

A group of people are walking through a forest with a ground covered in fallen brown leaves. In the foreground, a woman in a teal jacket and a man in a grey jacket and green beanie are walking towards the right. In the background, a man in a brown jacket and a flat cap is standing and looking towards the group. The forest has many tall, thin trees, some with green foliage and others without.

Small Woodland Owners' Group

Newsletter April 2015

SWOG of the North meeting

Handling bushcraft knives

Hedging with Rich

Small Woodland Owners' Group

www.swog.org.uk



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Thanks to Bill and Shan Rigby for hosting a wonderful meeting in their wood at the end of February. Eleanor Carr has been kind enough to write up her impressions of the day. Rich has shared the agony and ecstasy of creating a hedge and John Clark provides a comprehensive and sensible feature on knife maintenance and handling.

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Thanks to Bernie for this photo of novel squirrel protection on a tree in Tenerife.

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.



Follow us on Twitter @_swog

SWOG COURSE LIST MARCH 2015



Courses are listed by location. You can search the lists by entering a key word.
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

SWOG-of-the-North meeting, Braffawd Wood

Eleanor Carr came away from her first SWOG meeting favourably impressed.

Meetings north of Watford gap are apparently a rare occurrence, and certainly my first ever. A bit concerned I might be the only person not wearing the latest chainsaw, and with my extensive collection of Kevlar sadly in the wash, I roll up in ancient cagoule and welly ensemble. Great relief when similarly cagouly-wellied loiterers outside sleepy village pub turn out not

to be the Ramblers. And not a STIHL accessory among them.

A few of us succumb to considerable Landrover envy on the short car-share to Braffawd Wood, but we handle it bravely. The introduction

ceremony reveals a fabulously diverse crew – from the couple who had owned their wood for a mere two days, to the one who had nipped out to Asda and returned with several acres of South Yorkshire. And two sets of hitherto unacquainted woodland neighbours. Woodlanders can be a secretive lot.

Braffawd's stately pines scatter unexpected sunshine – the trusty Cagoule is ditched for a full and courageous six minutes. There is a woody, earthy whiff of the merest suggestion of springtime; a tall trunk embraced by beautiful black bracket fungus; the contorted root matrix of a wind-felled beech. There are bluebell shoots in all directions; we massacre thousands by our mere existence. The welly does not make for elegant woodland tiptoe – even the two-year-old daughter knows that, though when

demonstrating the point she looks less of a twerp.

Guest professional Ben Scotting is excellent on PAWS restoration, as well as tree care and coppicing. And new planting. And a healthy canopy. Oh, and squirrel damage, clear felling, timber prices, native species, forestry in Scotland, plantations in England, tree disease, tree protection, the commercial benefits of ownership, wildlife conservation, woodland structures, woodland grants and, well, pretty much everything he is asked to talk about. A



patient tree identification lesson clarifies the difference between Scots and Corsican pine. No, don't ask me – the morning's coffee has made its way too quickly southwards to allow for adequate concentration;

but I think the Corsican would provide slightly more cover, trunk-wise, should the promised pub lunch be postponed much longer.

I came away having enjoyed the morning hugely, talked to a wealth of interesting friendly and helpful people, and much consoled to learn how many other wood owners begin without a darned clue what they are doing either. But how inspiring that all, veterans and novices alike, are eager to discover from patient professionals, and each other, ways of making their woodlands as healthy, fun and wildlife-friendly as possible. So, many thanks to Bill and Shan for hosting in their beautiful plot, Ben for his knowledge and abundant advice, and to Judith for coordinating from afar. It would be great to have another one soon.

Malvern Coppicing courses at Ravenshill Nature Reserve 10% discount for SWOG members

Phil Hopkinson will be running a number of coppicing and woodland craft courses throughout the year based at Ravenshill Nature Reserve in rural Worcestershire. Ravenshill is a 50acre privately owned ASNW woodland reserve with a range of very diverse habitats.

He is offering a 10% discount to SWOG members.

Charcoal making weekend 16–17 May

This weekend starts by loading the ring kiln, we then start the burn which carries on into the first night. On Sunday afternoon the kiln is opened and participants finish the course by taking a bag of charcoal from the burn.

Introduction to green woodworking 15 May 2015; 3 July 2015; 14 August 2015; 12 September 2015

This course is based in the woodland workshop. Participants will use a range of traditional tools such as a drawknife and froe to cleave and peel poles and will make a maul using breaks and shave horses.



Coppicing courses

17–18 October 2015; 21–22 November 2015

The two-day coppicing courses are aimed at small woodland owners who would like to gain more knowledge about traditional woodland management. The first morning is spent walking round the wood learning tree ID and looking at the coppice coupes that have been cut over the last 15 years. A small section of a coupe is worked from start to finish over the weekend culminating in each participant making a selection of products from the poles cut over the weekend.

Camping is available in the wood for course participants. A cooked meal is provided each day in the woodland workshop/ kitchen. For more information visit www.malverncoppicing.co.uk

Free advice from Plumpton College 16 April 2015, 9.30am-4pm Woodland Enterprise Centre, Flimwell, East Sussex, TN5 7PR



Plumpton College is running a day of free advice for woodland owners and managers. They have lined up representatives from

- East Sussex Council
- Forestry Commission
- DataTag
- High Weald AONB
- Sprint Fuels renewables

- WARR Partnership
 - RAMSAK machinery rings
- Along with experts from the Plumpton staff, they will all offer

advice on many aspects of woodland management. There will be guidance about the grant system and information about the latest grants available to woodland owners. If you are in the area, it will be well worth attending. Pre-booking is vital.

For more information contact Claire Gammon on 01580 879547 or email gammonc@plumpton.ac.uk

Woodlands blogs

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

Who are the Woodcraft folk?

The Woodcraft Folk is a national youth group with historic links similar to the scout movement. It encourages young people to enjoy the outdoors, while promoting international fellowship.

Connected woodlands

Lewis reflects on the first law of ecology, which states that 'Everything is connected to everything else'. Today, connectedness in woodlands also extends to a vast array of technological sensors and data monitors that record information about the natural world.

How does Inheritance tax and capital gains work with woodlands?

Woodlands get a certain amount of protection from 'capital taxes' to encourage investment in forestry. This blog provides a short but comprehensive review of woods and taxes.



Woodland ants

There are four main species of woodland ants in the UK which have an important role to play within the woodland ecosystem.

Buying a woodland with your pension

Angus explains how to free up pension funds to buy woodlands in a tax-efficient manner

Finding buried treasure in woodlands through metal detection

If your pension won't allow the purchase of a woodland, perhaps you'll get lucky with a metal detector. Robert describes his enjoyment of metal detecting in the woods.



Introduction to Bushcraft Saturday 23rd May, £50 per person, lunch included

Learn the principles of bushcraft with qualified bushcraft trainer Leo Dawson: safe use of cutting tools; basic carving techniques; sustainable harvesting of materials; natural firefighting; wild food; basic tracking.

To book, email: info@primecoppice.com or call 07778525816. You can also visit our website www.primecoppice.com

Prime Coppice is a 52-acre working wood in the Marshwood Vale, near the beautiful Jurassic Coast of West Dorset. the wood is the last remaining part of an ancient woodland and is an



integral part of the local AONB. The majority of the wood consists of mixed ash and hazel coppice with scattered oak and ash standards. There are 6 acres of ancient woodland pasture, which we are restoring with sensitive grazing and management.

Trees for Doomsday

The 'doomsday' vault in Svalbard, Norway, widely known for protecting global food crop seeds, has accepted its first delivery of forest tree species seeds.

Norway spruce and Scots pine samples have been stored in the vault inside a mountain on the Arctic archipelago. The work on conservation of forest tree seeds at Svalbard was initiated in 2008, when the importance of tree-breeding, including genetic adaptation to climate change was underlined. Other nations are expected to contribute tree seeds later.



The frozen depository opened in 2008 and is designed to withstand all natural and human disasters.

One researcher said, 'The catastrophe scheme is not a major motivation for me. It is more important that these samples will provide an opportunity to monitor long-term changes in the genetic composition of our natural forests.'

The website is <https://www.regjeringen.no>.

Flora locale training programme 2015

The Flora locale training programme is created for people involved in the design, management and restoration of wild plants and landscapes for biodiversity, whether on a farm, smallholding, village green or city park. Each event is led by an individual with practical experience and provides an informal opportunity for participants to learn from an expert and each other. Fees are £100 p/p per event; £75 p/p for employees or volunteers of charities, parish councils, students and those not economically active, unless otherwise stated. Flora locale Associates benefit from a 10% discount on the booking fee. For more details about all these courses, please visit the Flora Locale website: www.floralocale.org

South-west England

Habitat management in new and established woods

21 May, Chulmleigh, North Devon

Managing woodlands for pollinators and sustainability

24 June, Chippenham, Wiltshire

Restoring and managing old orchards and fruit trees: summer pruning

20 July, Devizes, Wiltshire



Using horses to manage woodland sites

6 October, Chippenham, Wiltshire

South-east England

An introduction to managing sites for woodland flora

29 May, Bredhurst, Kent

Managing veteran trees: implications of aging and decay with reference to Burnham Beeches

12 November, Burnham Beeches, Slough

East England

Propagating and planting tree seeds for woodland creation projects

18 November, Cranfield, Bedfordshire

Wales

Managing woodlands and gardens for wildlife and sustainability

15 July 10am–3.30pm, Betws y Coed, Conwy

Scotland

Woodland flora identification and introduction

24 June, Dollar, Clackmannanshire

Managing biodiversity on a small holding

2 July, Aberdeen, Scotland

A good quality bushcraft knife does not need to cost the earth. John Clark of Bowji Bushcraft describes how to use knives safely and legally.

A strong 'entry level' knife – and a favourite of many woodsmen – is the 'Mora'. My recommendation would be one of the Mora Heavy Duty series which, with a 3 to 4 mm thick 4 inch blade, will handle most of the abuse you are likely to put it through; and for less than £15.00.

You can go mad and pay anything up to £450 for a similar knife if you are in the market for a hand-made British forged 'family heirloom'.

Whatever price you pay, the blade will usually come with a razor-sharp polished finish. In order to keep your blade in similar working condition over time, we will look at knife-handling, cutting techniques and maintenance.

But firstly, carrying a razor sharp 4 inch blade whilst travelling to and from your woods might arouse the suspicions of your local police officer, so let's take a brief look at **UK knife law**.

Under UK law it is illegal to

- sell a knife of any kind (including cutlery and kitchen knives) to anyone under 18.
- carry a knife in public without good reason – unless it's a knife with a folding blade 3 inches long (7.62 cm) or less, e.g. a Swiss Army knife.
- carry, buy or sell any type of banned knife.
- use **any** knife in a threatening way.

The penalty for an adult carrying a knife can be a prison sentence and /or a sizable fine.

There are acceptable reasons for carrying a knife in public. Examples include:

- taking knives you use at work to and from work.
- taking knives to a gallery or



museum to be exhibited.

- using the knife for theatre, film, television, historical re-enactment or religious purposes (e.g. the kirpan some Sikhs carry).
- fishing
- taking your knife to woodlands to be used for bushcraft activities and woodland tasks.

However do use caution – the police might have a different point of view. A knife in a tool box is a lot easier to explain than one carried on your hip! Remember to take the knife off your belt and place it in the boot of the car when leaving the woods.

If you find yourself charged with illegally carrying a knife, a court will ultimately decide if you've got a good reason for carrying it. There is a complete ban on some knives.

The list can be seen **here**, but those typically used for bushcraft are not on it.

Safe handling and use

Handling and using your knife safely can be achieved by following a few straightforward rules

1. Use a sheath. A good sheath protects both the knife and the carrier.
2. Get into the habit of always returning the knife to its sheath (even mid-task) rather than



Knife maintenance, handling and the law

laying it on the ground or placing it in a pocket.

3. The ground and soil are damp. Never stick a knife into the earth as it damages the blade and ruins the edge.

4. Placing an unprotected, razor-sharp knife in a pocket is an obvious no-no!

5. Returning a blade to its sheath mid-task prevents a mishap when suddenly distracted, e.g. wiping sweat from your face, or slapping at a horse fly nibbling on your leg.

6. When passing a knife to someone, do so in the following manner:

- handle first
- edge of blade up
- with spine of blade lying along the arm of the giver.

Basic cutting techniques

Forehand grip This is the strongest grip and one you are probably likely to use most often.

The cutting action is always away from the hand holding the wood. It is very tempting to occasionally reverse direction, cutting towards yourself.

Don't – it will end in tears! I have plenty of scars as proof!

Backhand grip The use of the backhand grip allows you to make fine, powerful cuts while maintaining good control of the blade. It is commonly used when whittling.

Chest lever grip Often used in conjunction with the backhand grip, the chest lever grip gives you greater leverage without losing control.

Battening Using a mallet or stick to drive the blade into a log to split it. This puts a great deal of stress on a knife, hence the preference for a full tang blade. When cutting or whittling wood, use a slicing action and follow the grain of the wood



Passing a knife safely.



Forehand grip



Chest lever grip



Unsafe cutting



Battening

Basic rules of safety

- Think about the follow-through – take care not to get yourself or others in the way.
- When sitting down, keep your elbows on your knees – this creates a stable working platform and an ‘area of safety’ into which the blade can pass.
- Stop when tired.
- Keep a basic first aid kit nearby.

Care and maintenance

- Blades need to be kept sharp – a dull blade is both ineffective and dangerous
- Many wood saps stain and also corrode the blade – clean carefully after every use.
- High carbon steel is prone to rust – keep clean, dry and lightly oiled with gun oil, vegetable oil or even goose fat.

Sharpening and polishing

Sharpening is a skilled process that requires care and practice. There are many ways to sharpen a blade, but I have found that the best results are achieved by:



Sharpening a knife on a whetstone

- Using a ceramic or Japanese whetstone system.
- Laying the blade on the stone with the blade away from you, then tilting until bevel lies flat against the stone.
- Working the blade away from you, stroking the blade with the bevel flat against the stone.
- Reversing the side and repeating the process.

Polishing can be done using a leather ‘belt’-style strop tied to a fixed object and pulled taught. Alternatively, use a piece of leather ‘cloth’ on a hard surface and apply a polishing agent to the leather (such as ‘Starkie Blue’ – also known as Smurf poo!)



Polishing a blade using starkie blue

A definitive guide to the law on carrying and handling knives in the UK is available on the government website here: www.gov.uk/buying-carrying-knives

*John Clark runs **Bowji Bush Camping** in Cornwall. Take a look at his website for a full list of courses and training.*

Planting a new hedge

For many woodland owners especially those with ancient woodlands, our hedges are our boundaries. They may have been planted hundreds of years ago, and some are still managed as hedges, having been layed, pollarded or coppiced many times. Others might be unrecognisable as a hedge, more a line of full grown trees which is what all hedges aspire to be eventually!

Managing an old hedge is a labour-intensive business. Planting a new hedge . . . is also labour-intensive! It is however, a very satisfying and rewarding experience – at least that’s what you will be telling yourself once you’ve put the last plant in and are soothing your aching muscles in a warm bath.

There are very good reasons to plant a hedge instead of using wire fencing:

- They provide food and shelter for wildlife.
- They increase biodiversity.
- Managed properly they can be as stock-proof as a wire fence.
- You may be able to get support in the form of a grant to help pay some of the costs.
- They look much better and are continually providing interest as they change with the seasons.
- Despite the amount of work – planting, weeding, watering in the early years, then trimming and relaying every 15 years – the benefits make the effort very worthwhile.

Choosing species - a fun process!

I whittled my original list down to nine possible species. I wanted as much diversity as possible, whilst providing shelter and a visual screen year round. Hawthorn is always going to be high on the list of any native hedge. Tried and tested over the years, it is hardy, provides blossom and fruit, and you can even add the young leaves to a salad. This was the basis of the hedge; other species I chose were hornbeam as, like beech, it keeps its leaves in the winter, but is hardier in the wet. I had noticed a lot of holly thriving in

the area and as I was planting a triple row, I used it for the centre of the hedge, along with a few wild privet for their year-round screening qualities.

Blackthorn, crab apple, two roses – guelder and dog – would add to the nectar and fruiting possibilities, and field maple would provide a lovely autumnal colour. I planted one wild service tree about six years old as a standard at the start of the hedge. I chose this as it is an increasingly rare ancient woodland species, much prized for its timber, but also because it provides fruit for the birds and has a beautiful shaped leaf and autumn colour.

Preparation

Preparation started last summer. You really want to start with a blank canvas to give the young trees the best start in life. I chose to use a herbicide to kill off the grass and weeds in a metre-wide strip where the hedge would be. I’m not overly keen on using chemicals, but the alternative on a hedge this long isn’t really practical. A weed barrier cloth and mulch over the site would work fine if left down for a year, but is expensive and labour intensive.

I treated the area in July, then went back a couple of



months later and reapplied it. Once it was all dead in a dry spell later in the season, I borrowed a friend's blow torch and burnt off all the dead material. All this doesn't seem very eco-friendly, but rationalising it, if this hedge is going to be around for the next few hundred years, the benefits to wildlife and biodiversity in the future are going to far outweigh this short-term destruction.

When I've planted hedges in the past, I have used a spiral or tube to protect the plant from rabbits, and a bamboo stake to hold them in place. In this hedge I wanted to ensure a thick, healthy and stock-proof growth from the bottom. So I intended to cut the plants back to between 6 and 8 inches and encourage this growth in the early years. Using a spiral makes this awkward, so I decided to protect the whole hedge with a double rabbit proof fence. This definitely IS expensive and time consuming, but again, I rationalised to myself that 90% of the hard work in any project is in the beginning during the preparation.

Putting up a rabbit-proof fence involves a bit more than a stock fence. Long term, once the hedge is established, I'd like to remove all the wire and netting completely. Future hedge layers (maybe even myself!) will be grateful for this, but in the meantime a robust fence is needed to protect the young plants. Rabbits are obviously quite adept at burrowing so the netting needs to be buried under the ground. The easiest way is to chop out some turfs about 10" wide, and lay the netting on the bare earth in the direction you are expecting the rabbits to 'attack', then replace the sods (that's the turfs not the rabbits). Hang the netting from tensioned line wires top and bottom with netting clips, sometimes called 'hog rings'. Because you are tensioning the lines, you will need to use thicker strainer posts and

struts to ensure the tension in the lines does not pull the posts out of the ground.

All in all, quite an effort, but after six months, a good few hundred quid and countless hours labour, eventually came the time to start planting!

Planting

By comparison, planting is relatively simple. Some people slot plant their young trees, by just wiggling a spade in the ground to create a slot to put the roots in. I prefer to dig a hole; it doesn't



take much longer, but actually as this soil was quite nice and friable, I used a petrol driven auger which produced a 4" hole big enough and deep enough to get the roots in and covered. I added a small handful of blood and bone fertiliser. A lot of people don't bother as it can encourage weeds, but if you are using mulch, this will help maintain the nitrogen level.

Make sure you don't allow your bare-rooted plants to dry out. It's best to plant on a damp drizzly day, but if not, cover the plants with a damp rag and water well once in the ground.

Finally, I cut the trees back to encourage a strong lateral growth from the bottom. At the end of the growing season I will probably cut back half of the growth again and hopefully, a good thick hedge will take shape. Annual or biannual trimming can be done until, in 15 years or so, as the hedge plants strain to become trees, it will need laying. I'm clearing my diary for winter 2030 and will probably be looking for more volunteers by then!

Rich Hare planted the hedge thanks in part to a grant from the Community Landscape Fund and with support from the High Weald AONB. He is also grateful for more than a little help from his friends and family.

Woodfairs

The woodfair season is nearly upon us! 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

The Bushcraft Show

23–25 May 2015 Beehive Farm Woodland Lakes, Rosliston, Derbyshire
www.thebushcraftshow.co.uk

Royal Highland Show 2015

18–21 June Edinburgh
www.royalhighlandshow.org

Woodfest Wales

26–28 June 2015 Caerwys, North Wales
www.woodfestwales.co.uk

Blackdown Hills Woodland Fair

4th July Wrangway near Wellington, Somerset
www.woodbiz.co.uk

Woodlands Country Show

11–12 July 2015 Royal Victoria Country Park, Southampton, Hampshire
www.woodlandcrafts.co.uk

New Forest and Hampshire Show

29–31 July 2015 Brockenhurst, Hampshire
www.newforestshow.co.uk

Treefest at Westonbirt Arboretum

29–31 August 2015 Tetbury, Gloucestershire
www.forestry.gov.uk

Stock Gaylard Oak Fair

29–30 August 2015
Sturminster Newton, Dorset
www.stockgaylard.com

National Forest Woodfair

31 August 2015 Beacon Hill Country Park, Leicestershire (early bird ticket discount until 5 May) www.nationalforest.org

Wychwood Forest Fair

6 September 2015 Charlbury, Oxfordshire
www.wychwoodproject.org

Confor Woodland Show 2015

10–11 September 2015
Longleat Estate, Wiltshire
www.confor.org.uk

European Woodworking Show

12–13 September 2015, Cressing Temple Barns, Essex www.europeanwoodworkingshow.eu

Bentley Weald 20th Anniversary Woodfair

18–20 September 2015 Lewes, East Sussex
www.bentley.org.uk/events

Surrey Hills Woodfair

3–4 October 2015 Birtley House, Bramley
www.surreyhills.org

Cranborne Chase Woodfair

3–4 October 2015, Fordingbridge, Hampshire
www.woodfair.org.uk

Peebles Wood Market

24–25 October 2015 Tweed Green & Community Hall, Peebles, Scottish Borders
www.forest-festival.com/wood-market

Free entry to Bentley Woodfair

One of the highlights of the year is the woodfair at Bentley, where SWOG has a stall decked out with woodland products, various displays and Rich's rocket stoves, which provide a constant supply of tea. The SWOG team is small – just two of us – and we are always really grateful for the support of SWOG members in manning the stall.

If you would like to help out by doing a couple of hours on the stall, talking to fellow members, or even recruiting new ones, please get in touch. In return, we are offering free entry to the Bentley Woodfair. Please email judith@swog.org.uk or rich@swog.org.uk