



Small Woodland Owners' Group Newsletter October 2017

The great storm of 1987
Woodlands Awards Winners
Coppice course with Phil

Woodland Awards

The nominations have been counted and the results of the first Woodlands Awards have been announced. Sponsored by Woodlands.co.uk, the competition celebrated woodland innovation in 14 different categories. Congratulations to all the winners and thanks to those of you who participated by entering nominations.

Many of these names will be familiar to SWOG members, and by lucky chance we feature the photography of Karen Elliott on this month's cover and in her article on Phil Hopkinson's coppice course, at the award-winning Malvern Coppicing.



Woodland blogs

Susan Davis and Sarah Axon for **oldcopse.blogspot.co.uk**

Joanne Hedger for **raiswood.blogspot.co.uk**

Alan Waterman for **catbrookwood.wordpress.com**

Small woodland websites

Jo Kjaer for **www.jokjaer.com**

Alan Morton for **www.sallertonwood.org.uk**



Woodland photography

Karen Elliott

Frances Lee

Greteli Morton

Graham Strong

Woodland building/shelter

Susan Davis and Sarah Axon at Old Copse, Sussex

Anna and Pete Grudgeon: Off-Grid Cabin at the Bulworthy Project

John and Leigh Price for moduLog



Woodland tool recommendation

The Silky F180 Folding Saw

Stallion Pole Saws by CEuk

The Stihl Cordless Electric Chainsaw
MSA160

Community woods

Kilfinan Community Forest

Skelton Woods Environment Group (SWEG)

Warren Woods, Denbigh



Woodland book of the year

Will Ashon: *Strange Labyrinth*

Barn the Spoon: *Spōn*

Sue Belfrage: *Down to the River and Up to the Trees*

Adrian Cooper: *Arboreal*

Christopher Goddard: *The West Yorkshire Woods*

Richard Fortey: *The Wood for the Trees*

Barry Mays: *The Greenwood Companion*

Derek Niemann: *A Tale of Trees*

Regional and National Woodland organisations

The Conservation Volunteers

The National Coppice Federation

The Royal Forestry Society

Sylva Foundation

Woodfair trade stands

Matt Belfrage

Christchurch Society of Woodturners

The Creative Chestnut Company

Woodland Skills Centre

Whole wood owners' coordinators

Alexander Bienfait

Richard Cooper

Mark Herbert

John Jackson

John Richards

Woodland contractors

Dartmoor Horse Loggers

Meirion Davies

Chris Hill Tree Services

Nina Williams at English Woodlands Forestry

Andy Wright at English Woodlands Forestry

Forest Schools

Lea Primary Forest School

Woodland courses

Go Wild Forest School Training

Greenwood Days

Malvern Coppicing

Sustainable Woodland Management at the Centre for Alternative Technology



Alexander Bienfait (right) hosts a SWOG meeting at The Forest in Kent.

SWOG meeting at the Woodland Skills Centre, Bodfari, north Wales 28 October 2017 10am-4pm

SWOG members in Wales may already know of the **Woodland Skills Centre**, which offers a highly-regarded range of courses in coppice and greenwood crafts, as well as workshops on woodland management, bushcraft and many other traditional crafts.

Owner Rod Waterfield has kindly offered to host a day for SWOG members, which will provide a taster of some of the courses on offer, and a chance to tour their award-winning woodland.

The day will be held at Warren Woods in the Clywdian Range AONB, in north-east Wales, where the Woodland Skills Centre has 50 acres of woodland and a permanent forest school site. In 2015 the Warren, which has been owned by the Waterfield family for more than 30 years, earned the RFS Excellence in Forestry Community Woodlands Gold Award. The



Woodland Skills Centre is a not-for-profit enterprise and provides a wide range of resources for individuals and groups.

SWOG members are invited to visit the centre on 28 October. There will be

- A tour of the woodland to learn how it is managed for wildlife, people and profit
- A chance to visit the facilities of the timber enterprises
- A tour of the heritage orchard, vineyard and allotments

This is a free event and participants are asked to bring their own lunch. Tea and coffee will be provided. If you would like to make a week-end

of it, there is camping available on site for £5 a night, with access to kitchen, shower, w.c. and meeting room in the new timber-framed Centre building. Email judith@swog.org.uk to reserve a space.



Autumn courses at the Woodland Skills Centre, north Wales

A complete list of courses and prices are available on the **Woodland Skills Centre** website. SWOG members can claim a discount of 10% off the advertised cost or 15% if booking more than one place.

October

7–8	Home chainsaw usage
13–15	Make a rustic chair
14–15	Make a pole lathe
14–15	Make willow masks
21–22	Make a traditional shave horse
21	Make a rustic stool
28	Gypsy crafts 1

29	Gypsy crafts 2
28–29	Introduction to green woodwork (£125; two-day)

November

4	Make bird feeders
5	Make nest boxes
4–5	Hedge-laying
11	Managing a small woodland
12	Practical woodland tasks
18–19	Coppice crafts

All these courses are run at the Woodland Skills Centre in Bodfari, north Wales. The programme is regularly reviewed and the full programme is on the **website**.

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

Iceland's missing woodlands and forest

Woodland covers only 1.5% of Iceland, although when the island was settled just over 1,000 years ago, coverage was 40%. How did this happen?

Bumblebees – neonics further evidence

Bumblebees are vital pollinators of crops and evidence shows that those that have been exposed to nicotine related chemicals laid 26% fewer eggs.

The monthly mushroom – chicken of the woods

It's a great time of year for mushroom foraging. Try 'Chicken of the woods' (*Laetiporus sulphureus*), which is large and delicious. As its name suggests, it is an excellent substitute for meat, with a texture and taste reminiscent of chicken.

Deadly nightshade

Also known as 'belladonna', 'devil's berrie's or 'death cherries', deadly nightshade is one of the most toxic plants found in Europe. It has long been used in medicine, however.

Marble run made from rhododendron

One of the stand-out stalls at the Bentley



Woodfair, this marble run puts the much-maligned rhododendron to good use. Maker Chris Colvill studied furniture-making for three years, which was excellent preparation for constructing elaborate marble runs.

Ideas for woodcraft from nomadic people

What could British woodland owners learn from Siberian nomadic peoples? They offer useful examples of shelters and animal traps, but their tradition of leaving their dead on high platforms in the trees to be consumed by birds is less appealing.

Annual rings, drought and climate change

Researchers in the USA and Germany have been investigating the effect of drought on the subsequent growth of various types of trees.

Woodlands TV

Top trees of Tortworth

Jacob Stow shares his enthusiasm for the wonderful trees in Tortworth Arboretum, which he is helping to restore. The arboretum in south Gloucestershire once rivalled its neighbour at Westonbirt for the extent and variety of its trees and today, they are slowly being rediscovered by a volunteer taskforce.



Award-winning coppicing

One of the winners of the SWOG Big Picture competition last Christmas, Karen Elliott and her husband travelled to Worcestershire in September to claim her prize – a place on Phil Hopkinson's coppice course at Malvern Coppicing. Karen has been kind enough to let us know how it all went and to share her wonderful photographs.

Ravenshill Woodland Reserve is a spectacular setting for this active and informative coppicing course, designed to give you the knowledge and confidence to get started with the process of traditional woodland management through coppicing, a process which encourages wildlife and helps create thriving woodland glades.

An expanse of ancient semi-natural woodland with a unique history, Ravenshill Reserve is a truly magical place to spend a few days. One of the country's first nature reserves, a wander around the meandering paths soon reveals dappled light, shivering aspens, the fleeting silhouette of roe deer and peaceful tranquillity, a world away from all the mania and mayhem of weekend motorways. Scattered benches provide resting places, often with glorious views out across the rolling farmland to the south and east.

The woodland is a mix of coniferous and broadleaved trees and shrubs, with an incredibly diverse range of species including lime, spindle, hornbeam, oak, ash, hazel, aspen, western hemlock, larch, cedar and spruce. Phil offers a great insight into the history of the nature reserve, having worked on the site for many



years. He guides participants through the process of developing skills that enable relatively new woodland owners to go away feeling competent and able to make sound decisions about their own woodlands.

The location, on the edge of the village of Alfrick, Worcestershire, was remarkably accessible. We camped overnight on site and enjoyed a sunrise walk on the Sunday morning, being really lucky with the weather. There was a perfect 'golden hour' for beautifully lit, glowing photography.

Phil offers other courses too. You can try your hand at green woodworking, making a maul (for novices) or a shave horse. Phil also creates made-to-order rustic structures and garden gazebos from





environmentally friendly materials. On his coppicing courses, tea and coffee are provided in the woodland shelter, with of Rae's delicious and warming homemade soups for lunch, with fresh crusty bread and butter and plenty for second helpings. Rae has a background in the arts, and an eye for the smaller details of the forest. Her creative advice on techniques for print-making will certainly inspire some experiments with skeleton aspen leaves in the coming weeks.

After work was complete at the end of day two, there was a sense of accomplishment, a

deep satisfaction in having opened up the woodland floor to the light. The urge now is to come back again in a year to see what new flora and fauna have adapted to the habitat that was created during 'our' weekend. We came away feeling we had made some new friends, learned some new skills, gleaned sources of refreshing inspiration and made a small contribution to the management of a remarkable woodland environment.

Contact Phil or visit his website for more details of the courses he has available this autumn. www.malverncoppicing.co.uk



Thirty years on: the Great Storm of 1987

Britain went to bed on the night of 15th October 1987 having heard weather forecaster Michael Fish reassure the nation that it might be a bit windy, but there was certainly no prospect of a hurricane engulfing the country.

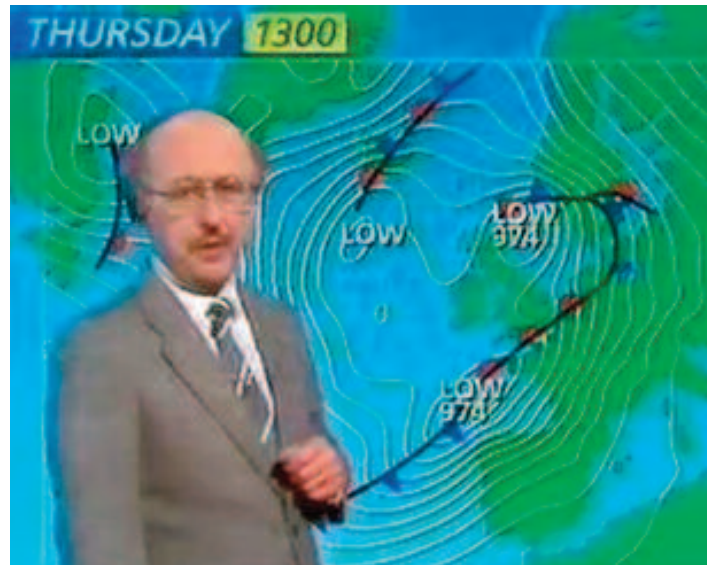
The state of the southern Britain the next morning suggested that Mr Fish may have been a little conservative in his estimation. Gales of more than 100 mph had roared across the country, ripping off roofs, toppling power lines and uprooting millions of trees.

It was a night to remember and in many woodlands the impact is still clear 30 years later.

Arborist Christopher Sparkes was working for Hampshire County Council in 1987 and he recalls his experience of the storm.

‘Well where do I start? As the wind started to blow hard on the 15th, I was called out by Hampshire County Council to clear trees on Three Maids Hill. We started cutting away at trees 80 feet tall which had fallen down either side of us. We had to pull out as it became too dangerous.

‘My father-in-law and I stood on either side of a large beech in a woodland. It was swaying backwards and forwards and we stood on either



side, using it as a see-saw, going up in air about six feet. It was down the next day. I’ve never seen anything as bad since and I certainly don’t wish to experience it again.’

In south-east England, where the greatest damage occurred, gusts of 70 knots or more were recorded continually for three or four consecutive hours. The damage is well documented: 18 people died, many buildings were damaged and it is estimated that around 15 million trees were uprooted. Sevenoaks lost six of its eponymous trees. Many of the fallen trees were mature and the immediate change to the landscape was shocking. In retrospect, however, many ecologists and arborists regard the storm almost as a beneficial event.

Conifers planted earlier in the century as fast-growing timber crops were toppled, exposing large areas of woodland to the light which allowed new planting and self-seeded broadleaves to flourish in the ensuing years. The quality of the understorey in many woodlands also benefited, with a resultant improvement in biodiversity of species.

Meanwhile, Christopher was heavily involved in clearing the



*Storm damage in Sussex - the first of many bonfires.
(Photo courtesy Leonora Enking, Flickr)*

Hampshire roads. 'We went up Romsey Road in Winchester to clear a tree which was blocking the main road. Once we started cutting, sparks flew and underneath the foliage we discovered a car which had been flattened by the tree. Fortunately, the driver got out safely. We spent the next two weeks clearing trees from main roads down to tiny roads.

'In those days chainsaw certificates were not required: if you could use one, it was fine

and the trees were cleared reasonably fast. How it would work now with all the paperwork and licenses involved, I don't know. I think the UK would have ground to a halt waiting on paperwork.

'A lot of the beech that came down was near the end of life and the ferocity of the storm shook them so hard that the trees had the shakes. When shaken wood went through band saws at the mills it was like an explosion, snapping bandsaw blades. A lot of mills would not take it then, and all it was good for was firewood or was left to rot.

'This is why woodland management is so crucial. Mature old trees need to be taken down, rather than waiting for them to fall down due to age, or to blow down as in the 1987 storm.'

In 1987 the destruction of so many valuable trees seemed catastrophic, but woodland owners and managers learnt many lessons. The Forestry Commission established the Windblow Task Force to provide advice to owners and to act as a focal point for information dissemination to the media, woodland owners and wood

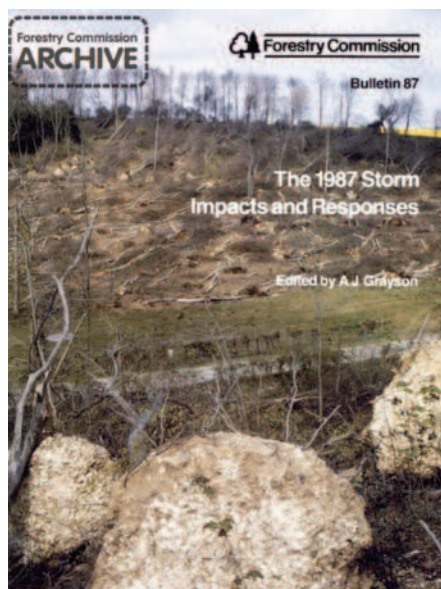


*Storm damage in London - a car is crushed by a tree.
(Photo courtesy David Wright/WikiCommons)*

processing organisations. In 1989 the Forestry Commission published *The 1987 Storm: Impacts and Responses*, which was a comprehensive examination of the storm and its effect on Britain's woodlands. (It is available to download via the Forestry Commission's **publication archive** [here](#).) One important revelation was that plantation woodlands were less resilient: trees planted closely together grew tall with shallow root systems and were therefore vulnerable in high winds. The traditional system of coppice with standards allowed trees to become resilient over time – and provided a good example of survival of the fittest.

By the mid-1990s ecologists realised that the storm had broken up monocultures in some woodlands and allowed natural regeneration of pioneer species such as birch. By 2007 many areas had regenerated naturally and required far less maintenance than areas that had been replanted with nursery stock, 'One of the legacies we have learned from the Great Storm is that woodlands look after themselves pretty well,' said forester Ray Hawes.

Thanks to Christopher Sparkes for sharing his memories.



Seed Gathering season



Launched annually on the autumn equinox, the **Seed Gathering Season** is an initiative launched by the Tree Council to encourage the collection and nurturing of

woodland seeds. Growing trees from local stock is an important factor given the problems caused in some species by imported pests and diseases. More details are [here](#).

Cumbria Woodlands Ash Conference 1 November, Ambleside

Five years since ash dieback hit Britain, this conference discusses the best ways to respond to it. It draws together experts including Vikki

Bengtsson from the Swedish Ancient Trees Forum, forest pathologist Iben Margrete Thomsen of the University of Copenhagen and plant health officer Barnaby Wylder of the Forestry Commission. Matthew Parratt of Forest Research, and Matt Elliot from the Woodland Trust will discuss how they have managed the threat. Find out more [here](#).

Grown in Britain Week 9–15 October

Woodland owners and supporters of the Grown in Britain campaign can download promotional materials and ideas for this year's **Grown in Britain Week**. Events include the SWA Skills Share on 8 October.



Help for owners

One of the best ways to learn about local conditions in your area and to discuss matters of woodland maintenance is to share your experiences with other owners. If you would like to get in touch with your woodland neighbours, but never seem to bump into them while at your wood, SWOG can help. We only share email addresses with permission, but if you email judith@swog.org.uk, she can link you up.

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. View them 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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