

Small Woodland Owners' Group

Newsletter January 2015

**Bushcraft techniques –
build a shelter**

A birds' eye view of butterflies



Small Woodland Owners' Group

www.swog.org.uk



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Happy New Year from SWOG! If you make just one resolution, this year, resolve to share your woodland experiences with SWOG readers? We'd love to read them.

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 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

Just the ticket – travel bursary helps those studying abroad

A call has gone out from the Royal Forestry Society (RFS) to those travelling independently to study woodlands or forests abroad to apply for a Donald Randle Travel Bursary by 9 February 2015.

There are no age limits to receiving the bursary. Recipients are asked to contribute an article to the RFS Quarterly Journal of Forestry (QJF) based on their travels.

Recent bursary awardees include Christopher Suthers, Director of Streettreecare Ltd, whose article on *Developing Urban Forestry in Ethiopia* appeared in the October 2014 issue of the RFS's Quarterly Journal of Forestry, and Ben Fanstone who has been tracing the history of colonial forestry in Kenya for a PhD. Ben has

contributed an article, *Sowing the Seeds of Modernity: the Colonial Kenyan Forestry Dept*, which will be appearing in the January issue of the QJF.

Details of how to apply and terms and conditions can be found by phoning the RFS on 01295 678588 or by visiting the website: <http://rfs.org.uk/learning/bursaries/rfs-randle-travel-bursary/>.



Ben Fanstone

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

There are still a few places available for the SWOG meeting in Bill and Shan Rigby's 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

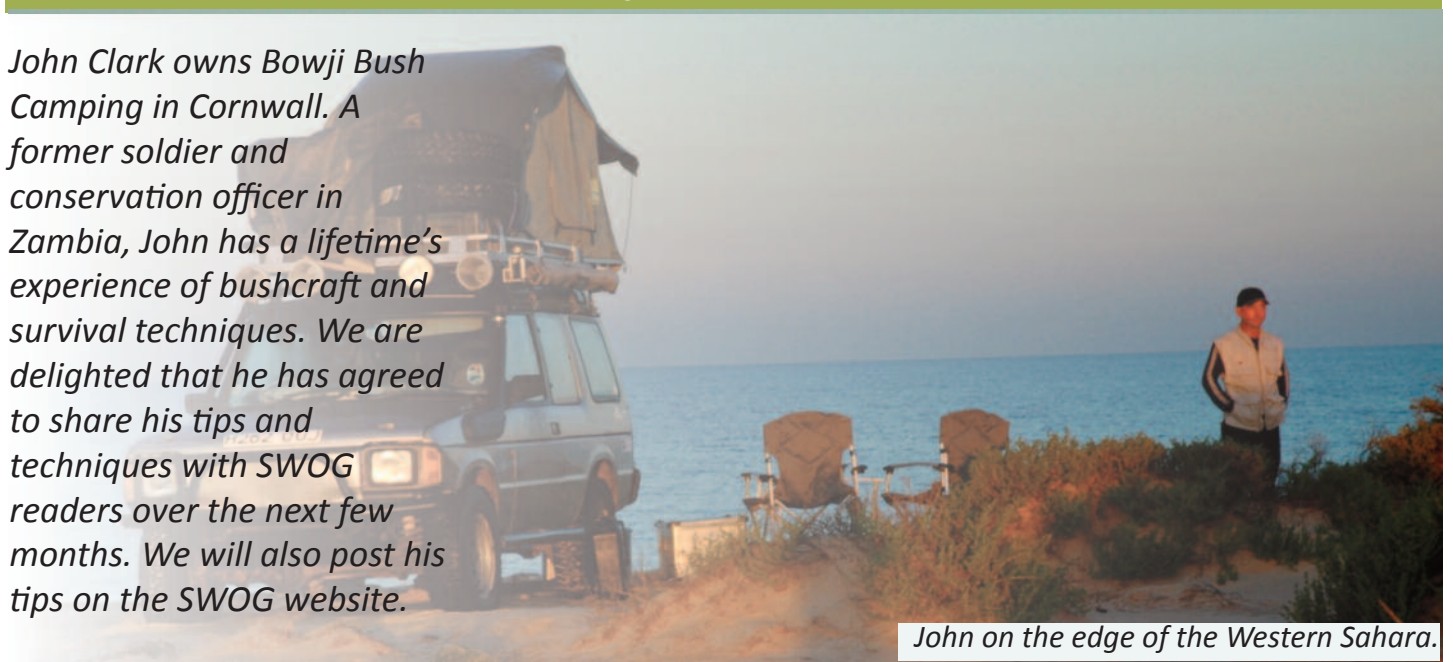
hearty lunch menu and looks like a good venue to warm up and refuel after the meeting.

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.



Bushcraft skills and techniques

John Clark owns Bowji Bush Camping in Cornwall. A former soldier and conservation officer in Zambia, John has a lifetime's experience of bushcraft and survival techniques. We are delighted that he has agreed to share his tips and techniques with SWOG readers over the next few months. We will also post his tips on the SWOG website.



John on the edge of the Western Sahara.

Bushcraft is the collective knowledge of our ancestors – the technology of an earlier age – applied to our modern world. It empowers us to access places and wilderness that might otherwise be too difficult or expensive for the average traveller and to do so with less reliance on hi-tech equipment and the accompanied complexities of logistical support.

The acquired knowledge and skills weigh nothing – they are carried in our minds and muscles. It helps us to open our eyes to what is not obvious, experience what is not common, and to do so with minimal impact on the environment through which we travel.

Bushcraft or survival?

The difference between bushcraft and survival was summarised by Paul Kirtley for the National Geographic Society. He suggests, with some validity, that the difference is largely down to context, as the following examples show.

1. Someone heads out into the woods for a while, lights a fire by using the bow-drill method of fire lighting – he is applying a bushcraft skill
2. Another person undertakes a wilderness canoe trip in Canada. He has a mishap and loses his boat. He manages to swim to shore but is stranded in the wilds with only the kit he has on his belt. He takes a shoe lace from his boot,

fashions a bow and makes a fire using the bow-drill method to dry himself, thus keeping hypothermia at bay. He is using a survival skill.

3. You are invited to a BBQ and later in the evening, your host, for the benefit of a few interested guests, provides a demonstration of the bow and drill. He is doing a party trick.

Skills for your woodland

Imagine an area of your own woodland and remember how it appeared to you the first time. Perhaps it felt familiar and comfortable, or maybe it felt new, strange and a little daunting.

Now imagine yourself plonked there by circumstances beyond your control. It's miles from anywhere familiar or 'civilisation'. You have little option but make it your home.

For most of us the woods or the bush, are not our natural environment. So to be forced into a position of 'making it our home' could be construed as a 'catastrophic change'. However with a few skills and a bit of knowledge (many of which SWOG folk already have) it is possible – indeed enjoyable – to turn a damp dark patch of woodland into a comfortable residence.

We will be covering some basic techniques in future editions of the SWOG newsletter and will kick off with a simple guide to building a camp. For more details, please visit www.bowjibushcamping.co.uk

Building a shelter

There are many different ways to build a shelter – in this example we have built a sturdy, two-person lean-to, but it does take time. It's a great family project and will keep everyone occupied for a day or two. Break it into three stages to make it manageable: collecting materials, making the frame and thatching.

1. Choose a suitable site. Look for flat dry ground, plenty of building resources around, close to a water supply. Avoid animal trails, areas of flooding and overhead branches that might break off in a high wind. Clear the ground before you start. Try not to use your bare hands to do this (not so important in UK, but in other parts of the world creepy-crawlies can be a problem).

2. Gather six branches about 2 metres long and at least 3 cm in diameter for the 'A' frame. You will also need 10 staves roughly 2.5 m long to form the roof. Erect two 'A' frames and a cross member and lash them together. It should be no more than 1.5 m at the apex. Use the last pole as an additional cross-member and lash it to one of the supports about 30 cm below the top one.

3. Build up a lean-to of hazel (or willow or ash) staves placed at 45 degrees. Too shallow an angle makes water proofing difficult. Ensure that the shelter has its back to the prevailing winds, with the opening in the lee. The second lower cross-member will create an overhang and provide extra cover at the entrance; it also helps to trap the heat from the fire. Lash the staves with cordage: para cord is ideal, but you can use vine or even make your own cordage from bark or roots.

4. Collect lots of smaller branches and weave them into the lean-to. This creates a strong lattice allowing you to build up the 'thatching' that will provide protection from rain and cold. Finally, gather ferns or pine brash and 'thatch' this into the lattice to wind-proof the structure. Remember that most body heat is lost through contact with the ground – constructing a bed comes next!



This final structure has a few extra enhancements.

Seeing Butterflies by Philip Howse.

176 pages, illustrated, Papadakis, £16.99
ISBN: 9781906506469

Heather Martin, our moth and butterfly enthusiast, reviews Seeing Butterflies.

When I first opened *Seeing Butterflies* I was so enthralled by the superb photographs of butterflies and moths that I kept turning the pages, treating the volume initially as a picture book. This visual experience was further enhanced by the entire contents being printed on yellow, orange and green paper, as opposed to the more traditional white.

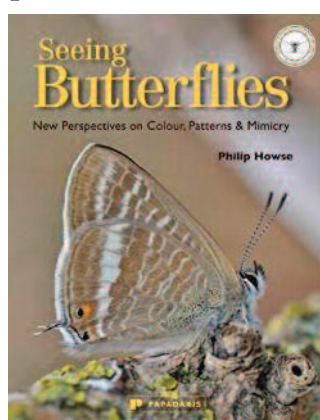
Then I started reading and if I had been enchanted by the wonderful illustrations, I rapidly became even more captivated by the text. Philip Howse has the ability to express his 'New Perspectives on Colour, Patterns and Mimicry' in a fluid, eloquent but straightforward manner making his theories immediately accessible to a very wide audience.

Birds' eye-view

This is a work that tries to persuade us to see something from another species point of view – insect-eating predators such as birds, whose visual perception is very different from ours. Humans have a habit of assuming that what they see is the only reality, but Professor Howse discusses many intriguing facts about eyesight and the world as a bird might view it. He cites various experiments carried out to further our understanding of how birds see things, including the way they observe and respond to a single detail first, rather than view the overall picture as we do. He explains how butterflies and moths have developed survival strategies using behaviour, camouflage and mimicry to take advantage of avian visual capabilities and so deter or evade predation.

The author goes on to describe how butterfly

and moth wings have evolved to feature all manner of images from big round eyes, teeth, claws, poisonous caterpillars and insects to animal and bird faces. Each eye-spot, set of stripes or dark dashes will be seen by the bird in isolation and could bear enough resemblance to the attributes of a particular creature to cause momentary hesitation and allow the butterfly or moth to escape. Philip Howse encourages the reader to study photographs in the book carefully, pointing out how to 'find' caterpillars for example along wing margins, twist and turn



the picture to consider it from another angle then discover the head of a fox-like animal on an eyed hawk-moth or a hornet on the body and head of a death's head hawk-moth. This was fun and I enthusiastically entered into the spirit of the activity but I soon began questioning the fact I was finding all these features within the capabilities of my own eyesight and imagination. What would a bird actually be seeing I asked myself? *Seeing Butterflies* contains a few photographs taken in near ultraviolet light, and with the shorter light wavelengths enhanced, they give an impression of what birds see. A few more would have added fascinating proof to back up such refreshingly enlightening theories.

The latter section of the book has whole chapters dedicated to groups of butterflies, such as peacocks, tortoiseshells, whites and yellows, as well as hawk-moths and giant silk moths, many commonly seen either in our gardens, the wider countryside or butterfly houses. Each is full of absorbing facts and details not found in popular butterfly and moth field guides, further serving to expand the author's ideas with actual examples.

This is a thought-provoking, perception-challenging, exquisitely illustrated work that should appeal to anyone with even a passing interest in butterflies and moths.

Woodlands blogs

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

What's the point in allowing deer stalking in my wood?

Peter discusses several options for woodland owners who want to control deer numbers in their woodland.

Turning a pen – in wood



Craftsman Stuart Murdoch describes how he creates beautiful wooden pens. No two are quite the same and each one is unique.

Mistletoe

Chris offers a seasonal reflection on traditional winter plants. Mistletoe, which has many traditional uses at Christmas, is a parasite plant, which requires a healthy tree to support it.

Heather and heath

Woody shrubs dominate heaths and bogs. Tough and hardy, they are a valuable food source for sheep, deer and rabbits, as well as a host of invertebrates. Left ungrazed, they can grow to heights of a metre.

The woodland Christmas quiz

Angus posted a fiendish Christmas tree quiz on 22 December, so we're a little late bringing it to readers' attention. Give it a try anyway!

Woodlands TV

Making cordage from nettles



Naturalist John Rhyder shows us the techniques to make cordage using nettles – from the initial preparation of the plant fibres through to the 'twist and clamp' process ensuring the nettle 'string' has the strength and flexibility required. And he explains how to grasp a nettle without getting stung!



Ancient woodland indicators

John Rhyder, walks through a Sussex wood, stopping to identify the plants, trees and physical features of an ancient woodland. John explains how even the surrounding area place names can be indicators of a wood's history.

Mushrooms growing on trees

Forager Fraser Simpson discusses the many uses of tree mushrooms, such as strop fungus and puff balls. He points out that woodland fungi are still used today in medical research.

