

Small Woodland Owners' Group

Newsletter February 2017

Winners of the Big picture
Working a Devon woodland
Insurance – is it worth it?



'Say trees' – SWOG's big picture competition – the winners

We received a fantastic selection of entries for the SWOG photographic competition, and our judge, former *Times* photographer Graham Wood, had a difficult decision when looking through the entries. Many thanks to all of you who entered and shared your sheer enjoyment of being in the woods.

We are very grateful to Phil Hopkinson of **Malvern Coppicing** for the first prize of a place on his coppice course in Worcestershire. The runners up will receive a Storm Kettle and a subscription to **Living Woods magazine**

The entries can be seen on the SWOG website, and many congratulations to the winners, who are noted below, with comments from Graham.



The winner: Jane Thompson (cover)

Take a look at the cover to see the real fun and excitement in this photograph. It very much encapsulates the brief of 'enjoying time in the woods'. It is nicely composed with the bright foliage, a picture of green punctuated by the child in the red sweater which concentrates your focus on the action.

Runner-up: Rob Elliott (left)

Another photograph of children enjoying time in the woods on a swing. This image shows a really nice interaction between the subjects. They are obviously having fun and it shows in this photograph. Another image that fulfils the brief very well.

Runner-up: George Smith (top)

There is a real sense of getting stuck in and helping out in this photograph. They are obviously having fun in the woods.



Ravenshill Wood Courses 2017 Malvern Coppicing Worcestershire



A full list of courses is on the website:

www.malverncoppicing.co.uk or you can contact Phil: info@malverncoppicing.co.uk, or phone on 01684 574865 or 07443 520040.



Over 40,000 people have scribbled, dictated or typed tree stories for the **Tree Charter website**, ranging from just a few words to several hundred, and you have a month to join in!

Gathering tree stories is more than just a lovely idea to celebrate woodlands and trees – although it all makes for really interesting reading.

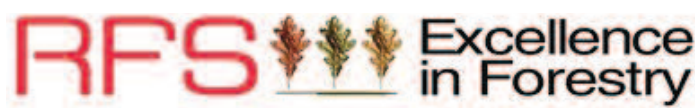
More than 60 organisations, including SWOG, are contributing to the 2017 Charter document which will consist of ten key principles relating to trees, forests and woodlands. We hope that the Charter, which will be launched on the 800th anniversary of the medieval Charter of the Forest, will influence policy makers and legislators over the coming years and put trees and woodlands at the forefront of public thinking.

Woodland owners can contribute their



thoughts via the **Sylva survey** [here](#).

Tell the Tree Charter why trees are important to you: visit the website **treecharter.uk** and upload your own tree story, whether it is long or short.



Royal Forestry Society Excellence in Forestry 2017 East of England

The deadline for entries in the Royal Forestry Society Excellence in Forestry Awards 2017 is 7 March. As the awards return to Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridgeshire, Lincolnshire, Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire, Rutland, Northamptonshire, Warwickshire and the West Midlands, the Royal Forestry Society (RFS) is calling for entries from woodlands large and small and from those involved in inspirational woodland Education and Learning Projects.

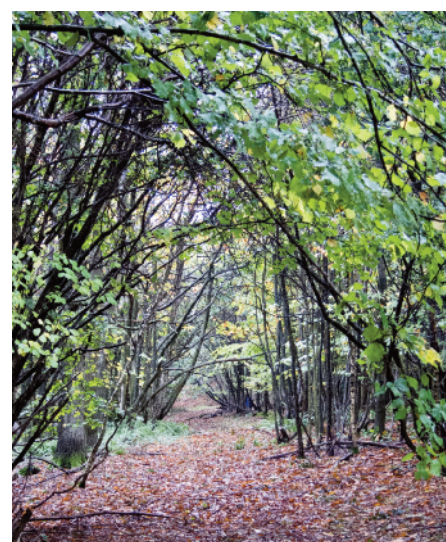
The four woodland categories reflect the modern day challenges, both economic and environmental, faced by woodlands today.

- Duke of Cornwall Resilient Multipurpose

Forestry

- Silviculture
- Small and Farm Woodlands
- Urban and Community woodlands

Further information and Entry Forms are available via the Award links at



www.rfs.org.uk/awards/rfs-excellence or by emailing EiF co-ordinator David Brackley at **rfscompetition@btinternet.com**. Telephone David on 01772 451276. Entries close on 7 March 2017. Case studies featuring previous winners are available at on the **RFS website**.

Managing woodlands for ground flora

Flora Locale is a national education charity whose aim is to promote the conservation and enhancement of native wild plant populations. SWOG member Paul Loughnane, honorary reserve manager of Thornton Wood, a Cheshire Wildlife Trust reserve and New Ferry Butterfly Park, attended a meeting on Managing Woodlands for Ground Flora and kindly sent us this review.

Course facilitators Dr Phil Putwain, a local ecological consultant and Dr Hilary Ash from Wirral Wildlife began with an initial background talk at Dibbinsdale Visitor Centre on ancient woodlands and the different plant species whose presence indicates ancient woodland in Cheshire.

This is not a static list: some plants once thought to indicate ancient woodland are now regarded as invasive, as they have hybridised or simply spread more widely. Pendulous sedge, for example has hybridised with garden centre supplies, and milder winters mean that ivy, holly, bramble and yew are all more competitive. Ironically, they may become the problem species of the future and woods are now the darkest they have been for 5,000 years.

I was very pleased to hear that Phil and Hilary approved of the hazel coppice regime of Cheshire Wildlife Trust's Thornton Wood. We have worked hard and the ground flora, especially the primroses and wood anemone, have benefited.

Boring colonisation

We moved on to discuss the many successful tree planting schemes which have inadvertently sometimes resulted in 'boring' ground flora: nettles and brambles have colonised the areas due to high phosphate and nitrogen levels in the

soil. Phil and Hilary explained that not only does a good ground flora makes the woods more attractive, but it also provides additional pollinator space. Woodlands are similar to wild flower grasslands in that reducing the nutrient status of the soil, especially phosphate, is the key to an attractive ground flora. When introducing trees to an area the removal of the nutrient rich topsoil prior to planting would be a good start to improving the potential ground flora and reducing the competition to new saplings.

Finally, they took us outside, where nature

led the discussion. First to an adjacent secondary woodland and then to the ancient woodland of Dibbinsdale where we looked at contrasting ground flora. Hilary has visited Dibbinsdale Woods for over 30 years, so knew exactly where isolated clumps of ancient woodland indicators of sanicle, barren strawberry and hairy woodrush could be found.



She was able to bring alive biological distinctions between species which are not readily appreciated by technical botanical descriptions, but easily understood in the field with actual samples to hand. The effect of hornbeam and beech on the ground flora was discussed.

In Marfords Wood, part of Dibbinsdale SSSI, there was a tremendous display of flowers with a tricolour of blue, white and yellow – they were bluebell, wood anemone and celandine, roughly a third of each, and looked absolutely inspirational.

The tutors spoke from extensive experience which was apparent throughout the day. For more information on Flora Locale's courses and training, visit their website:

www.floralocale.org

One of the most common questions from new owners is whether or not they should take out woodland insurance. It costs around £200 per year, depending on the size and location of the wood, but do you really need it. Gary Alexander of the Beech Tree Insurance Company lays out the pros and cons.

So you're fortunate enough to own a wood or meadow or other rural land and are looking forward to enjoying it. Perhaps it's purely for your own family use, with no other visitors, or maybe you plan to show off your wood to neighbours, whether for the bluebells, the views, use by a forest school or just for the sheer beauty of a piece of woodland or meadow.

Will you need insurance? If so, what do you need? What's legally required of you as a landowner and what isn't? Where do your responsibilities start and end – and to whom?

Put simply, you owe a duty of care to others, regardless of their right to be in or near your land; yes, even to trespassers! So, what's needed to protect you?

Public Liability

Public Liability is your liability to others for injury to them or damage to their property. If someone alleges that they were injured or suffered damage to their property on your land due to your ownership and use of the land, that needs to be defended. In order to win, the claimant will have to prove that you have been negligent and are therefore liable for the claim, but in any case, you won't want to fight that claim on your own, with all the attendant legal costs; so Public Liability really is a must. In our experience, genuine claims are almost unheard of, while, fortunately real accidents to people or damage to their property are extremely rare. However, we see spurious claims regularly and

while we know they cannot really have happened, they still have to be fought.

Products Liability

Given free with Public Liability insurance, Products Liability insures you against an allegation of injury or damage arising from something you make, sell or just give away, such as logs, fenceposts, charcoal and so on.

Employer's Liability

You also have a responsibility to people helping you on the land. The extent of your responsibility is down to this: do you control how they do the job? It doesn't matter whether they are paid or volunteers: if you control them – in other words dictate which jobs they do – that makes you their employer and Employer's Liability becomes a legal requirement, as well as being sensible protection.



Assessing the risk

So what do you need to do? Insurance is a personal choice and if you don't insure, that's fine as long as you've made that decision carefully and understand the risks.

- Check for damage or disease in your trees
- Have them checked regularly and take professional advice when it's given
- Watch out for hazards that you may know about, but which may not be obvious to a visitor, eg, a sudden hidden drop or steep slope into a seasonally-full water course or deep ditch. This becomes vital if you are opening up your wood or land to others.

Contact Gary for advice on all aspects of risk and the safe enjoyment of your land by you and your visitors. And enjoy your wood!

Gary Alexander

The Beech Tree Insurance Company

01273 475 276

Sallerton Wood: a riverside haven for woodland crafts

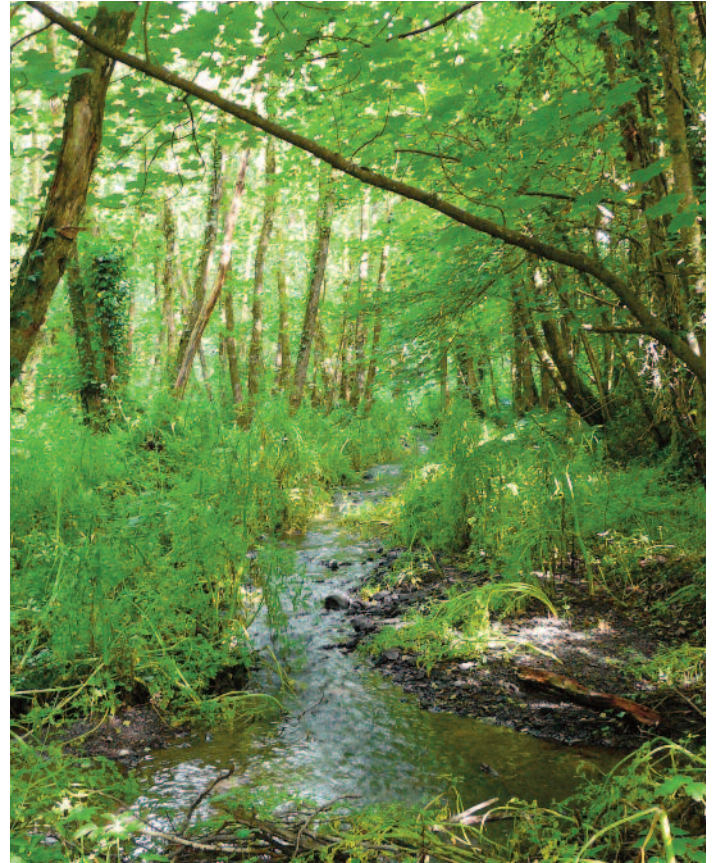
Sallerton Wood is nestled in a peaceful corner of south-west Devon close to the River Tamar and comprises some 10 acres of unspoilt, ancient mixed deciduous woodland. It is home to a wide diversity of habitats, including hillside woodland, alder swamp and a pretty stream. The wood is owned by Andy and Jane Morton who moved to Bere Alston in Devon from Berkshire in 2008, soon after they got married. Jane tells us how they came to own the wood and set up their business.

Andy is a timber framer by trade and his parents owned and managed an SSI nature reserve in Berkshire where Andy spent much of his free time as a teenager, planting trees and helping to manage the reserve with his father. Green woodwork was another of his hobbies, in particular chair-making and wood-turning. While on a chair-making course in 1998, he was inspired by Mike Abbott's woodland workshop at Clissett Wood and dreamed of creating his own one day. Purchasing or managing our own woodland was something we were keen to do together from the start and the dream has finally turned to reality with Sallerton Wood. It was formerly part of the estate of Kelly House, but was sold off about eight years ago. We were initially looking for a smaller woodland of around 4 acres, but Sallerton offered so much of what we had been searching for. We first visited the wood in the spring as the bluebells carpeted the ground and simply pulled out all the financial stops to purchase the wood, doing so just a couple of months before the birth of our son Thomas!

We had a vision to manage and utilise the woodland sustainably, to run woodcraft courses and train the local community in woodland management skills.

Under new management

The wood was clearly in need of some TLC when we purchased it, but with a careful and sustainable management plan we knew we could



work with all its good features and improve it in numerous ways, whilst making good use of its resources as we went along. There was evidence of good management some time ago, but coppice was overgrown and the ash, which makes up about 70% of the trees, was in desperate need of thinning. The woodland rides were mostly obscured by brambles and none were particularly flat. Nevertheless the potential was all there. The variety of tree species includes ash, beech, alder, hazel, wych elm, larch, sweet chestnut, holly and hornbeam.

We have received a small grant from a local legacy trust fund which is used specifically to benefit the local community through education in woodland management and craft skills. It has enabled us to buy tools, such as saws, axes and draw knives, a tarpaulin for one of the workshop shelters and afforded some free tuition for local young people. Other than that, we have mainly relied upon the generosity of time from friends, family and volunteers and simply spent almost all of our weekends and holidays in the woods, as we both work during the week.

Over the past two years, we have worked to install the necessary facilities to host various woodland activities. We have thinned specific areas to provide materials for projects such as a chestnut boardwalk over a boggy area. This leads to the workshop shelters constructed using 13-year-old coppiced ash and the utility shelter made from thinned larch. Having discovered clay in the woods near the stream, Andy used it to construct a clay oven with a hot box from woodland larch atop (for drying chair parts) alongside rocket stoves for cooking. A solar-powered pump brings water up from a spring, providing fresh water for cooking. Having completed this work, all amenities, including a composting toilet, are now on hand for visitors, volunteer workers and course participants.

Woodland courses

Last summer saw the very first season of woodland craft courses run by Andy within the woods. We offer an introduction to green woodwork, which include pole lathe turning; stool making and chair making. Chairs and stools are finished with a hand woven seat, often with bark from Sallerton Wood trees.

The crafts teach people a really satisfying process using traditional hand tools, all in a peaceful natural environment. We are really proud of all we've achieved in just two years and are looking forward to building on our success.

To follow Jane and Andy's progress, visit www.sallertonwood.org.uk, which is full of information and picture galleries showcasing the woodland conservation and its habitat. There is a list of courses and workshop opportunities, and a booking page for the 2017 season. Book before the end of February for a special discount!

Woodland activities from top: seat weaving, new shaving horses ready for use and the kitchen/utility shelter.



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

TV



Deerstalking in the woods

Deerstalking is a necessary part of woodland management. Without predators in the UK, populations have grown unchecked.

Blogs

Woodlands, climate and robustness

A topical post about the effects of climate change on woodlands and how intervention strategies, such as planting mixed woodlands, can improve the robustness of trees.

Buying a woodland in a SIPP

It is possible to buy a woodland using the proceeds of a SIPP – a Self-Invested Personal Pension. One new owner tells us how he achieved it.

The spread of the grey squirrel

They are a highly-successful invasive species, but how in-bred are Britain's grey squirrels?

Growing mushrooms on logs in your woodland

Successful cultivation of edible species requires a bit of planning – a fallen tree (oak for choice), a drill and some mushroom spores.

Sawdust to go

Flushed with success, Dick finds a use for sawdust generated by a neighbouring milling operation. He delivers it to woodland owners for use on their composting loos.

Big garden bird watch 2017

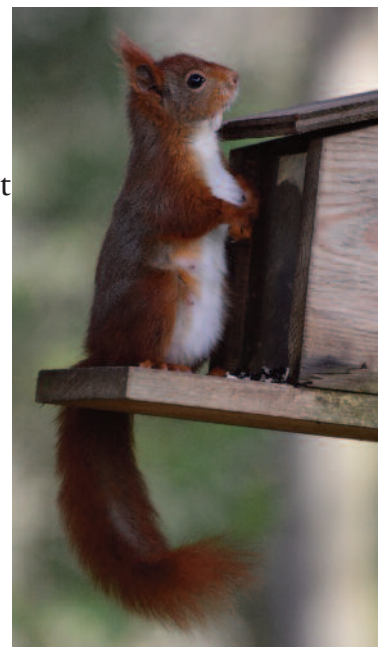
Last year half a million people, noted over 8 million birds in their gardens. The survey has just passed but there are plenty of details to assist in bird identification on the RSPB website.

Squirrel Workshop 18 February, North Wales

Red Squirrels Trust Wales have successfully removed grey squirrels from the isle of Anglesey and increased the population of 40 red squirrels to 700. This conservation success story would not have been possible without the input from local communities and businesses.

Over the next three years they aim to remove grey squirrels from a 90km² area surrounding Bangor, and reinforce the current red squirrel population with the help of local people.

Red Squirrels Trust Wales is running a **FREE** workshop for woodland owners in north-west Wales 18 February, which will train people in grey squirrel culling and red squirrel monitoring. Owners who volunteer for RSTW will receive the tools necessary to carry out these tasks. They also seek permission from woodland owners to trap and monitor squirrels on their land.



The Arb Show

12–14 May 2017

Westobirt Arboretum, Gloucestershire

www.trees.org.uk/The-ARB-Show

Weird and Wonderful Wood

13–14 May 2017

Stowmarket, Suffolk

www.weirdandwonderfulwood.co.uk/

The Bushcraft Show

27–29 May 2017

Beehive Farm, Rosliston, Derbyshire

www.thebushcraftshow.co.uk

Devon County Show

18–20 May 2017

Clyst St Mary, Exeter, Devon

www.devoncountyshow.co.uk

Royal Bath & West Show

31 May – 3 June 2017

Shepton Mallet, Somerset

www.bathandwest.com

Weald and Downland Living Museum Show

17–18 June 2017

Chichester, West Sussex

www.wealddown.co.uk

Royal Highland Show

2–25 June 2017

Edinburgh, Scotland

<http://royalhighlandshow.org>

Great Yorkshire Show

11–13 July 2017

Great Yorkshire Showground, Harrogate

www.greatyorkshireshow.co.uk

Royal Welsh Show

24–27 July 2017

Builth Wells, Wales

www.rwas.wales

New Forest and Hampshire County Show

25–27 July 2017

Brockenhurst, Hampshire

www.newforestshow.co.uk

Woodfest Wales

29–30 July 2017

St Asaph, Denbighshire

www.woodfestwales.co.uk

South Downs Show

19–20 August 2017

Queen Elizabeth Country Park, Petersfield, Hampshire

www.southdownsshow.co.uk

Wilderness Gathering

16–20 August

West Knoyle, Wiltshire

www.wildernessgathering.co.uk

Stock Gaylard Oak Fair

26–27 August 2017

Sturminster Newton, Dorset

www.stockgaylard.com

Wychwood Forest Fair

3 September 2017

Charlbury, Oxfordshire

www.wychwoodproject.org

Confor Woodland Show

7–8 September 2017

Longleat, Wiltshire

www.confor.org.uk/about-confor

Belmont Woodfest & Country Fair

9–10 September 2017

Faversham, Kent

www.belmont-house.org

Bentley Weald Wood Fair

15–17 September 2017

Lewes, East Sussex

www.bentley.org.uk/woodfair

Surrey Hills Wood Fair

30 Sept–1 Oct 2017

Birtley House, Guildford

www.surreyhills.org/events/

Sweet chestnut blight, Devon

Sweet chestnut blight has been found in a small number of trees in Starcross, near Exeter in Devon. The Forestry Commission has implemented its contingency plan, and is asking local people not to remove any sweet chestnut and oak material, including wood, bark, branches, plants and foliage, off properties within 5km (about 3 miles) of Starcross. This is to minimise the risk of spreading the disease further afield. Although oak trees suffer only superficial damage if they are infected by the fungus, they can spread the disease, which is why a restriction on movements of oak material is also necessary as a precaution.

Please note, that this only applies to a small area around Exeter. For more details, please see the **Forestry Commission website here**.

Countryside stewardship grants and events

The government has committed to plant 11 million trees during the life of this parliament, and **Countryside Stewardship**, a Rural Development Programme, is supporting well designed woodlands that will deliver biodiversity, improved water quality and reduce the risks of floods. There are grants available for planting trees and while these are probably of more use to farmers than small woodland owners, it is worth exploring the options if this is something you are thinking about. The FC is also running a series of events around the country to offer guidance and advice on the grants and management plans. The full list is on their **website here**.

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



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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Picture credits: Cover J Thompson; p 2 G Smith, Rob Elliott; p 3 Common Ground, RFS; p 4 P Loughnane; p 5 LOC; pp 6– 7 Sallerton Wood; p 8 Paul Rogers (top), SWOG.

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