

# Small Woodland Owners' Group

## Newsletter November 2017

**Culverts: keeping them clear**

**Sustainable soil**

**New barn, old techniques**



## Discount from Plumpton College on autumn short courses

Plumpton College in East Sussex offers a wide variety of short courses relevant to woodland owners, including aspects of woodland management, chainsaw training, and health and safety training.

The college currently offers a generous 25% discount to SWOG members on many of their short day or half-day courses. The full list can be **seen here**, along with the booking form. Please mention that you are a SWOG member at the time of booking with Plumpton to secure the discount.

Subjects include woodland archaeology, practical management using hand tools, different uses of felled timber, generating income from coppice woodland, chainsaw competence and maintenance, and green woodworking. It's a great range and one might make a good Christmas present!

Download the **list of discounted courses** and a **booking form** from the SWOG website.

To see the complete list of Plumpton's course, visit their main website, **www.plumpton.ac.uk**.

### Woodland into management: Realising the value of broadleaf woodland workshop 24th or 25th November

With the objective of bringing neglected woods back into management and creating new woodlands, the Forestry Commission and Small Woods Association are proud to host a day of discussions and demonstrations for the farming community, woodland owners, managers, contractors, community woodland groups and agents.

The event is **free** to attend and will include:

- Seeing the value of wood: commercial and woodland craft value of trees.
- Walk in the woodland around the Green Wood Centre to discuss the commercial and woodland craft value of trees.
- Venison taster session.
- Timber processing: equipment demonstrations - focus on firewood production.
- Step-by step-firewood production.

Demonstration of equipment, including a hydraulic log splitter, firewood processor, a kindling processor and small-scale equipment



for log chopping.

- Hear from experts and ask questions about woodland management, from grants to planting.

Complimentary lunch and refreshments will be provided by the Green Wood Café. *There are two sessions available, which will both cover the same topics.* Places are limited, book early to avoid disappointment. RSVP by 13 November.

For full details or to book your place, contact Kieran Leigh-Moy at [kieranleighmoy@smallwoods.org.uk](mailto:kieranleighmoy@smallwoods.org.uk) or call 01952 432769.

**Dates:** Friday 24 or Saturday 25 November  
9.30pm-4.15pm  
Green Wood Centre, Ironbridge TF8 7DR

## Culverts – keeping them clear

*For many of us, the first time we encounter a culvert is when we fall in the ditch around it, and notice the pipe before clambering out. Culverts and woodland drainage are probably low down on most owners' to-do list, but they are vital to both the health of a woodland environment and to the integrity of a woodland track.*

Most owners will experience the misery of a boggy track at some point, possibly in the fading light of a dank winter's day when a vehicle becomes irretrievably stuck. The benefits of a well-maintained culvert mean that this scenario is less likely – or at least it might occur less frequently. Drains and culverts are often blocked by leaves during the autumn and it is essential to keep them clear to ensure adequate drainage.

One of the essential aspects of keeping access tracks in good condition in woodlands is drainage. A key method to improve drainage is to have ditches and culvert pipes, where necessary. When Woodlands.co.uk prepares a whole woodland area, the agent ensures that ditches and culverts are installed where needed. Ditches and culverts often block up during the leaf fall in autumn, and at other times of the year, heavy rainfall can cause blockages of silt



and other debris.

### Clearing culverts

There is usually a sump at the entrance to catch any debris, and this needs to be cleared out at least twice a year. A long chestnut/hazel (or similar) pole of 8-10 cm in diameter is the ideal tool to poke in and clear the culvert of debris.

We ask that all owners that use tracks with these signs in place to check every now and again to make sure the culverts are not blocked. If they are, be sure to remove any blockage, and if possible, dig out debris that may be at the entry point for the culvert.

Woodlands are now marking culverts in new woods with a sign and owners who purchased their woods from Woodlands.co.uk can request them from Simon Feltham. The sign (21 cm high x 5 cm wide) can be easily screwed onto a post at least 1 meter high and minimum 8 cm diameter. (Chestnut or oak or similar rot resistant wood is best). The post should be put in firmly at the entry end of the culvert, just by the ditch, so it does not block flow. It also needs to be visible from the track.

*Owners who bought their woods from Woodlands.co.uk can request a free sign(s) by emailing [simon@woodlands.co.uk](mailto:simon@woodlands.co.uk).*



## Old chestnuts and other woodland myths

Grown in Britain Week has been and gone for another year, but to ensure that we keep their key message in our minds, the team has launched a series of attractive e-postcards, the Old Chestnuts, which can be seen on the GIB website and will be released via Twitter.

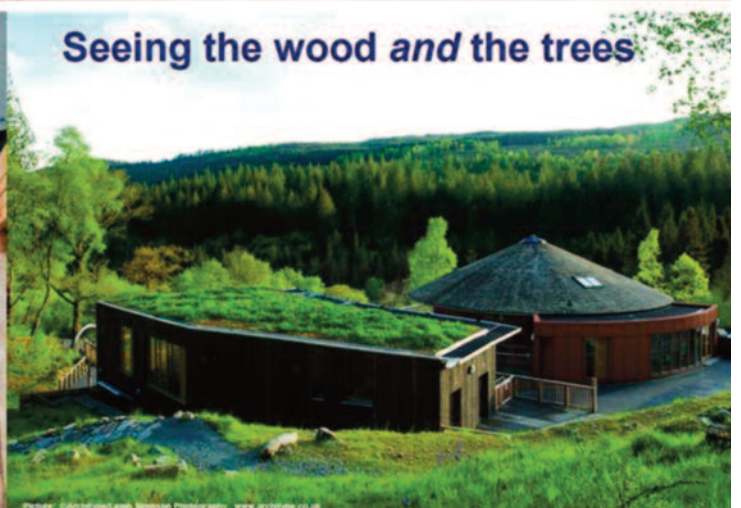
Grown in Britain is keen to highlight the innovation and research that are at the heart of the British timber industry, and to dispel old myths about the quality and availability of local timber.

With the slogan ‘British wood. It curves just where you need it to’, the first postcard shows that British timber is more than just a series of sturdy planks. The series of cards showcases some amazing wooden structures and pays tribute to the imagination of the craftsman and architects using British timber today.

‘Hearsay from the past about British timber and its suitability for various uses now need to be laid firmly to rest,’ says campaign CEO Dougal Driver.

‘With materials ranging from British-grown Glulam to thermally-modified cladding and laminated and finger-jointed sections, UK timber is now being used for innovative projects and products of all kinds. Add to this the integral social value and the present favourable pricing situation, and British timber is certainly delivering for companies throughout the wood supply chain.’

The Old Chestnuts series can be accessed on the campaign’s website at [www.growninbritain.org](http://www.growninbritain.org), and will be seen weekly on Twitter: [@GrowninBritain](https://twitter.com/GrowninBritain).



## Discounted 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.

### November

- 11 Managing a small woodland
- 12 Practical woodland tasks (seed collection and treatment, planting, formative pruning, coppicing)
- 18–19 Coppice crafts (coppice some hazel and make a range of products with it)
- 25 Christmas crafts (half-day sessions)

### December

- 2 Christmas crafts (half-day sessions)



### January 2018

- 13 Make a rustic stool
- 14 Make a shave-horse (made from sawn timber)
- 20–21 Make a traditional shave-horse
- 27–28 Introduction to Green Woodwork using a shave-horse and draw-knife make the legs from green ash and fix them into a seasoned hardwood seat)

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 their **website**.

## Free land management visit for residents of the High Weald



Land owners in the High Weald are invited to book a free land management visit with one of the High Weald AONB Partnership's new Land Management Project Officers.

Ross Wingfield and Christine Meadows are working with landowners across the High Weald to develop and implement high quality projects that conserve and enhance the special features of the area's medieval landscape; namely its ancient woods, wildlife-rich boundaries, meadows, heaths and wetland.

Ross Wingfield has joined the High Weald AONB Partnership from the National Trust and Christine Meadows is a long term resident of the Weald and Downs landscape with experience in the management and restoration of ancient woodlands and their associated wildlife. Ross and Christine are now available

for free land management visits to all High Weald residents with land greater than 1 acre. The visit is an opportunity to:

- explore historic maps that show the development of your property
- earn more about your property's special landscape, archaeology and wildlife features
- understand their contribution to the beauty of the High Weald
- find out more about specialists that can assist you with land management: undertaking surveys, producing management plans, sourcing grants and finding contractors.

To book your free site visit, please contact:  
Ross: ross.wingfield@highweald.org or call 01424 725604.

Christine: christine.meadows@highweald.org or call 01424 723009.

Visit the High Weald website for more information about the support they offer woodland owners, **www.highweald.org**.

## Sustainable soil – more than just a load of old muck

Launched at the House of Commons in October, the Sustainable Soils Alliance instantly attracted press attention, partly because of the presence of Michael Gove MP, Secretary of State for the Environment, and partly because the predictions about the lasting fertility of soil all over the planet are so alarming.

In 2015 DEFRA estimated that 2.9 million tonnes of topsoil are lost each year in the UK alone. It is estimated that we have between 60 and 100 years of harvests left before soil in the UK becomes so depleted that yields collapse. Intensive farming, pollution and erosion have reduced the fertility of our soil and over the past 40 years, 30 percent of the world's arable land has become unproductive.

With the green and the good assembled at the House of Commons, we heard from leaders of notable organisations – Greenpeace, the Soil Association and the Woodland Trust – as well as a number of eminent scientists, who urged the government to take action. Sir Tim Smit, founder of the Eden Project, demanded nothing less than a second agricultural revolution to reestablish Britain's position as a world leader in agronomy and to reconnect people with nature and the land.

Mr Gove listened intently and said, 'No country can withstand the loss of its soil and its fertility and therefore there is an emergency'.

### What role can woodlands play?

Baroness Young, Chairman of the Woodland Trust, stated the case simply: if tree didn't exist, you would have to invent them. The rich biodiversity of soil in ancient woodlands is irreplaceable, and trees and hedges have a hugely important part to play in slowing erosion and flooding. It seems sensible, therefore, to plant more trees along the boundaries of agricultural land and it is important to consider the 'right tree, right place' when planting new ones. Owners of PAWS, ASNW or ancient woodlands are custodians of immensely rich ecosystems which must be preserved.

The aim of the Sustainable Soil Alliance is to reverse soil health decline and to encourage farmers, government and other agencies to work together to restore our soils to health within one generation. In the words of Neville Fay, one of the founders of the alliance, 'soil death is tantamount to species suicide', and its decline is a problem for society as a whole.



*Michael Gove, Secretary of State for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs.*



*Baroness Young, Chair of the Woodland Trust.*



*Founder, Neville Fay, Treework Environmental Practice.*

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

## Feed the birds

Autumnal fruits and berries form a valuable part of birds' diet and help them to survive the winter months.

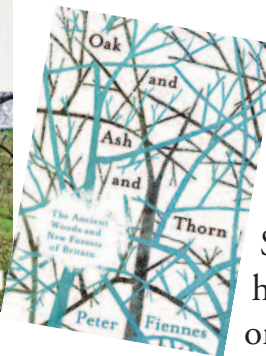
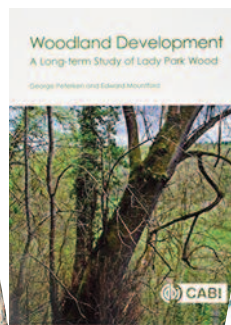
## Woodlands Awards 2017: a community of winners

The extraordinary talent and range of activity celebrated by the inaugural Woodlands Awards.

## A wood of one's own by Ruth Pavey

The owner of four acres of neglected Somerset orchard and woodland, Ruth Pavey describes how she has tamed the land over the last 18 years.

Packed with anecdotes, good advice and wonderful illustrations by the author, this is a fascinating read.



## The 2017 Big Butterfly Count

Numbers of butterflies were down, but observers and participants in this valuable project were up.

## The great storm of 1987 – 30 years on

The ferocious storm of 1987 seemed to have a catastrophic effect on trees and woodlands. Yet 30 years on, in areas where nature has been allowed to take its course, recovery via natural regeneration has been remarkable.

## Woodlands TV

### How to use an iron horse

The Iron Horse is a manoeuvrable tracked vehicle and winch system which is used to extract timber from a woodland. Light and versatile, it makes very little impact on the woodland floor.



## George Peterken, ancient woodlands and his new book

George Peterken is one of Britain's leading ecologists and has done more than most to protect Britain's ancient woodlands. He continues to study woods and how they work in great detail. His new book, *Woodland Development* is a 70-year study of Lady Park Woodland in the Wye Valley, which was set aside by the Forestry Commission to develop naturally.

## What the bees see

The eyes of insects are complex structures and utterly unlike those of human beings. Bees in

particular are especially receptive to

light in the blue and green wavelengths, in the ultraviolet

spectrum, which is invisible to humans.

Some flowers and plants have tiny nanostructures or ridges which create a

blue 'halo' effect and help guide bees to the centre of a flower.

## Oak, Ash and Thorn by Peter Fiennes

Peter Fiennes immersed himself in British woodlands for a year and this erudite and entertaining book combines the fruits of his knowledge with a mixture of autobiography, literary history and well-informed nature writing.

## New barn, old techniques

*Rich Hare has begun the construction of a new barn on the site of an old piggery to support his forestry business.*

Just as a tiny acorn can eventually grow into a much bigger tree, so has the seed of my idea to build a new barn to season my wood and store my forestry equipment. I have been managing two small woodlands on the edge of the High Weald AONB of East Sussex for three or four years now. Both have been neglected and both have been in a transition from working coppice to a high canopy of crowded oak and hence a suffering understory.

Combining the thinning of these oak with the construction of a new, but traditionally built barn, seemed to me like a virtuous circle. The trees desperately need thinning for the health of the woodlands, and I desperately need more storage space. As far as possible, the materials for the barn will be sourced from within a 10-mile radius of the site. Using traditional building techniques for construction will be both immensely satisfying, and will also provide



*A venerable oak lies in a clearing, where regeneration is already occurring.*

a great opportunity to re-learn some new ‘old’ skills.

Opening up the rides in the woodlands was my first job. Once more light is allowed in, natural regeneration occurs. Neglected coppice stools revive and dormant seeds germinate and flourish. My aim is to reduce the oak canopy to about 30% cover in the woodlands and maybe even more on the ride edges. This means felling quite a lot of trees, as in places they shade up to 90% of the woodland floor.

The reason why these woodlands and most other similar ones in the country are so undermanaged is largely economic. It is very difficult to make coppicing pay and even the big oak timber trees will only make a meagre return, once the felling and transportation costs are taken into account. Trees close to a road or ride can make up a viable load for the timber mill, but that leaves a wealth of good quality trees which



*Swing arm milling an 8"x8 beam.*





are difficult and possibly expensive to extract.

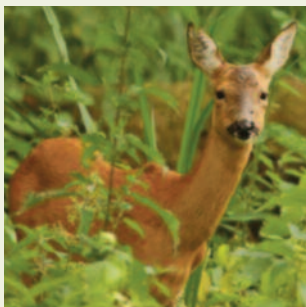
### Milling on site

I've taken a slightly different approach. Instead of taking the tree to the mill, which entails hiring lifting equipment, hard tracks and turn-arounds, I use a lightweight portable swinging arm mill, which can be carried in by two people and built up around the felled tree. The boards or beams can usually be taken out with logging arches, gravity and sometimes skids and hand winches. It is all very labour intensive, but is

considerably easier than hewing the beams by hand or being consigned to the 'underdog' of the saw pit!

The groundwork is nearing completion: I will build on a concrete foundation and brick plinth. The rest will be as near as possible in keeping with the techniques and traditions of the oak timber framers stretching back hundreds of years and hopefully lasting for as many into the future.

*Rich will be providing updates as the building takes shape.*



### Deer management across landscapes

Deer which nibble at young saplings are the bane of many a woodland owner's life, and management is an ongoing challenge. All six species of deer in Britain have increased in density and range over the last 40 years and consequently their impact on ground flora and the structure of woods is greater than ever before. Deer browsing alters three important elements in a woodland: regeneration potential, woodland structure, and ground flora diversity and abundance. This in turn affects many wildlife species which depend on them for habitat and food, such as butterflies and other invertebrates, smaller mammals, birds, and their predators.

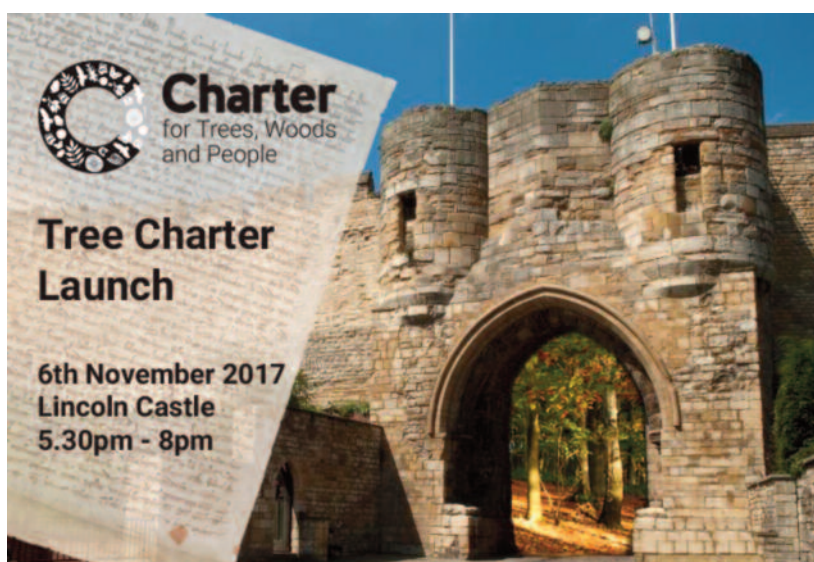
Culling is the one certain method of population control, but it is something which requires collaboration across landscapes. Users of Sylva's **MyForest** mapping system and app can now create a deer management plan using the new Deer Initiative Template and then share the information with their local **Deer Initiative** officers. Visit **Sylva's website** for more details.

## Tree Charter Launch, Lincoln 6 November 5.30pm-8.00pm

Live music, woodcraft displays and a lantern procession will herald the launch of the **2017 Tree Charter** in Lincoln on 6 November. It promises to be a great celebration of trees and woodlands.

The lantern procession will travel from Castle Hill at 5pm into Lincoln Castle where the Tree Charter Champion Pole will be revealed. Carved by artist Simon Clements from Grown in Britain oak, it showcases words by the poet Harriet Fraser.

The original 1217 Charter of the Forest is housed in Lincoln Castle, and this event provides an opportunity to see both the old and new documents. The 2017 Charter will be



available to read via the usual online methods, but a striking lasting document has been written in oak gall ink by calligrapher Patricia Lovett.

**The event** is completely free and promises to be fun and memorable.

## 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](mailto:judith@swog.org.uk), she can link you up.

Anyone who buys a wood from [Woodlands.co.uk](http://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](http://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](http://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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