy to walk across. Vehicular access is more limited, so we suggest meeting at a local pub and car-sharing the remaining couple of miles to the wood. The Old Black Bull in Raskelf offers a hearty lunch menu and looks like a good venue to warm up and refuel after the meeting.

This promises to be a really fun event – and one of the first for some time in the north! If you are interested in attending, please email judith@swog.org.uk for further details.

Woodland grants 2015

Time is running out for those wishing to apply for the next round of grants for forestry equipment. Woodland owners seeking grants are advised to get their paperwork in order before the new Rural Development Programme opens in 2015.

Forestry Commission England are promoting a series of free events which will give attendees the chance to speak to those who have been through the funding process. To register call Amy or Jude at Lantern (who are co-ordinating the programme) on 07502 985921 or email them at events@lantern.uk.com. The full list is below, or see the website **www.lantern.uk.com/#!events/cmpy** for further details.

Funding Events

Gloucestershire Tuesday 2nd December 2014
Guiting Manor Farms, Nr Cheltenham.

Dorset Wednesday 3rd December 2014
Travellers Rest Farm, Durweston, Blandford Forum.

Cheshire Friday 5th December 2014
Anderton Boat Lift, Lift Lane, Northwich, Cheshire, CW9 6FW.

Exmoor Thursday 18th December 2014
Kitchen Wood, North Molton Estate, Exmoor.

Cumbria Wednesday 21st January 2015
The Yard, Halecat Estate, Witherslack.

European Coppice Conference 2014

Kentish woodlands and the traditional way they are managed were the focus of an international conference hosted by the University of Greenwich. Visitors from across Europe, as well as from South Africa and Turkey took part in a three-day conference in the heartland of the British coppice industry to learn new techniques, share experiences and compare practices.

Dr Debbie Bartlett, Programme Leader for Greenwich University's MSc in Environmental Conservation programme, said 'It allowed us to show off our beautiful Kentish woodlands, which are in an important area for coppice woodland management. It is also a great opportunity for our MSc students to expand their knowledge and learn from the experts.'

Kentish tradition

Speakers included Matthew Woodcock of the Forestry Commission, who noted that official figures about woodland cover in England do not really register coppice. This is partly because coppice as a form of woodland management has declined dramatically since the Second World War. With the growth in demand for wood fuel, woodland managers are slowly seeing the value in coppice, and reverting to the old maxim of 'the wood that pays is the wood that stays'.

Sally Marsh of the High Weald AONB expanded further on the history of the Kentish High Weald, explaining that it has always been an area rich in iron and timber. Today, there remains 27% woodland cover – far higher than the national average of 13%. A remarkable 75% of this is ancient woodland, which has survived simply because timber is still highly valued in the region.

Dr Debbie Bartlett reported on her research into the area of coppice in Kent. She asks coppice workers to register the extent of the areas they cut in one year, along with the species

of wood and what happens to it. Over time, she is building up a picture of coppice as a surviving industry that is growing gradually.

With contributions from woodland owners – including a presentation on behalf of SWOG about how small woodland owners manage their woods (available **here on the SWOG website**), the final words were left to forest workers themselves.

Modern coppice techniques

It was interesting to hear that although coppice working is an ancient trade, modern coppice workers do not shy away from modern techniques, which enable them to work faster and more efficiently. Mike Gilman of the Long Barn reported on the installation of a biomass- and solar-powered drying kiln, while Nick Hilton talked about the use of tractors and power tools in his business, Woodwise Forestry. Both men are keen to promote coppice as an efficient long-term method to manage woodland, but equally, they recognised the need to make a living from it. Chris Letchford of the Sussex and Surrey Coppice Group sent out a heartfelt plea for recognition for those engaged in the ancient skills that have grown up around the coppice trade. He singled out small woodland owners who sell woodland products and urged them not to undercut craftsman who use their skills to make a living.

The reluctant horse logger

It's not often that you meet a horse logger who confesses to an early dread of horses, but Dan Gould is brave enough to admit that he once had a slightly irrational fear of them.

Dan is an arborist by training, a man happiest when winched up a tree with a chainsaw for company. For many years he worked for a contracting company, on projects that ranged from maintaining the banks of railway lines (and probably doing much to prevent the perennial problem of leaves on the line) to regular arboricultural work in the parks and gardens of Kent and Sussex.

It wasn't until he was called upon to extract some timber from a particularly tricky position that he realised that machinery was not the only way to drag logs out of the woods. His boss called in a team of horse loggers and Dan watched, amazed (from a safe distance).

It was something of a Damascene moment. He went home and spent months reading up on the subject, convinced that low-impact extraction using horses was a more efficient and sustainable method of timber removal from woodlands. He also researched horse and animal psychology, which helped him to overcome his fear. Above all, his commitment to horse-logging as an eco-friendly means of timber extraction drove him on.

Fast forward a few years and Dan, trading as Lyndwood Forestry, is a fully paid-up member of the British Horse Loggers Association, and with his horse Luna is busier than ever.

His story is an unusual one, because unlike most horse loggers, he has approached the trade from a background in forestry, rather than in equestrianism. Many horse loggers come from a 'horsey' background, but have to learn about woodlands and timber. Dan approached the situation from a different angle, and arguably, had the more difficult side of the job under his belt already. He was – and is – well qualified to advise on woodland management and tree surgery, and once he had conquered his fear of horses, was able to offer an additional service.

It is fair to say that he was driven more by a love of trees and a belief in low-impact forestry than a love of horses – although as in all the best love stories, the relationship has blossomed!

Lyndwood Forestry work around Hastings and East Sussex and can be contacted at **www.lyndwoodforestry.com**

Life with a log biomass heating system

Joyce Gibbard is a rare creature: not only does she successfuly run a log-fuelled biomass heating system, but she has also recieved a pay-out from the Renewable Heat Incentive. She tells us how it's done.

A near miss, due to snow, ice and a higher than normal demand for heating oil during December 2010, of a delivery in time for Christmas, made us think about changing our reliance on delivered fossil fuel, in any form.

For some time we had been toying with the idea of utilising our resource of woodfuel to heat our home, beyond what we were harvesting on a very small scale for open fires. Something more sustainable than oil was needed. This meant that we would have to be far more pro-active in our small woodland. It also meant hard work. Could we rise to the challenge? We decided we would.

As we had access to a plentiful supply of wood, in 2011 we decided on a log gasification biomass boiler. We chose it because it was easy to operate and suited our style of living. No computerised gizmos, no pellet and wood chip sourcing and delivery problems, just a plain and simple 'what you put in, you get out' operating system. Basically, it was down to us.

We teamed up with an excellent alternative heating company (Sterland & Elgar, Shipton-under-Wychwood) who advised and guided us through this process. A Woodland Management Plan was commissioned and installation was completed in October 2011.

Running a biomass herating system

Running a biomass heating system utilising logs is very 'hands on'. The furnace has to be manually lit and fired daily. I have become so practised it takes very little time. Organisation is the key. Kindling and logs are stored close to hand in sufficient quantities for a week at a time; even moving the logs with my trusty wheelbarrow from the outside dry store does not take long.

Continuous running is intensive and reserved for very, very, cold weather (but does mean relighting can be avoided). Otherwise, a daily burn of one good load (a one-wheelbarrow day) is sufficient to heat the thermal water store for heating morning and evening during normal winter weather, with a top-up load on colder than average days (a two-wheelbarrow day).

The use of excellent wood-burning stoves in the two main living areas of the house (a turn of

Joyce and her wheelbarrows: the first c. 1950 and the second more recently!

the century four-bed house) reduces the need for periods of central heating during daytime. Sometimes, when it's very mild, it isn't fired up at all. You just have to make sure that the thermal hot water store remains viable. If the core temperature drops too much, it takes a while to heat up again. Only logs that have 18% or less moisture are used.

Almost all the wood for fuel is sourced from our 10–11 acres of mixed deciduous woodland. It has been in our ownership for 30 years or so, and had been very lightly managed. Wood for fuel had been extracted for our open fires/log burner for most of that time, but not to any specific plan and usually from wind-blown trees and some selective thinning. The 2011 management plan is being implemented and an organised program of timber extraction takes place during the winter months for the benefit of the woodland, its flora and fauna, and long term regeneration. Using a small tractor and trailer, we fell, coppice, haul and process into logs around 20 cubic meters of stacked and stored logs per season at least a year in advance. Dry storage areas have been built for this purpose. We do buy in some store wood from a local supplier, about 3 cubic metres which is covered by our winter fuel allowance!

The pros and cons

One of the advantages of having a domestic biomass heating system is the reward of the Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) scheme. The RHI pays us for the energy we produce, eventually allowing us to recoup the initial investment of the system. We estimate that it will take five years, with an additional two years of payments after this. This scheme finally came into existence in April 2014 after many delays.

Angus Orligno 200 40kW log batch boiler & 1500L thermal store.

And of course, we are independently heated. No oil/gas price wars. However, where additional woodfuel needs to be brought in to supplement our own resources, the rising price of woodfuel should be born in mind for the future. Hopefully the price of firewood will encourage more small woodland owners to manage their resource, use their own woodfuel or enter it onto the market.

The disadvantages? Well, going away during the winter months could pose problems – there might be a big freeze and nobody at home to light the furnace. The system does require daily input when you need heat, compared to more automated auger fed pellet and chip systems. A year's supply of dry wood for the boiler takes time to accumulate and dedicated dry storage space. Apart from that, it is a wonderful system!

The Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) is a government financial incentive to promote the use of renewable heat. People who join the scheme and stick to its rules, receive quarterly payments for seven years for the amount of clean, green renewable heat their system produces. The Renewable Heat Incentive has two schemes, domestic and non-domestic. They have separate tariffs, joining conditions, rules and application processes. There are four eligible renewable heating system types:

- biomass only boilers, and biomass pellet stoves
- air source heat pumps
- ground source heat pumps
- flat plate and evacuated tube solar thermal panels.

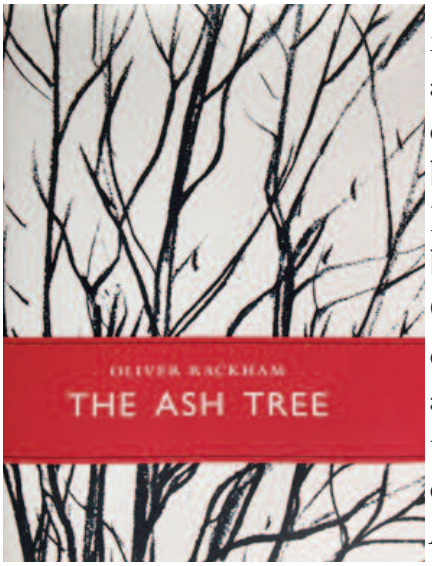
For more information visit the Ofgem website: **www.ofgem.gov.uk**

Book reviews

Those of you taking a break from winter work might like something to read in front of the fire.

The Ash Tree, by Oliver Rackam, *184 pages, illustrated, Little Toller Mongraphs, £15.*

When I last saw Oliver Rackham I was infected by his curiosity. Someone suggested, as we walked though a woodland, that one spot might have been historically used for making charcoal so Dr Rackham dived into the undergrowth armed only with a set of keys and dug into the soil and he soon emerged triumphant with some old charred remains, proving definitively that this location had in fact been used for charcoal making. This sort of curiosity and dogged ferreting for facts runs through his new book on the ash tree. He considers what threats the ash tree faces, but he also uses the book as a platform for a wider diagnosis of the state of British woodlands.



Yes, *The Ash Tree* is vitriolic in parts such as when he condemns the government's response to threats to ash trees: 'Defra produced 34 pages of verbiage on Chalara, the No. 2 threat to ash trees that has got here and is uncontrollable, without one mention of the Emerald Ash borer, the No. 1 threat, that could yet be kept out.' But the book is also sanguine about the likely effects of Ash Dieback (*Chalara fraxinea*) and, ever focused on evidence, Oliver Rackham points out that in other countries Ash Dieback has tended not to kill the host trees but just to damage them. The experience of Dutch Elm disease in the 1970s stops us being over-optimistic on the outcome of Ash Dieback but equally there is not enough yet to prove that British ash trees are 'all doomed'. Even elm continues to grow as a hedgerow tree throughout the country and as tall trees in several pockets.

Remarkably, until *The Ash Tree* was written there was no book dedicated to the ash, in contrast to the dozens of books written about the oak tree. This is surprising considering that ash has been such an important wood in British woodlands and as a timber for building and manufactured goods.

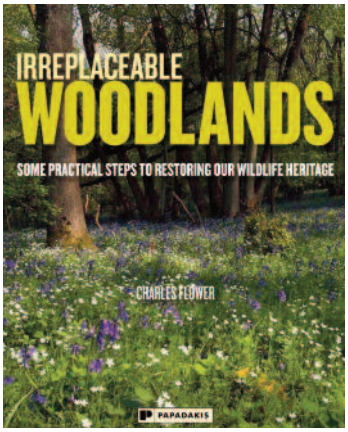
Because it is easily bent, it was used for making everything from tennis rackets to trims on cars such as the Morris Traveller and remains the preferred material for tool handles. Rackham is skeptical about the claim that it is the best firewood. but admits that its low moisture content is an advantage.

There are probably about as many ash trees in the UK as there are people, though a lot depends on how big you require a plant to be to qualify as a tree, and Rackham considers what the biggest threats are to the ash tree. Certainly Chalara and an excessive deer population are bad news for ash trees, but the number one threat, Rackham concludes, based on the experience of America and Asia, is the Emerald Ash Borer which is fatal to ash trees. This illustrates that generally British wildlife is most endangered by globalisation, which exposes trees to pathogens and parasites for which they are unprepared. We should, Oliver Rackham argues, make use of the fact that we are an island to protect nature and to forestall diseases that have not yet got here. We should 'stop treating plants (and bees) as mere articles of trade, like cars or tins of paint, to be made and brought in industrial quantities from anywhere.' This monograph on the ash tree, *Fraxinus excelsior,* is really a plea for a radical review of how we protect British woodlands and re-order our world as if trees really mattered. It's a bargain at £15.

Angus Hanton

(The full review is on the ***Woodlands blog here****.)*

Irreplaceable Woodlands, by Charles Flower, *240 pages, illustrated, Papadakis, £25*



This book is a glorious account of a 30 year custodianship of a 25-acre ancient woodland, Mapleash Copse

It begins with an overview of the history of the wood and the management, practices and demands for underwood and timber which have shaped the way the wood is today. The archaeology of any woodland is fascinating and this is no exception, but I did find it a little difficult to follow the text alongside the schematic drawings. Better maps with clear notations might make this part easier to read.

The next section is a fascinating look at the medieval period, in particular the crafts and timber that were once produced from the wood. The interesting chapter on hazel restoration really demonstrates the amount of hard work involved in bringing a hazel coppice back into a viable rotation.

The middle chapters look at the flora and fauna, and some beautiful illustrations with fine close- up photographs, give a real insight into the range and diversity of wildlife the woodland supports.

Realising that taking care of a woodland like this is work never finished, in his penultimate chapter, the author lays out his list of priorities for its management. A final chapter looks at improving conditions for wildflowers to colonise newly planted broadleaf and gardens.

The book is pleasing mix of reference material, wonderful photography and the author's passion for his woodland. I would recommend it to anyone with or without a woodland and a lifetime's work ahead of them.

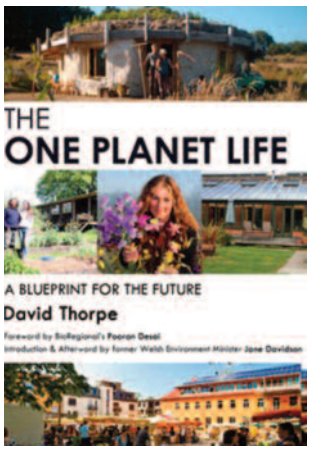
Rich Hare *(The full review is on the **SWOG website**)*

The One Planet Life: a blueprint for Low Impact Development, by David Thorpe, *476 pages, illustrated, Routledge. £25.*

David Thorpe, explains the idea of One Planet living, and the pioneering One Planet Development planning policy in Wales. One Planet living embodies the reality that we are consuming the planet's resources in an unsustainable way: we only have one planet to live on, and our use of it must be reduced to a level that is sustainable for the long term.

The first part of the book explores the need for change in the way we use our planet, including the role of ecological footprint analysis. It explores methods of food production and whether the UK, for example, could feed itself.

The next section looks at the practical details of finding suitable land and preparing a management plan. This is followed by practical day-to-day details of land management, water supply, energy, buildings, food, and transport.



One Planet Developments in Wales are typically applicable to a rural setting, but it is feasible to pursue one planet living objectives in an urban environment too.

The fourth part of the book looks at examples of successful one planet living, and a couple of less than successful initiatives.

This book is essential reading for anyone interested in sustainable living. It contains a wealth of detailed statistics and references to numerous reports and sources to back up the data, together with very practical hands-on advice, on everything from generating power to how to build a composting toilet. It provides a vision of a sustainable future, and with it, a call to action.

Chris Colley

*(The full review is on the **Woodlands blog here.**)*

Woodlands Blogs and TV

Woodlands blogs

What's it like to go on a deer management course?

Peter reports on a comprehensive four-day Deer Stalking Level 1 Certification course in Alice Holt Forest, Hampshire. A good mix of classroom-based theory and hands-on practical tasks ('gralloching' anyone?), the course was engaging, useful and fulfilling.

Why do we need to shoot deer in our woodlands?

Deer have no natural predators in Great Britain and their unrestricted presence in our woodlands is bad news for conservation and tree health. Deer over-population also leads to malnourished and unhealthy herds

Native ladybirds and woodlands

The Native Ladybird Study, a citizen science project has examined the spread of the invasive harlequin ladybird and discovered that coniferous woodlands are providing shelter to native ladybirds, where the harlequins struggle to thrive.

Help save our bumblebees

Professor Dave Goulson writes about the importance of woodland habitats for bees and offers some advice for woodland owners who wish to encourage bees in their woods.

Woodlands TV

Mushroom foraging in the woodlands

Fraser Simpson, a dedicated mushroom forager for some 30 years, explains how he finds edible mushrooms in the woods – and recommends checking any finds against reputable reference material at home. Fraser is driven by his belief that we should lessen the emphasis on meat and widen the vegetarian element of our diets.

Installing a stile

Engineer Harold Rawlings OBE designed and installed his first stile in East Sussex in 1961. Here volunteers from the Monday Group, an organisation of volunteer public rights of way workers, continue his work, encouraged by Harold himself.