



# **Small Woodland Owners' Group**

## **Newsletter November 2016**

**I've bought a wood – now what?**

**Tree tales from the woodfair**

**Butterfly decline: what's going on?**



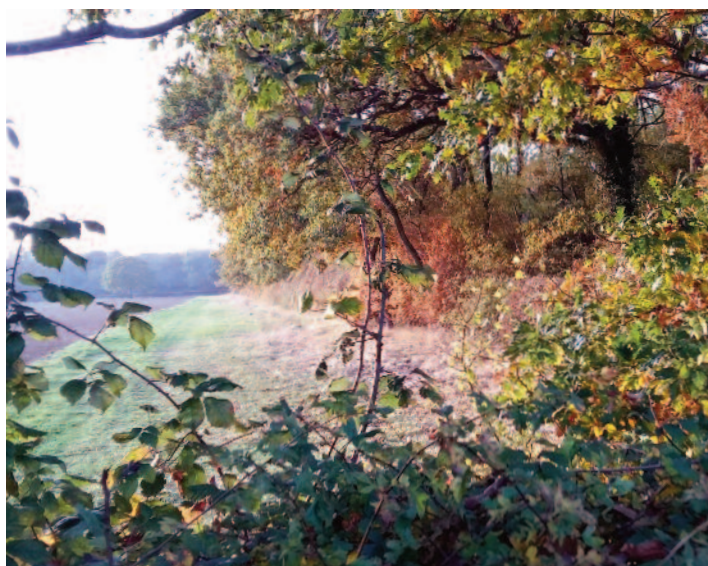
# Small Woodland Owners' Group

[www.swog.org.uk](http://www.swog.org.uk)



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Butterfly numbers, or the lack of them, continue to be a concern, but we hope SWOG members will be able to help with their preservation – see page 3 for more details. Petra Billings' offers some clear-sighted advice on making plans for small woodlands; and tree spotters might like the free app available from the Woodland Trust – see page 11.

The Small Woodland Owner's Group has been formed to aid the enjoyment, diversity and conservation of British woodlands. 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 website

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## The SWOG Forum

We have taken the difficult decision to archive the SWOG forum after several months of staff debate. It was established in 2008, when SWOG was born and proved to be a lively centre for woodland owners to exchange views and swap tips. It remains a rich resource of useful information and inspiration, but over the last 18 months or so, the number of visitors and contributors has declined to a trickle. Most of the SWOG online debate seems to be conducted on our **Facebook page here**, and it seemed to us that although our users had moved with the times, we had not.

The Forum is still easily accessible from the front page of the website, and the message boards can still be trawled for information, but there will be no new threads. We would like to thank all of you who have contributed so much to it over the years, and we hope that the chatter, stories and generous exchange of experience (good and bad) will continue on the Facebook page or via the newsletter (how about a new letters page?) If you have any suggestions about how we can improve communications, please let us know.

## Butterfly decline: what's going on?

More than 36,000 people took part in this year's Big Butterfly Count, spotting around 390,000 butterflies during the three-week mid-summer recording period. Anecdotally, many SWOG members have reported that butterfly numbers seemed lower this year and attributed it to our chilly spring. The results of the Count have backed up these anecdotal reports of decline, although the above-average temperatures during the summer should have helped butterfly populations.

The majority of butterfly species studied as part of the scheme saw their populations fall, with some producing their worst numbers since the Big Butterfly Count scheme began.

Widespread species such as the Gatekeeper, Comma and Small Copper experienced their worst summers in the project's history and were down 40%, 46% and 30% respectively compared to last year.

The Small Tortoiseshell saw a 47% drop in numbers and the Peacock slumped by 42% with both species recording their second-worst years.

Numbers of the colourful Peacock have now dropped from an average of 3.6 individuals per count in 2013 to just 0.5 per Count in 2016, a six-fold decrease over three years.



Participants also saw the lowest number of butterflies per count since the scheme began with an average of just 12 butterflies spotted.

Butterfly Conservation's Head of Recording, Richard Fox, said: 'The drop in butterfly numbers this summer has been a shock and is a bit of a mystery. When we have cold, wet summers, as in 2012, we expect butterfly populations to plummet, but that wasn't the case this year.

'The summer months were warmer than usual, yet most Big Butterfly Count participants saw fewer butterflies. Perhaps the very mild winter had a negative effect, or the cold spring, or perhaps the impacts of intensive farming and pesticides are really hitting these common species now.

'The importance of Big Butterfly Count is that it takes place every year over a long period; the longer it goes on the more we can learn about the causes that are driving the declines and in some cases, increases of our beautiful butterfly species. We are really grateful to the many thousands of people across the UK who do their bit to help butterflies by taking part in the Big Butterfly Count each summer.'

Read the full report on the **Butterfly Conservation website here.**

## SWOG butterfly workshops 2017

Woodland owners are in a unique position to help redress butterfly habitat loss and we hope that many of you will be interested in our plans for 2017.

SWOG will be working with Butterfly Conservation to provide a number of workshops throughout south-east England next spring and summer. Staff from Butterfly Conservation will explain the needs of different species of woodland butterflies and how to

recognise different varieties in flight. They will identify the plants eaten during the caterpillar stage of the butterfly lifecycle – different species favour different plants – and their presence or otherwise will determine which particular butterflies breed in your woods. They will offer guidance about creating different woodland areas for butterflies: for the larvae, for nectaring, for patrolling in flight as a territory, and for shelter.

More details about the workshops will be released in the new year.



### Rare dormouse discovered in Blackdown Hills

The reports of the discovery of a the UK's first black dormouse in the Blackdown Hills is a salient reminder of how good woodland management can be vital for the encouragement of this increasingly endangered species.

Ian White, Dormouse Officer at the People's Trust for Endangered Species (PTES) commented, 'The National Dormouse Monitoring Programme has been running for more than 25 years, with volunteers collecting

Individual populations become isolated and risk extinction. In addition, the decline in woodland management has meant that woodlands have become less diverse, with fewer open spaces and a poor understorey.

Dormice need well-managed woodlands connected by hedgerows rich in fruiting plants so that they can flourish. In the 19th century they thrived when there were many more hedgerows, and when hazel trees in woodlands were regularly coppiced, providing plenty of nuts for food.

The Blackdown Hills team report that the black dormouse was found on farmland which is being managed with conservation in mind. It was found in an area where there is an abundance of hedgerow habitat with a good diversity of wildlife species.

Woodland owners can help dormice populations by providing linked areas of coppice. Regular coppicing of trees such as hazel, sweet chestnut and hornbeam will ensure that the understorey regenerates and flourishes to provide the habitate needed by

dormice.

Unfortunately, we can do nothing about the weather. Hazel dormice hibernate during the winter and if the weather is particularly bad during their active period, they will undergo a period of 'torpor'. Dormouse fur is not especially waterproof and they try to avoid the damp. Dormice favour drier springs, summers and autumns, so the climactic trend towards warmer, wetter seasons may have an unfavourable impact upon populations.

The Blackdown Hills report of the discovery is here [www.blackdownhillsnaturalfutures.org](http://www.blackdownhillsnaturalfutures.org)



*Photo courtesy of Claire Pengelly/PTES*

data on thousands of dormice at nearly 400 sites. Not once has anyone come across a black dormouse.'

PTES published **The State of Britain's Dormice 2016** report in September, which noted that dormice are now only present in 32 English counties, almost all south of a line drawn from Shropshire to Suffolk. In 1885 they were found in 49 counties.

The factors affecting dormice numbers are well documented – woodland management, woodland connectivity and climate change. Dormice habitat has declined with the removal of hedgerows and the loss of woodland cover.



## Ravenshill Wood Courses 2016-2017

### Malvern Coppicing, Worcestershire

Phil Hopkinson  
has been  
working  
Ravenshill Wood

in Worcestershire since 1999. A firm believer in sustainable woodland management, he offers tuition in coppicing and traditional woodland management for small groups or individuals.

All courses are held at Ravenshill Reserve, Iffrick, Worcestershire, a 50-acre privately owned nature reserve. It has a patchwork of diverse habitat including many indicator species of ancient semi-natural woodland, with both deciduous and various conifer species. Prices include lunch and an open fire!

#### Two-day coppicing course

The two-day coppicing course provides an introduction to coppicing, with a mixture of theory and practical sessions which include tree identification.

Beginning with a walk through the woods looking at various compartments that have been coppiced over the last ten years, the benefits of coppicing and the differences between native deciduous woodland and conifer plantations are discussed.

Aspects covered on the course include planning the work area, building work breaks and coppice restoration, working methods, practical coppicing, material selection, processing, and storage.

**DATES:** 25-26 February 2017  
18-19 March 2017  
24-25 September 2017  
22-23 October 2017

**COST: £108**

*(includes 25% SWOG member discount)*

#### Introduction to green wood-working course

One-day taster day in green woodworking techniques suitable for novices. Good quality sharp tools will be provided. A certificate, course notes and a tree identification guide are included in the course fee.

**DATES:** 19 May 2017

14 July 2017

18 August 2017

22 September 2017

**COST: £67.50**

*(includes 25% SWOG member discount)*

Contact Phil: [info@malverncoppicing.co.uk](mailto:info@malverncoppicing.co.uk), or phone on 01684 574865 or 07443 520040.

Visit **[www.malverncoppicing.co.uk](http://www.malverncoppicing.co.uk)**



### Win a place on Phil's two-day coppicing course!

Enter SWOG's Christmas photographic competition for a chance to win a place on Malvern Coppicing's coppicing course. Runners-up prizes are a kelly kettle or a subscription to Living Woods magazine. We invite everyone to send us a photograph of people enjoying woodlands – whether it be around a fire, clearing brash, hauling logs, gazing at the woodland around you, or simply mucking around with your family. More details will be released next month, but in the meantime, make the most of some clear autumn weather and capture your friends' and families' (or even your selfie's) enjoyment of the woods.



## Tree tales from the woodfair

*At SWOG we love wood fairs because they are a great opportunity to meet woodland owners, both extant and aspirant. At Bentley this year Rich and I spend a couple of days learning a great deal about what owners do in their woods, answering questions from people who wonder what woodland ownership involves and in Rich's case, discussing the various stoves he has acquired to adorn our tent.*

It's a genuine pleasure to meet owners and members and to put faces to names. This year we had an extra task. Our friends at the Woodland Trust, who are leading the Tree Charter campaign, were kind enough to send us a batch of tree whips to hand out. They looked great outside the stand and people were keen to help themselves. However, although we are all generous to a fault, we asked visitors to the stand to tell us why trees are important to them and to tell us a tree story in exchange for one of the crabapples. Reactions varied from the slightly bemused to the wildly enthusiastic.

Brief and to the point was Professor Julian Evans, formerly president of the Institute of Chartered Foresters and a man who has a distinguished 40-year career in forestry behind him.

'Trees improve soil,' he said. 'I have planted five cycles of conifer in Swaziland and each crop is better than the last. People wonder why, but the answer is simple: unlike crops, which take nutrients from the soil, trees enrich it'.

Other echoed his views:

'We love trees because they deliver heat and food'.

### Carter and Leon

Most enthusiastic was nine-year-old Carter, (now nicknamed Tree Carter) who told us about his climbing misadventures.

'I got stuck then my friend got me to go

down a step at a time after luring me down with sweets. Then I got down.' On close questioning, it transpired that Carter had scrambled up quite a tall tree [exact height estimates varied . . .] and on realising what he had done, froze.

The friend who had talked Carter down turned out to be something of a young superhero. Leon arrived in person the next day to tell us his tale: 'Next to a massive trampoline is a more huge tree. I go there every summer and climb really high. This year I saved a bird's nest from falling down.'

Eleven-year-old Woden and his eight-year-old sister Valkyrie are lucky enough to have a family wood and demonstrated impressive tree ID. skills. They told us about a treehouse they have constructed.

'We made a treehouse without any help from the grown-ups in a very old hornbeam tree. It has indents in the bark that you can use instead of a ladder. We put sticks across the branches that stick out in a crisis-cross pattern to make a platform that supports two or three people.'

Poppy and Amelia have a big oak tree in their garden. They believe that Totoro, a Japanese tree spirit lives in it, and looks after them. Big and brown with little ears, he is something like a cross between a rabbit and a cat.

*We made a treehouse without any help from the grown-ups.*



*Wearing the SWOG Tree Charter t shirt, Carter sits among the crabapples.*

Poppy, aged seven, told us about exploring trees in Spain.

‘We went to a forest of ancient chestnut trees that were hundreds of years old. They were so big we could climb inside, and in one tree there were holes that we could peep out of. In another it was pitch black’.



which was given to us by David Bellamy. Obviously, we call it Bellamy and our new one will be called Bentley’.

Naming trees is increasingly popular and one couple told us, ‘Buying a wood was our dream. When we finally found our chestnut coppice with standards, we decided to cant by

### What better place to be than near a tree?

The adults' stories included fewer live-action tales, and were generally a little more reflective.

Gemma from London wrote: ‘I feel at peace with trees, which is why I now work as a forest school leader supporting the next generation in loving their local trees. My favourite tree is hazel. I dream of owning a hazel coppice and sharing it with people – it’s a beautiful tree’.

Naomi wrote, ‘Trees help you breathe more easily! It’s invigorating walking among trees because the air is genuinely fresher. All the birds help you feel more cheerful too, and the leaves are so graceful. What better place to be than near a tree!’

Judith remembered, ‘sitting in the tree with my school friend eating sweets’.

In summer, Kevin said, ‘The rustling of leaves in a beech wood on a breezy sunny day is the best sound ever’.

And moving on to autumn, as Sarah said, ‘There’s nothing better than dappled sunshine streaming through branches on a chilly autumn day’.

Others focused on the reward itself:

‘We would like a crabapple to go with our other crabapple,

lettering. This developed into naming each cant after a king and we’ve managed Alfred to Xavier – although we have had trouble with finding a king’s name for Q!’

Moving from history to creative writing, one person, known only as ‘Sam i Am’, left us a short poem:

I like trees

Tress are good

I like trees

They’re made of wood

*Thank you to everyone who visited the SWOG stand and shared their tree stories. We hope the crabapples flourish and become part of a new chapter of tree tales. The final words must go to the person from Bentley, who wrote. ‘Will be planted on the site of the Bentley miniature railway - look out for it next year!’*





## I've bought a woodland – now what?

*Ecologist Petra Billings offers some advice for new woodland owners.*

You've bought a woodland – fantastic! Carpets of bluebells. The spring chorus of woodland birds, perhaps even the charismatic song of the nightingale. A glimpse of bats weaving through the tree canopy at dusk. Children discovering their own secret places in the woods. An open fire fuelled by your own logs. Exciting prospects!

Your woodland can give you all of this and more. But according to Forestry Commission figures, only 20% of private woodland is in active management and lack of management is one of the biggest threats to woodland today. As the tree canopy closes, and sunlight can no longer penetrate to the woodland floor, unmanaged woods become dark and start to lose their wildlife interest. Without woodland flowers and shrubs to provide feeding and breeding places for wildlife, your woodland will fall silent.

Lack of management may not be the only problem. Populations of deer in the south-east are the highest they have ever been and deer

damage can change the structure of woodland completely by preventing natural regeneration and destroying the shrub and ground layers. Non-native invasive species such as rhododendron and cherry laurel can be another major problem, out-competing native woodland flowers and shrubs and taking over the woodland. And then there's the ever increasing tide of pests and diseases spreading across the UK.

### Make a plan

But let's look on the bright side. All these issues can be dealt with, and a woodland management plan is an essential part of the process. Think of it in three parts: first, what have you got? Second, what do you want from, or for, your woodland, and third, how are you going to achieve this?

Start by getting to know your woodland and finding out what's there. Survey the trees, shrubs and wildflowers. Have you got any interesting woodland archaeology such as woodbanks or other 'lumps and bumps' that could be man-made? Do you have any ponds or water courses





## I've bought a woodland – now what?

and what are the woodland soils like? Do you have any protected designations on your woods? Is there any evidence of past management? Gather all the information you can about your wood then you're ready to start planning how best to manage it.

### Managing the future

Take time to think about your 'vision' for the wood. What will it look like in five or ten years? The next step is to define your management objectives for your woodland. Have you bought it for wildlife conservation, woodfuel production, recreation or maybe all of those? You also need to identify any particular threats or constraints to its management, such as deer, squirrels, disease, invasive species, or access issues. Finally, work out your management strategy: in other words, how you are going to achieve your objectives given whatever constraints you have identified.

It helps to divide your woodland into compartments so that you can focus particular works in specific areas of the wood. Maps are an essential part of the plan. Never has the old adage 'a picture (or map) tells a thousand words' been more true. I find it useful to have a series of maps showing the location and designations of your wood; the main tree species and



*Dark, unmanaged woodland.*

important woodland features such as badger setts, ponds, woodbanks and so on, and the proposed management.

### Support for owners

If all this seems a bit overwhelming, there is a great deal of help available. Management plan templates and mapping resources are available on-line. Sylva's **MyForest website** provides an excellent set of tools. The **Forestry Commission** provides templates and advice, and the system will automatically trigger a felling licence application covering all the woodland works in the plan. There are also woodland planning grants available through the Countryside Stewardship Scheme which can cover most, if not all, the costs of the plan, if you are eligible. Applications for planning grants have closed temporarily but hopefully will open again in the New Year.

Woodland consultants with experience of navigating the grant system and writing approved plans can help with any or all stages of this process and work with you to turn it from what can sometimes be a daunting journey into a hugely satisfying project.

*Petra Billings is an experienced ecologist based in Sussex who advises on land management, especially woodlands. Contact Petra: [petra@sussexwoodlands.co.uk](mailto:petra@sussexwoodlands.co.uk)*



*Ancient woodbank marking a parish boundary.*



## Woodlands blogs and TV

*Click on the titles to be taken to the full blogs or videos on the [Woodlands.co.uk](http://Woodlands.co.uk) website.*

### TV

#### Making a dugout canoe

Artistic woodworker Arthur de Mowbray puts real heart into his craft as he shares his skill and enthusiasm for designing and building a contemporary leisure boat from available timbers. He talks us through the making of *The Mighty Sparrow*, from a 14- foot long poplar log.

#### How to manage a woodland

Andrew Wrigley explains how he manages woodland on the Brompton Estate in Yorkshire to ensure a balanced habitat for wildlife.

### Blogs

#### The Mediterranean cypresses and forest fires

After a fire swept through a forest near Andilla in Valencia in 2012, most of the oak, holm, pines and juniper were destroyed. One species remained: the Mediterranean Cypress. Researchers have recently concluded a three-year study which has examined the unique properties of this tree that enable it to resist fire.

#### The Big Butterfly Count – results 2016

The results of the 2016 Big Butterfly Count are disappointing and record a decline in butterfly numbers throughout the country.

#### Lokrum – a special reserve of forest vegetation

Lokrum island is situated off the Croatian coast, a short boat ride from Dubrovnik. With a perfect Mediterranean climate, it is a haven for a rich variety of flora and in 1976, it was designated as a protected 'special reserve of forest vegetation'.



#### Unusual or exotic trees – the Medlar (*Mespilus germanica*)

Native to southwest Asia and southeastern Europe, medlars have been cultivated for thousands of years and were a popular fruit in Britain in medieval times.

#### A guide to tree pruning

Paul George, a professional arborist explains why pruning will make your trees healthier, more structurally sturdy and ultimately more beautiful when done properly

#### Snighow wood – an update

A year after his purchase, Peter reflects on his decision and shows us how he has encouraged the local red squirrel population.





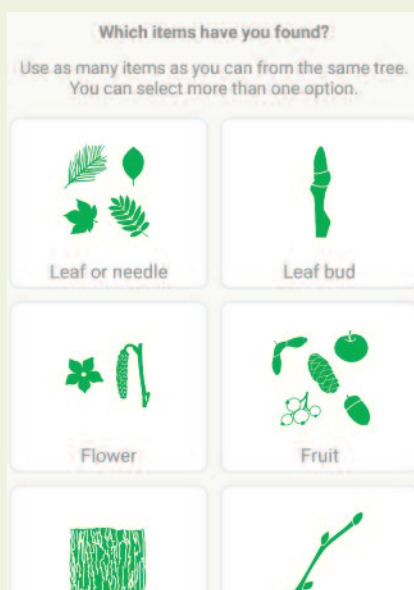
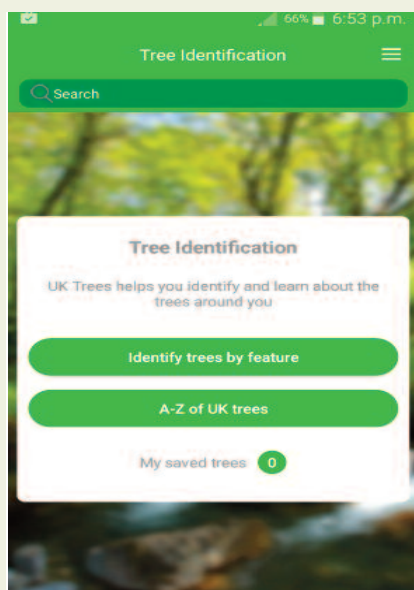
## New tree ID app from the Woodland Trust

The Woodland Trust have produced a useful free new app, British Trees for both iPhone and Android which will help you identify trees while you're walking in the woods.

Users can identify common native or non-native trees by feature: use bark, twigs, buds,

leaves, flowers and fruits to identify them, or look up the A-Z gazetteer of British trees, from alder to yew. It is a powerful app that works without an internet connection and is enhanced by clear photographic images and illustrations to aid identification.

It can be downloaded from **Google Play** or the **Apple app store** – search for Woodland Trust tree ID.



## 'Ghost of a wooden building' unearthed at Sylva Wood Centre

A team of archeologists, led by Jane Harrison of the University of Oxford, has unearthed an Anglo-Saxon building at the Sylva Wood Centre.

The village of Long Wittenham in Oxfordshire lay within the heartland of the early kingdom of the Gewisse, later known as the West Saxons. The area has produced evidence of a wide range of early medieval activity, of which



the recently-excavated Anglo-Saxon building forms an important part. Two early Anglo-Saxon cemeteries containing richly furnished weapon burials indicative of links with mainland Europe, and an adjacent complex of large, high-status buildings visible in aerial photographs, lie just a few hundred metres from Sylva's building.

The excavated structure, 'the ghost of a wooden-built building', is likely to date to the 7th century, according to Jane Harrison, a period that saw rapid social change in England including the emergence of the first English kings and the conversion to Christianity.

Timber remained the building material of choice for Anglo-Saxon kings and nobility, even several centuries after stone construction was reintroduced for building churches. Indeed, the word 'timber' is an Anglo-Saxon one and was synonymous with the act of building itself.

You can read more about the extraordinary find on the **Sylva website here**.