

A photograph of a forest clearing. In the foreground, several wooden canoes are lined up on the ground. In the background, a tent is visible, and a tree trunk has a small white sign with the letters 'WE' on it. Sunlight filters through the trees, creating a dappled light effect on the ground.

Small Woodland Owners' Group

Newsletter (October 2015)

Results of British Woodlands Survey

Foraging – foods from the forest

Roundwood timber framing

Small Woodland Owners' Group

www.swog.org.uk



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Woodfairs are wonderful events on many levels and Bentley did not disappoint (despite a slightly soggy start). It was great to meet so many owners and to catch up with colleagues in the woodland world. There's several national events coming up which promote woodlands and next month we will have news of FC-sponsored training sessions for those applying for forestry grants. In the meantime, enjoy this month's SWOG news!

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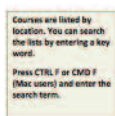
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The Small Woodland Owner's Group has been formed to aid the enjoyment, diversity and conservation of British woodland. The company Woodlands.co.uk sponsors the group, so membership is completely free and events are free of charge unless otherwise stated. SWOG is open to anyone interested in the management or the enjoyment of woodland.

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SWOG COURSE LIST MARCH 2015



SWOG Course Listings

We are often asked to recommend courses and have a list of those undertaken by owners on our website. Many new woodland owners study woodland-related topics ranging from basket-weaving, green woodworking or pole lathe turning, to chainsaw tuition and woodland management. The reviews provide a short resumé of each course, noting how effective participants found it, and whether

they would recommend it to others.

We regularly update this list of valuable comments, which is a database searchable 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

Bentley Woodfair 2015

Did Bentley have its Glastonbury moment during the 20th anniversary woodfair? It certainly felt like it on the Friday as we lugged our mud-spattered kit to the SWOG stall and the rain drummed down on the tent. Happily the rain stopped and Saturday and Sunday were fine, if muddy.

It was wonderful to meet so many owners and

thank you to all those who lingered long enough to help us with our questionnaire about track maintenance.

We were also really grateful to our volunteer helpers, notably Rodney and Heather, and Andy Malleson. We passed on lots of SWOG t-shirts and pencils and were delighted to hear first-hand what is going on in woodlands around the country.



We had a steady stream of visitors, ranging from SWOG members to those pulled in by the vision of Rich's latest toy, a solar-powered stove. It attracted many interested comments and the patient enjoyed sausages and bacon. (Visit www.sunstove.co.uk for a closer look and email rich@swog.org.uk for more details.)



British Woodlands Survey on Resilience

SWOG members were urged to respond to the British Woodlands Survey on Resilience over the summer. More than 1,470 people filled it in and the results show, among other things, that owners want guidance in how to address the environmental factors that are affecting our woodlands.

Nine out of ten woodland owners and other forestry professionals who responded say they had observed at least one form of impact in the past ten years. They reported increases in vertebrate pests such as deer and squirrels, while among professional managers and agents, pathogens and pests were the most commonly-reported impact on the woodlands that they manage. Faced with these challenges, it is not surprising that owners want more information about pathogen control.

Nearly three-quarters (72 %) of the UK's woodlands are in private ownership. The survey provides an insight into how their owners – those who manage them and the nurseries who supply them – are responding to potential

2015 BRITISH WOODLANDS SURVEY

challenges of the future through their planting and tree species choice. It captured the opinions and activities of those responsible for managing 11% of all privately-owned woodlands in the UK (an area covering 247,571 ha, equivalent to 245,606 rugby fields).

Provenance matters

The survey results emphasised that in the past only 44% had specified provenance (origin) when buying trees for new planting. This highlights there may be a lack of awareness of the importance of provenance, and tree genetic diversity in general, when planning resilient woodlands. 69% of owners stated a preference in future for sourcing material grown in UK nurseries, possibly reflecting recent issues around infected imported plants – ash dieback was originally identified in the UK on plants imported from nurseries in continental Europe.

There also appears to be an appetite among private woodland owners towards a move from the current mix of native and non-native tree species to a 6% increase in native species compared to non-native species. Such a change was not supported by forestry professionals.

Most respondents believe that climate change will significantly affect our forests, although there is considerable uncertainty among private woodland owners among whom more than 50% are uncertain or don't believe it will affect forests in the future.

Dr Gabriel Hemery, Chief Executive of the Sylva Foundation and survey co-ordinator, said: 'We are passionate at Sylva about working with the many thousands of owners and forestry professionals whose voices are not often heard. The weight of the response to this survey will allow their views and experiences to inform



policy and practice for years to come. We are grateful to all those who took part, and indebted to our partner organisations for their support.’

Resilience for the future

Beccy Speight, CEO of the Woodland Trust added, ‘The survey results give the industry some real insight into how our woodlands are changing. We hope the survey will help to stimulate discussion . . . in order to help kick-start a unified approach to understand the issues more fully, tackle challenges we face as a sector together, and identify a way forward to help create a resilient landscape for the future.’

Simon Lloyd, Chief Executive of the Royal Forestry Society (RFS), whose membership includes many of the private woodland owners of England, Wales and Northern Ireland, said: ‘The survey shows that most woodland owners are already experiencing the adverse impacts of pests and disease in their woods and expect this trend to continue in future.’

Survey respondents recognise the need to

Forestry Commission advice

For those owners concerned about tree diseases, the Forestry Commission is an excellent starting place to find answers to your questions.

The FC has recently released a series of videos about the most common Phytophthora species, including *Phytophthora ramorum*, the killer of larch. Phytophthora is a destructive parasitic fungi that causes brown rot in plants. They are a large group of pathogens that cause diseases in plants, including many species of tree. The name is derived from Greek and literally means ‘plant destroyer’ from *phyto* (plant) and *phthora* (destroyer).

Two videos explain how to prevent the spread of this deadly disease. **View them here.**

Ash die-back

Meanwhile, the fungus that causes our old friend ash die-back, or *Chalara fraxinea*, has

improve the resilience of their woods to environmental change. The challenge is to provide woodland owners with the evidence base to support long-term decisions on species choice and management systems. A lot more work is required in this area.’

Of the survey respondents, 821 (56%) were private woodland owners with professional agents responsible for managing 3,473 woodlands and 13 specialist tree nurseries with a combined annual turnover of more than £7.5m also taking part.

The information from the survey will be used by organisations, policy makers and researchers to help improve the resilience of the nation’s forests, and to determine how better support can be provided to woodland owners and managers. The results will also inform the government’s National Adaptation Programme for England.

A full report will be published before the end of the year and made freely available at **www.sylva.org.uk/bws**

acquired a new name: *Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*. The Forest Research Agency and government scientists continue their research into identifying disease-resistant strains and the Forestry Commission has renewed their advice: **www.forestry.gov.uk/website/forestry.nsf**, The map which shows how the disease has spread across the British Isles has been updated: **chalaramap.fera.defra.gov.uk**.

There is a comprehensive guide to identifying ash die-back, with excellent illustrations and videos, as well as advice about what to do if you find evidence of ash die-back in your wood. Older, mature trees tend to survive and have more resistance to infection than younger specimens.

On a more positive note, the Forestry Commission has an excellent series of videos on their **YouTube site here**, with short films covering coppicing, tree and plant health, and other aspects of woodland management.

Coppicewood College Courses

Introduction to coppicing 26 Oct – £240

This four-day course will introduce you to the skills needed to take a neglected broad-leaf woodland and transform it into a productive coppice with wildlife benefits. Our tutors will demonstrate how to cut a coppice plot safely using appropriate hand tools. You will also learn to identify different tree species and understand their value.

Hedgelaying 8 Feb – £240

If you have neglected hedges on your land, or just want to acquire the knowledge and skills in this ancient craft? Then join us on this four-day course to learn how to make them stockproof and more beneficial to wildlife. We will teach you traditional hedgelaying using hand tools. Learn how to use a bill hook – the iron age tool that is still the best for the job today.

Coppicewood College promotes and supports sustainable woodland management and runs courses using traditional methods and tools. They cover all aspects of coppice practice, hedgelaying and coppice craft in our own woodland in Cilgerran, Pembrokeshire, West Wales. Visit www.coppicewoodcollege.co.uk for more details.



Practical hedgelaying – free downloads

We have published a couple of articles about hedgelaying this year, and in May advertised a free e-book on the subject from the National Hedgelaying Society. The final part of the trilogy has just been published and all three instalments are available as free downloads for non-commercial use from the **SWOG website**.

Practical Hedge Laying – the Basics and *Practical Hedge Laying – Field and Competition*, is followed up by *Practical Hedge Laying – Hedge Laying Styles*. Written by Allan Portas of the National Hedgelaying Society, they are useful guides and form an important permanent record of the craft of British hedgelaying.

More information about hedges and hedgelaying can be found on the National Hedgelaying Society's website:

www.hedgelaying.org.uk

Seed-gathering season 2015

The Tree Council is celebrating the seed-gathering season until 23 October. They are encouraging everyone to harvest berries, nuts and seeds from local trees, and especially to nurture and germinate tree seeds for the benefit of their neighbourhoods. SWOG members probably don't need much encouragement to do this, but those in search of healthy tree stock could do worse than following the tips on the **Tree Council website**. Trees that are most likely to put down the strongest roots are those whose seeds have been gathered from local stock.



Rich goes roundwood timber framing



Earlier this month I attended the first roundwood timber framing course run by Artizans of Wood at the Dangstein Conservancy in Rogate. The course showed us how to construct a cruck or 'A' frame style building from round and somewhat irregular poles. Although it was the first course that the Artizans have run here, all the tutors have many years of experience and were trained in this style of construction by Ben Law who came to notoriety when he crafted his woodland house for the Channel 4 architectural programme, *Grand Designs*.

This project was to construct a two-bay tractor shed which requires three 'A' frames or crucks. This meant the group of 12 could split

into manageable teams of 4 and work on a cruck each. There was a real feeling of team-work on the build: people had come from many different backgrounds with varying amounts of experience, but everyone seemed to enjoy the challenge, and the feeling of satisfaction was palpable in the group as each joint went together, then each frame and on the final day, the frames were all raised and fixed firmly with oak pegs.

Frame raising

The artisans' passion for their craft was obvious from the first day and maybe this is why they all seemed so at ease in putting across a sometimes difficult subject. Along with all the other

attendees, I found myself being thoroughly engrossed in the whole process and would recommend it to anyone with an interest in natural sustainable building, or who just wants to make a simple shelter in their woods. Attending this course will inspire you!

Visit the **Artizans of Wood website** for more information about what they do or to book on a course.



Foraging – food from the forest

*John Clark of **Bowji Bush Camping** explains how to find food in the woods.*

Extended trips into the outdoors require a careful assessment of nutrition. For a weekend in the woods or the first few days or weeks of an extended trip, it is possible to rely on food brought with you. However, at some point it is not possible (without re-supply) to bring sufficient resources with you and ultimately you might be forced to acquire food in the wild.

Resources may be limited by season, climate, terrain. There are many stories about people suffering from starvation whilst surrounded by an abundance of food simply because of a failure of recognition, or the absence of skills and equipment to acquire them.

Calorie calculation: energy out vs energy in

If acquiring food expends more energy than that provided by the food acquired, the process will ultimately lead to starvation. High value foods, including starches, carbohydrates, sugars, proteins, fats, oils are required to sustain life in the outdoors. Vitamins and minerals are also important, but are not a substitute for calories nor are they essential in the short term.

Energy is burned from moving about and working; mental activity (an increase in stress = increase in mental activity); and keeping warm

In a crisis you can conserve energy by remaining in one place and moving about as little as possible. At the same time, you will be less prone to accidents, grow more familiar with your surroundings and can erect a sturdy shelter and animal traps. It will also be easier for rescuers to locate you.

Foraging

Foraging in the wild can produce more than just food. As well as edible fruits, plants, roots and tubers, you can use various plants to supply antiseptics, soaps, insect repellents, preservation chemicals and medicinal remedies.



Basic rules of foraging for food

Following the principles from the calorie calculation and use these guidelines when you begin foraging.

- Stay close to camp – the further you go, the more calories are required.
- Collect close to the ground as climbing requires a high-energy output and is higher risk. Digging also requires more effort and a higher output of energy.
- The less preparation that ingredients require, the better. Heating or soaking requires water and fuel, both of which require collection. Ease of digestion should also be considered.
- Try to collect things that are easily identifiable as this minimises the risk of misidentification and poisoning.
- Avoid toxic plants and fungi. Fungi in particular represent a high risk with poor calorific return.
- Don't take too much from any one area – allow the area to recover.

In the woods, a diet of starchy carbohydrates is difficult to source in any meaningful quantity. A quick glance through any wild food book reveals lots of salad options but few vegetables with significant calorific content.

You can find some energy-laden roots during spring and summer in the UK, but it is a question of knowing what to look for. One could spend a lifetime learning about wild edibles for each season and each part of the world, and a comprehensive list is beyond the scope of this article. Some of those most easily found and identified are listed here.



Lesser celandine is a perfect spring and summer plant. It is to be found in many locations from ancient woodland to road side banks, as a member of the buttercup family its bright yellow flower can be a great help in identification.

It is the starchy root nodules which provide the meal and in this

case the root's appearance lends itself to one of its other common names of pilewort. This description stems from the 'Doctrine of Signatures' an ancient medicinal belief system dating which posited that plant parts resembling parts of the human body were considered beneficial for that part of the body. Celandine roots were thought to be good for the treatment of haemorrhoids. (Feel free to make your own mind up about this!)



Cattail is a great spring root commonly known as the **bulrush**. It is a year-round restaurant favourite and provides a meal at any time of year. The bulrush is a starchy food store packed with carbohydrate, easily accessed by simply heating directly in the fire and sucking out the starch. Alternatively boil, followed by settling it out and drying as a flour for baking as flatbread or as a thickening agent in stew.

The other great benefit of cattail is its abundance; it is common in ponds where it can be found in huge quantities.



Burdock is another plant which is available from the spring to late summer. All of the plant is edible, although the leaves are bitter. Cooking does remove this bitterness, however. The root is huge and once the fibrous outer rind is removed can be treated as any root vegetable. It is highly nutritious and can even be eaten raw. As it is a biennial plant the root will have maximum nutrition at the end of the first year or the beginning of its second.



Pignut is a real gem; its feathery foliage is an indicator not only of spring but also ancient woodland. Its underground parts are of interest to the forager, forming a nut similar in texture and taste to sweet chestnut, but with a hint of radish.



As with all foraging please seek landowners' permission, avoid protected plants and gather from far and wide to so as not to put too much pressure on local populations. After all, you may wish to come back for more in the future. Take a look at www.hedgerowharvest.org.uk for ideas and recipes for foraged nuts and berries.

Woodlands Blogs

Branching Out Adventures competing with Go-Ape in East Sussex

Branching out Adventures offers visitors to Bentley an entirely new arboreal experience – the chance to tackle a high walkway, climbing wall, giant swing and various ropes strung up in the woods of the estate.

A clever device for long-cutting – the ‘truncator’ sawhorse

The worst thing about cutting logs with a chainsaw is all the bending down and picking up, but Richard Bowness and Steve Tonkin have solved the problem. They have designed a sawhorse with a set of ingenious “cups” that space out branches for cutting and holding the cut logs. There is a hinge so that the cut logs can then be tipped into a wheelbarrow.



Woodland types: Yew woodland

Chris describes the vital characteristics of the slow-growing but long-lived yew tree and discusses the uses of yew timber, both past and present. Perennially popular with wood turners, it was once highly valued by bowyers.

Italian forestry

Forestry cover in Italy is a remarkable 40% – considerably more than the 13% coverage in the UK. Italy has a long tradition of forestry management going back before Roman times, and ancient traditions and compared to the UK, Italy gets a large proportion of its energy from



woodfuel, with almost 60% of cut wood being used for domestic heating.

Cordless electric chainsaws are now cutting the mustard

Should woodland owners go electric and adopt electric chainsaws? Lighter, and quieter, their batteries are more efficient and they are more powerful than they used to be, but can they beat their oil-powered cousins?

Butterflies and climate change

The Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, Natural England and Butterfly Conservation have looked at the effects of extreme weather, specifically drought, on butterfly populations. Butterflies are valuable indicators of change in natural populations and are extremely sensitive to drought.



Events 2015

Cranborne Chase Woodfair

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

Timber Expo 2015

6–8 Oct NEC, Birmingham
www.thenec.co.uk/whatson/timber-expo

Chiltern Woodlands Conference

9 October 2015 Ashley Green, Bucks
www.chilternsaonb.org

UK Fungus Day

11 Oct Raising public awareness of fungi and fungal science. Events across the UK
www.ukfungusday.co.uk

National Wood Fuel Conference

15 Oct Epsom Racecourse
www.woodfuelconference.co.uk

National Coppice Federation Gathering and AGM

17–18 Oct Grizedale, Cumbria
ncfed.org.uk/

Grown in Britain Week

12-18 October 2015 Events around the country, including Open Forest Friday
www.growninbritain.org

Peebles Wood Market

24–25 October 2015
www.forest-festival.com/wood-market

The value in wood

National Wood Fuel Conference 2015

15 October Epsom Downs Racecourse

Opportunities for growth and funding for the wood fuel industry will be under the spotlight at this year's National Wood Fuel Conference on 15 October. It's a great chance for small woodland owners to learn more about generating some sort of income from timber.

Organised by Surrey Hills Enterprises in

association with Grown in Britain and the CLA, the one-day conference will provide a comprehensive overview of the industry, ideal for those looking to generate income from wood, understand more about growth opportunities through renewable energy or sustain a business in the wood fuel supply chain.

For more information or to book a place at the conference or exhibition space, please call Surrey Hills Enterprises on 01483 661151 or visit www.woodfuelconference.co.uk.