No.55 SPRING 2020

Living Woods MAGAZINE

SQUIRRELS PROTECT OR CONTROL?

plus

WHAT DO I DO WITH MY ASH TREES?

- Recycling old barn wood
- Meet the Maker: Rob Duckmanton

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With 2020 designated as the International Year of Plant Health, we will be focusing over the year on some of the most common threats to trees. We kick off with the most prevalent: grey squirrels and ash dieback.

It's refreshing to be able to celebrate the sheer beauty of trees, too: Antony Mason reviews *Among the Trees,* the breathtaking exhibition at the Hayward Gallery, and our Treenote column looks at the enduring symbolism of ash trees in cultures around the world.

Chairmaker Rob Duckmanton shares his inspiration and craftsmanship, and Chris Brandler explains why he reycles century-old barn wood from Europe in his furniture-making business.

Finally, we ask how the proposed legislation concerning the sale of firewood will affect small producers.

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COVER PHOTO
RED SQUIRREL
BY TOIMETAJA TÕLKEBÜROO/UNSPLASH

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@Woodland News

Ash project launches International Year of Plant Health

Three thousand trees have been planted in Hampshire as part of a pioneering project to tackle the devastating tree disease, ash dieback.

The UK's first Ash Archive has been established using £1.9 million of government funding and is the culmination of projects spanning five years to identify ash with a high tolerance to the disease.

The archive is a major step towards maintaining and restoring ash in the British landscape. It is intended that it will provide the basis for a breeding programme of tolerant ash over time and will enable the development of orchards producing commercially available seed.

As part of the **Government Ash Research Strategy**, Defra funded two projects which studied ash trees as they grew, to identify those exhibiting a high degree of tolerance to ash dieback. These were than grafted on to ash rootstocks and grown in nurseries before being planted to form the archive. With Future Trees Trust, Forest Research, Forestry England, Kew Gardens and Fera working in collaboration, the trees of the archive will be used for further scientific research into the disease.

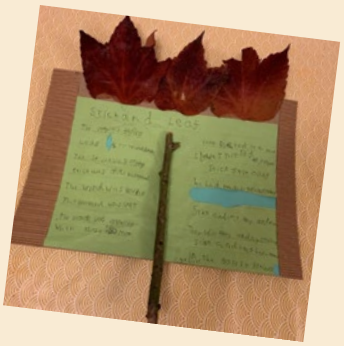
The next steps for the project are to monitor tolerance levels of the trees under real-world conditions and continue to refine the archive by removing any trees that are damaged by the disease and replacing them with newly-identified tolerant trees from the wider countryside and other trials.

Defra has launched **a new website** for the International Year of Plant Health, to raise awareness of the critical importance of healthy trees and plants, and with information about how to get involved.

RFS poetry winners make a splash

The Royal Forestry Society's Where My Wellies Take Me competition caused quite a splash with the six winners announced on World Book Day. Celebrating the 20th anniversary of its Teaching Trees programme and inspired by Michael and Clare Morpurgo's book, *Where My Wellies Take the M*e, the competition received a flood of entries from primary schools across the UK. It was adjudicated by international spontaneous poet, Judge the Poet, who said: 'The beauty of poems is that, like trees, every one can be different and yet equally beautiful. I'm sure that from these little acorns, some great oaks shall grow!' Entering into the spirit, Judge also added his own arboreal poem.

The complete list of winners is on the RFS website.



Trees, say all of the young,
Work like our planet's lung.
So, to look after our air,
Of our forests take care.
What is more, every day,
They're such a fun place to play.
So, treasure every tree,
As much as this poetry!

Judge the Poet

A gorgeous spring scene. Frankie Woodgate of Weald Woodscapes has been horse-logging in Kent and Sussex for more than 25 years.

NEW HEAD AT THE FORESTRY COMMISSION

Tree Champion Sir William Worsley has succeeded Sir Harry Studholme as the new Chair of the Forestry Commission. He currently holds the posts of Chair of the National Forest Company as well as Chairman of the Howardian Hills AONB Joint Advisory Committee.

He said, 'It couldn't be a more exciting time to join the Forestry Commission. As Chair, my aim will be to celebrate, protect and deepen the impact of its excellent work, not only for the sake of our environment but also for the huge benefits that our success brings for society.'

The correct placement of trees around buildings can reduce the need for air conditioning by 30% and reduce winter heating bills by 20-50%.

International Year of Plant Health

USING BIOCHAR IN WOODLANDS TO TACKLE CLIMATE CHANGE

Herefordshire-based forestry and timber company, Say it with Wood, will be holding a biochar information event on 25 April.

Biochar is one of the best nutrients to add to soil for carbon sequestration. Put simply, biochar is biomass heated in the absence of oxygen to make charcoal. When charged with nutrients and used in the soil it becomes a perfect habitat for soil mycorrhizal fungi, which provide plants with essential nutrients in exchange for carbohydrates. Unlike other soil additives, it doesn't break down and the effects get better over time.

Aly May, partner at SIWW explains, 'We are very excited about biochar. Using charcoal in soil firstly locks that carbon away for thousands of years. It regulates water and nutrients in the soil, but it's mycorrhizas that do the magic.'

Anyone wishing to learn more is invited to attend the information day at their Herefordshire premises. For more information about biochar, or to book a place on the day, call 07958345833 or email, **info@sayitwithwood.co.uk.**

CLEAN AIR, WET WOOD AND SMALL SUPPLIERS

We asked Bruce Allen, chief Executive of WOODSURE, about the implications of the proposed legislation regarding the sale of seasoned firewood for woodland owners and small producers.

The government has published its proposals for legislation which will regulate the sale of firewood, **Air quality: using cleaner fuels for domestic burning**. It will ban the sale of wet or unseasoned wood, with the intention of improving air quality, a laudable and very necessary aim. But has Defra thought through the implications for small producers of firewood, in particular those small woodland owners who sell small quantities of seasoned firewood to friends and neighbours?

Shropshire woodland owner Iain McNab, the author of the award-winning **Century Wood blog**, has written a thoughtful piece about the implications for small woodland owners. He notes that,

> 'The proposal is to make membership of Woodsure, the only woodfuel quality assurance scheme, compulsory for anyone selling firewood in loads of less than 2m³, no matter how little they sell (one bag a year?) or who to. It gets worse when you look at the cost of the Woodsure 'Ready to Burn' scheme: £507.60 to join, then £385.20 every year.
>
> 'So imagine you own a small woodland, and you harvest firewood and diligently season it for a year or two to get the moisture down below 20%. You bring it home and burn it in a modern woodstove, following all the rules. So far so good. But if your in-laws buy a woodstove too and buy some of your firewood, you're suddenly a criminal unless you fork out £385.20 per year. That's a strong incentive not to bother, and for your in-laws to just turn the gas central heating up rather than burning carbon neutral woodfuel.'

Chief Executive of **Woodsure**, Bruce Allen, responded to these queries, noting that **HETAS** first met with the Minister Thérèse Coffey and representiatives from the wood fuel supply sector in 2017. Since then, Defra has issued a number of consultation documents and has sought the opinion of wood fuel producers of all sizes.

> ***Our sector can and will be part of the solution, not part of the problem.***

Mr Allen said, 'It's really important to look to the future. If we carried on burning wet wood and causing five times more particulate emissions than necessary, there was unlikely to be any future for the wood burning sector at all. The mainstream media have often misinterpreted Defra's consultations and responses as a "total ban on wood burning" and we know that is just not true. The drive is for more environmentally responsible burning.

'Woodsure and HETAS, with support from appliance manufacturers, commissioned a scientific review and report and from that we have been able to show government that environmentally responsible burning is a very real option. The whole point of **Woodsure Ready to Burn** is that if you buy smaller quantities of wood fuel, it is "ready to burn now" without further seasoning or drying. If you want to buy and store wood and season it at home you won't be buying a net of logs or a small bag – it's just not financially viable. Woodsure is a company limited by guarantee without share capital; there are no director dividends or shareholders – it really is about supporting the environment, the sector and its customers.

'Feedback from small and not so small producers suggests that using the brand logo and marketing the concept is simple and increases business. The concept does what it says on the tin. There is always a cost to protect our environment and the charges [to producers] (excluding VAT) are a one-off application fee of £102 and then an annual £321. If the number of registrants grow, and if we can realise economies of scale, we can choose what to do with any surplus. The Governance Committee made up of non-Woodsure industry representatives will help with these decisions.

Small supplier scheme?

'We have engaged with the Small Woods Association, the Arb Association and the Coppice Association on the topic of a group scheme managed on a sub-licence arrangement where small processors can share the registration costs. We still need someone to put the concept into practice and we would welcome some volunteers. We're also open to group schemes and always keen to have contribution from the smaller suppliers.

'The feedback from those using the scheme is that they are benefiting and so is the environment. This is exactly what we need to protect the air we breathe and to support the businesses that rely on wood for their living.'

ASHES TO ASHES

Andy Poynter and John Lockhart, of environmental planning, forestry and landscape design consultancy Lockhart Garratt, explain some of the key issues around ash dieback.

Ash dieback arrived in the UK from mainland Europe in 2004 to much consternation and trepidation as people feared a repeat of the decimation wreaked by Dutch elm disease decades earlier. Since that time, with the media flurry of activity around ash dieback subsiding, it would be reasonable to assume that the impact of ash dieback has been steadily reducing. Unfortunately, that is not the case. In fact, the disease has now reached crisis levels, with figures from mainland Europe, where it has been present since 1992, suggesting that the majority of common ash trees will decline or die within the next 10 to 15 years.

What is ash dieback?

Ash dieback (*Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*) is a vascular wilt disease carried through the air by fungal spores from the central leaf stalks on the fallen leaves from the previous year. Once infected, the water transport system in the trees is blocked, causing leaf loss, lesions in the wood and on the bark and eventually the dieback of the crown of the tree.

Unfortunately, the **Forest Research Distribution Map** shows that ash dieback is now present across most of the UK. Adding to the problem, many of the trees that fall or shed limbs due to ash dieback also have a secondary pathogen such as Shaggy Bracket, Honey Fungus or Giant Ash Bracket. The combination of these diseases reduces the length of time that affected ash trees can safely be retained in areas of higher activity.

Which trees are most susceptible to ash dieback?

Anecdotal evidence shows that younger trees are more susceptible to infection. However, the fact that the older trees seem more resilient doesn't mean they are more resistant. It simply means that older trees take longer to die because of their larger stem diameter. In the UK, ash dieback seems to be more severe in some regions than others, with the counties of south-east England particularly badly affected. It also seems that isolated trees and those in urban areas have increased field tolerance to the disease than those in more within populations such as hedgerows, woodlands and plantations.

What are my responsibilities as a landowner?

The obligations around ash dieback vary according to whether the woodlands in question are used for commercial purposes or purely for amenity. However, regardless of the purpose or size of the woodland, any individual or organisation that occupies land or property has an important legal responsibility to take reasonable precautions to ensure the safety of those on their land under the terms of the Occupiers' Liability Act 1957. On top of that landowners are bound by the statutory duties of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974. As some landowners have found to their cost, the consequences of failing to take the appropriate measures to ensure tree safety can be severe.

Of course, it's important to remember that very few small woodland owners will find themselves in a situation where they are embroiled in legal action over injury or damage to people or property caused by ash dieback-related tree damage. Nevertheless, it is still extremely important to take the appropriate steps to monitor and manage ash trees in the context of the current crisis.

Should diseased ash trees be felled or remain standing?

Felling ash trees won't prevent the spread of the disease as it's likely that any trees in the vicinity will already have been exposed due to the fact that infected spores are wind-borne. So

ABOVE: An ash branch with the telltale signs of ash dieback: a canker on a young shoot. The bark within the canker has a shredded appearance. (Photo: WikiCommons)

RIGHT: The main stem of this ash tree remains healthy, while the right-hand side shows distinct signs of dieback.

SPOTTING THE SIGNS OF ASH DIEBACK

- Dead, blackened leaves appear and veins and stalks of leaves turn brown.
- Dieback of shoots, twigs and branches.
- Bushy, epicormic growth lower down in the crown may be noticeable in mature trees.
- Long, diamond-shaped dark lesions appear on the trunk close to dead side shoots and may appear at the base of infected trees.
- In late summer and early autumn (July to October), small white fruiting bodies can be found on blackened leaf stalks.

it's really more a question of safety. If ash dieback is present in an amenity woodland it may be possible for the trees to remain standing where they pose no threat to people or property and landowners make appropriate arrangements for them to be monitored for regeneration, resilience or retained as deadwood habitat. However, when trees affected by ash dieback are providing a function such as screening or cover then replacement planting will need to be considered. Each set of circumstances is unique and needs to be considered before deciding on the best course of action. Good management and husbandry such as clearing dead and dying trees can help improve tree health and lifespan.

When affected trees are located in areas of public access, including around paths and highways as ash trees often are, there is an increased duty of care, due to the increased risk to the public. In this instance, it's important to take a 'safety first' approach. Even if these trees are on the border of a woodland, they will be categorised as 'non-woodland ash' if they are in falling distance of people, vehicles or property.

What can I plant to replace felled ash trees?

It is possible to learn from the experience of heavily infected areas in both continental Europe and the UK where young trees, regeneration and coppice regrowth have all been killed quite quickly. This is due to the fact that their crowns are closer to the ground than older trees which are able to resist for longer. However, prolonged exposure or infection with a secondary pest or pathogen almost always proves fatal.

If ash trees do have to be cut down in large numbers, one of the obvious issues is the negative effect on the landscape. Whether it's for aesthetic or commercial purposes, most landowners are understandably keen to restore the landscape. Legal requirements to replant the landscape in order to compensate for the loss of trees to the environment apply to areas of woodland within a Forestry Commission approved management plan; and this may apply to small landowners where the felling is subject to the controls of the Forestry Act (1967).

Guidance is available from the Forestry Commission within their ***Getting Permission*** leaflet .

The choice of species for successful replanting in places decimated by ash dieback will vary between forestry and arboriculture and will also depend on the woodland's objectives and location. However, alder, aspen, rowan, hornbeam, lime, sycamore, walnut and wild service have all proven successful species for replanting in these areas.

Does diseased ash still have value?

As a hardwood that grows well in a variety of soil types, ash traditionally has a significant value within the timber industry. It's also a flexible timber that can be used for a wide range of products including flooring and veneer. Current market prices for ash timber vary from £40 to £55 per tonne for roadside (firewood), and £70 to £90m^3 for milling ash. Providing the disease has not advancd to a stage when the timber has started to decay, it should be possible to achieve these values. However, it is likely that the disease will bring more ash to the market, so prices are likely to fall as a result of possible oversupply. Once the disease

> ***Good management and husbandry, such as clearing dead and dying trees, can help improve tree health and lifespan.***

Dieback weakens ash trees and make them vulnerable to secondary pathogens such as Honey Fungus or Giant Ash bracket.

becomes established, anecdotal evidence seems to suggest that the timber will start to decay and degrade fairly rapidly, so being alert to the progress of the disease in timber areas will be important.

What are the costs of ash dieback?

Whether felling trees or carrying out good maintenance and management of a site with infected trees, there is a significant cost involved. There may also be a loss of revenue in terms of timber sales. Given all of the variables, in particular in relation to scale and location of the trees to be felled, it sometimes costs more than their market value to undertake the work.

The decimation of one of the UK's most iconic trees is a significant loss for the UK forestry industry, as well as the landscapes of Britain, both urban and rural. The loss of this common species also has significant implications for the ecological systems it supports and inhabits. We are yet to understand the full impact of ash dieback, but we know it will be damaging and momentous in the years to come.

In **their report** prepared in conjunction with Oxford University , the Woodland Trust estimated that the true costs to society of ash dieback, including replacement costs and loss of natural capital, amounted to some £15 billion.

RESOURCES

Lockhart Garratt links and advice

Lockhart Garratt Advice for Clients

Forest Research guidance

Managing Ash Dieback in England
(Forestry Commission)

JOHN LOCKHART is Chairman of Lockhart Garratt. He specialises in a range of areas including strategic woodland management, environmental planning and development and green infrastructure.

Principal Arboricultural Consultant at Lockhart Garratt, ANDY POYNTER has over 25 years expertise in a range of areas including feasibility and strategic arboricultural advice on development site and land acquisition.

Boxing hares by Cathy Ryan, Woodland Photography winner 2019

WOODLANDS AWARDS **2020**

The annual Woodlands Awards have been gathering momentum since they were first launched in 2017. Once again they aim to spotlight and celebrate the hard work, artistry, knowledge and enterprise invested in British woodlands – and this year we are varying the mix by introducing three new categories: Best Woodland Instagrams, Best Woodland Huts and Best Woodland Tree-Planting Projects.

Awards categories

There are 14 categories altogether, divided into two groups: awards for individuals (woodland owners and users) and awards for enterprises (woodland organisations, businesses, educational programmes and so on). See the list in the box, right.

How to enter

Each of the categories has its own criteria for entry. Some (such as the Woodland Photography Award, or the new Woodland Huts Award) depend on individuals submitting their own entries. Some (such as the Woodland Courses Award) depend on personal recommendations. Others still (such as the Woodland Blogs Award and the new Woodland Instagram Award) depend on a mixture of these.

The main idea is that they are all easy to enter. Full details are available on **www.woodlands.co.uk/woodlands-awards**.

Deadline for submissions: 31 July 2020

Any questions? Pease email **antony@woodlands.co.uk**

Winners

A panel of judges will draw up shortlists of the best entries, and then award the prizes. There may be a number of winners in each category (last year there were 48 winners altogether): all entries judged to be of equally high merit will be awarded a First Prize (i.e. no Second, Third etc).

The 2020 award winners will be announced in September 2020.

A note to past winners: the competition rules say that winners cannot win an award in the same category for a second time, but there is nothing to stop them entering (or being entered) in another category.

Prizes

The prizes (depending on the category) will be a mixture of award certificates, selected woodland books and woodland equipment and/or tools – and recognition!

THE WOODLANDS AWARDS SPONSORED BY Woodlands.co.uk

Prizes will be awarded in each of the following categories:

Awards for individuals

Woodland Blogs
Small Woodland Websites
Woodland Photography
Woodland Instagrams
Woodland Tool Recommendations
Whole Wood Owners' Coordinators
Woodland Huts

Awards for enterprises

Woodland Contractors
Woodland Tree-Planting Projects
Forest Schools
Woodland Courses
Community Woods
Woodland Books of the Year
Regional and National Woodland Organisations

VIEW THROUGH THE TREES

With spring in the air, **JULIA GOODFELLOW-SMITH** contemplates a little al fresco cookery.

Myles Tan/Unsplash

There's nothing quite like the sight, sound and smell of sausages cooking over a campfire. The glowing embers, bright orange flames dancing around the pan; the smell of woodsmoke and searing meat; the crackle of the fire and of course, the sizzle of the sausages, combine beautifully for a delicious experience. Throw in some olive oil, finely sliced onions and a pack of mushrooms, serve with lovely fresh bread, and voilà! A simple meal that has become one of our firm favourites in the woods, whether we're on our own or in company.

We can't help feeling, though, that eating sausages every weekend is not a good plan. It's not great for our health, and it's certainly not great for the planet. We decided that we needed to find an alternative.

At first, we thought that vegetarian sausages could provide the answer. We eagerly bought some from our local supermarket, got the fire going, emptied the pack into the frying pan, and… nothing. No sizzle. No smell. No juice. Each week, we tried a different brand. And each week, we were disappointed. Vegetarian sausages have their place, but sadly, we have concluded that they just don't belong over a fire in the woods.

Next up, we decided to try curry. We have a food delivery from a local organic farm on a Thursday, so always have plenty of fresh vegetables for the weekend. I'd love to tell you that I'm the Fanny Cradock of the woods, but I'm not. All I do is chop up whatever veg we have, throw in some chickpeas, lentils or nuts and add some curry powder (yes, that stuff from the 1970s!) or some sauce from a jar. I cook it the night before, so all we need to do in the woods is heat it up. It's cheating, I know, but very effective. We love it, and our visitors love it, either with a potato baked in the fire or a naan bread heated up in a dry frying pan. It hasn't let us down yet.

Over Christmas, we decided to be a bit more adventurous. We invited everyone we knew to join us for Christmas lunch in the woods, with the whole meal cooked over the fire. Sadly, we will never know how successful that would have been, as no-one took us up on our offer. Instead, we cooked a simple lunch of soup, reheated sausage rolls and mince pies. It may not have been the full monty Christmas lunch, but it certainly felt festive.

We have some friends staying overnight in the woods with us soon. Perhaps we'll try something a bit more ambitious then… or maybe we'll just combine our two favourites, and have curry for dinner and sausages for breakfast.

Our woodland food may not be made with finesse, but it is made with plenty of love – and I'm pleased to say that our family and friends do keep coming back for more, so we must be doing something right.

We've put together a couple of campfire basics for woodland cooking. The secret to successful campfire cookery is preparation: if you can get as much as possible prepared at home, cooking over an open fire will be a whole lot quicker and more fun. Turn Julia's sausages into hot dogs with some fire-baked bannock bread and finish up with some sweet bananas for pudding.

Wild bannock bread by Annette Stickler

When on the trail, be it in Britain or abroad, I like to carry the following ingredients with me to make what I call a Wild Bread. Bannock originates from Scotland and was made with oats, flour, salt, and water but over time other ingredients have been added to the delight of our taste buds! This bread is particularly fun to make as a family.

The ingredients can be measured out at home and then carried easily, all in one large plastic ziplock bag. This is also convenient for adding seasonal foods like nuts and berries discovered on the trail. I never weigh ingredients, but measure them out with a camping utensil, in this case my old metal mug.

You will need:

- 3 mugs of flour
- 2 mugs of milk powder
- 1 tsp of baking powder
- 1 tsp sugar
- 1 old metal mug of water
- + nuts/berries/etc
- Olive oil
- One large pan/cooking pot

Method

1. First get a good campfire established, ideally a bed of hot embers with no flame.
2. Put a little olive oil in your frying pan/cooking pot and place on the embers to heat up.
3. Add a cup of water to your dry ingredients and mix well together. (Being in a ziplock bag saves you having to carry a mixing bowl.)
4. Add your seasonal fruits/nuts/berries. (June is the best month to find the sweetest wild strawberries along the woodland path.)
5. Once everything is mixed together, flatten the dumpling-like creation and place on the hot oil. (I find that it is important that the thickness of the bread is an inch and no more: anything thicker and it will end up being uncooked inside and very burnt on the outside.)
6. Fry the bread for about 7 minutes on each side until golden.
7. Once cooked, break the bread with your hands, but watch out as the bread will be very hot.
8. And finally, don't be tempted to use a knife to cut the bread as this will bring bad luck!

Annette Stickler runs **Campfire Skills**, hosting bushcraft courses in Hampshire.

Angus's brown and sweet bananas

These baked bananas are not only delicious, but they are a great (supervised) cooking activity for children.

You will need:

- enough ripe bananas for everyone
- a roll of kitchen foil
- chocolate or Nutella

Method

1. Start by wrapping the bananas in kitchen foil.
2. Put them over a hot fire after the flames have died down, but while the embers are very hot. As the picture shows, we put them on a metal grille.
3. Turn them every couple of minutes to make sure they cook on both sides.
4. It takes about 10 minutes for them to cook through, depending how hot the fire is. Take them off the grill and open the foil.

The blackened skin can be peeled back with a knife and fork. You'll probably need cutlery to eat them (it's difficult to eat these hot squishy bananas in the usual monkey style). It's even more delicious if you cut them open while they are still hot and put a couple of thin squares of chocolate inside. Alternatively, use chocolate spread such as Nutella.

SQUIRRELS

PROTECT OR CONTROL?

JACKIE FOOTT of British Red Squirrel looks at how grey squirrels are impacting British woodlands and explains how red squirrels are making a comeback in some areas of the UK.

For most of us, the sight of a red squirrel (*Sciurus vulgaris*) is a rare thing. Britain's only native squirrel species, the red squirrel has been displaced by the grey squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*), which was introduced during the 19th century. The larger greys outcompete reds and, having originally been regarded as an ornamental species, are now commonplace in towns, cities and the countryside.

Estimates vary regarding the number of red squirrels versus grey squirrels, but the huge environmental and economic damage caused by grey squirrels is now widely accepted. Grey squirrels damage trees by stripping bark from the trunks and branches of trees, especially during the spring and summer months. This can weaken the tree, leaving it susceptible to disease or, if they strip a complete ring of bark from around the trunk, it can cause the tree to die.

Trees such as oak, beech, hornbeam and sweet chestnut between 10 and 40 years of age are frequently targeted, often leaving the tree with no value for useful timber. On Anglesey, with no grey squirrels and a high red population, there are reports of damage only to a very few hornbeams.

Grey squirrels also raid birds' nests, stealing eggs and preying on fledgling young.

> ***Red squirrel populations protected and thriving and greys controlled, through targeted and sustained action.***
>
> The UK Squirrel Accord 2014

Controlling grey squirrels

In 2014 more than 30 forestry, land management and conservation organisations signed the UK Squirrel Accord, an agreement that 'records a common purpose and resolve concerning squirrels in the United Kingdom. Grey squirrels need controlling because of the economic, social and environmental damage that they cause and their adverse impact on red squirrel populations which are part of the natural heritage of the United Kingdom and need protection. Many different parties are involved in work to protect reds or control greys. The signatories to this Accord recognise the vital importance of both these work areas and agree the following long term aim: red squirrel populations protected and thriving and greys controlled, through targeted and sustained action.'

The most recent estimate of the annual cost to British Forestry is £40

RIGHT: Grey squirrels gnaw trees to get at the sweet sap-filled layers of the bark. Classed as an invasive non-native species in the UK and an invasive alien species in Europe, the grey squirrel was moved outside its natural range by humans and has negative consequences for native biodiversity and the economy.

BELOW: Pine martens reduce grey squirrel populations.

million in lost revenue. A Royal Forestry Society survey reported one member's comments: 'Grey squirrels are the single biggest threat to growing hardwoods (especially oak) in the UK and must be controlled, especially in the light of diseases in other hardwoods.'

THE LAW

- It is illegal to release a grey squirrel back into the wild.
- It is not illegal to lawfully and humanely shoot or trap in order to control grey squirrels.
- Kill traps must not be used if there is any chance of reds squirrels being in the area.

If you live in a 'grey only' area with no control group, start by clearing the greys on your own property. You may find that squirrels from adjacent properties will fill the void so you could develop a network with neighbours, possibly even covering large areas such as this rewilding project in Staffordshire. Woodland owners could profitably join with their neighbours to hire a pest controller to reduce numbers in their woods.

Methods of control

LIVE CAPTURE TRAPS

Regular wire traps are widely available. Pest controllers advise setting them up for a week or so with bait to lure the squirrels into what appears to be a feeding station. If the bait has been taken, set the trap properly after a week or move it to another location and start again. These traps must be checked every day (preferably twice) and the captured squirrels despatched humanely. Read this best practice guidance from British Red Squirrel. A comprehensive list of traps is available here.

KILL TRAPS

There are many different types of kill traps available and it is essential to be sure of the licensing requirements in your part of the UK.

SHOOTING

Shooting grey squirrels is legal and can be highly effective. It is important that owners plan carefully and ensure safe shooting angles with a backstop within the area in which you have permission to shoot. (Obviously, if it is your own wood, permission is not needed, but be mindful of your neighbours.) Shooting guidelines and best practice are available from the British Association for Shooting and Conservation (BASC). Tree surgeon Bob Wilson advises setting up a feeding station in front of a tree for a few days to lure the squirrels. 'Keep it filled for five or six days to let them get a taste for it before shooting. That way, the squirrels are drawn to a safe shooting area, with the hopper and tree acting as a safe backstop.'

FERTILITY CONTROL

The UK Squirrel Accord is funding research into fertility control and is now in the third year of a five-year project developing an oral contraceptive for squirrels. Research has also just started on gene editing for grey squirrels, but results are some years away.

PINE MARTENS

A number of projects have proved that they can play an important role in reducing grey populations, although

Common in Scotland, but near threatened in the rest of the UK, red squirrels are protected under the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act.

the exact reason for this remains unclear. Faster and more nimble, reds are less often preyed upon by pine martens. Pine martens are a natural predator of grey squirrels (and also reds); monitoring and research are continuing for the limited reintroductions and natural populations in the UK. *Living Woods* reported on pine marten reintroduction in Issue 52, Summer 2019.

Red squirrel conservation

Local volunteer groups in the north of England began work 25 years ago to control greys and to protect red squirrels. They were the first to understand that grey success came at the expense of red squirrel populations. Over the years the groups kept careful records and these, along with more recent scientific monitoring and analyses, have shown that reds can survive and thrive if there is consistent grey squirrel control.

Grey squirrels will outcompete reds for food and habitat, generally harassing them so that they are unable to breed. Grey squirrels also carry the squirrel pox virus (SQPV) that is harmless to them but fatal to the reds, subjecting the majority of any infected population to a long and painful death.

Red squirrels do not need special habitats and can live in areas stretching from northern British climates as far south as Cornwall and the Scilly Isles, and in rural, suburban and sometimes even urban locations. The notion that red squirrels prefer conifers is somewhat confusing: they have been increasingly restricted to large conifer woodlands and plantations due to encroaching grey squirrels. While they can utilise coniferous trees better than grey squirrels, red squirrels reach their highest population densities in mixed or broadleaf woodlands that offer a diversity of tree species and availability of food.

The surviving populations of red squirrels in the British Isleas are not there by chance, but because of the work of volunteers in the first instance and then, more recently, through funded projects and organised conservation groups. However, there is still a reliance on volunteers to carry out much of the work on the ground. If you would like to get involved, follow the links in the boxes on the right.

British Red Squirrel

To see whether you live in a red squirrel area, check their **Activity Map** and contact your nearest group to work with it.

British Red Squirrel is collecting evidence of tree damage caused by red squirrels. Email reports of woodland squirrel damage to **contact@redsquirrel.org**.

View a short film about about the ecological damaged caused by grey squirrels: **Red Squirrels: Turning the Tide**.

LINKS

Click on the organisations to link to their websites.

European Squirrel Initiative

Red Squirrel South West

Red Squirrel Survival Trust

Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels

UK Squirrel Accord

Vincent Wildlife Trust

TORTWORTH ARBORETUM **WINS THE LOTTERY**

In January Tortworth Arboretum in South Gloucestershire received a £100,000 grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund. Rebecca Cork, founder of the Tortworth Forest Centre, explains what it will mean for the arboretum.

Our National Lottery Heritage Fund grant will enable us to launch a two-year Woodland Heritage project to manage the arboretum and bring in more people to enjoy the benefits of spending time in nature. The project will see regular open days as well as more volunteer opportunities, a series of talks open to the public, and an exciting new planting plan which will ensure the survival of the tree collection for future generations.

Since we took on management of the arboretum in 2014, we have been slowly gaining momentum as an organisation, with hundreds of volunteers joining us over the years – some drop in from time to time, some attend every session, but all are contributing their time and energy to restore the overgrown arboretum collection. We have been lucky enough to receive small grant funding from various places, donations from individuals and companies, and we regularly receive donations of hand tools. Woodlands.co.uk have supported us over the years with advice, as well as helping us out with tools and training for our volunteers. This new funding will cover our work for two years, meaning we can focus more on the restoration of the arboretum and less on scrabbling around for money for volunteer sandwiches!

Tortworth's trees

When we started, the tree collection was at serious risk of disappearing under ten years or so of bramble, bamboo, rhododendron, laurel and sycamore. You name it, if it grows unchecked and harms trees, we have plenty of it! We quickly found a number of special trees, including some beautiful mature oaks, rotten to the core, with evidence of tree failures throughout the site. Some trees were coming to the end of their natural lives and with the ground cover of rhododendron and no new planting for 20 or 30 years, the collection was disappearing fast.

We split the arboretum into six compartments and over the past six years we have cleared – almost entirely with hand tools – as many of the compartments as we can, focusing on key trees and creating a halo around them through the bramble and rhododendron. As we continue to clear we discover more trees that have either long since given up due to the lack of light

and the competition for nutrients, or specimens that have grown contorted or been damaged by squirrels and will never become specimens worthy of an arboretum.

We gained some funding in 2018 to start mapping the arboretum, and with the support of a number of very dedicated volunteers we hired in forestry GPS equipment and noted the location and details of every single tree in the collection – including the sycamore, birch and other self-seeded trees that were not part of the original arboretum. It took us the whole of winter 2018-2019 and we launched the maps at our spring Open Day last year. We could not have been prouder! Over 600 trees are detailed, and we have details of the mapping project in our blog.

With this information we can now start to produce visitor maps, we can see which trees need to be identified, we can log works that need doing, tree failures, and – perhaps most excitingly – with the new funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, we can bring in expert advice and purchase new specimen trees that will form part of the collection for years to come.

Just as good, the funding will allow us to open up the collection more often, for groups to visit and learn about trees, the environment, and about woodlands in general. We run projects that focus on health and wellbeing from our campfire area, and this funding means we can bring in more people from the local community, as well as some harder to reach groups. We will have more open days, more volunteer days, more recruitment and support for volunteers. Look out for details of our open days on our Facebook page and website – the first one should be around May Day. And of course, please get in touch if you would like to volunteer – we hold volunteer days on the third Sunday of each month, and a management day every Tuesday.

> ***“This funding means we can continue to engage people with nature, restoring the collection, planting new trees together, and creating something that will outlive us all.”***

As a small community organisation, volunteer-led, we will never rival the arboretum at Westonbirt – we simply don't have the capacity. But this funding means we can continue to engage people with nature, restoring the collection, planting new trees together, creating something that will outlive us all.

For us, people are as important as the trees. We see how spending time in nature can transform lives, and as a result of attending our volunteer days and projects, people connect to nature. They know they are doing something very special that will be available for many generations down the line to enjoy. We aim to keep the arboretum available to community groups for as long as possible, and we will continue to hold volunteer days, open days, and run projects for wellbeing and health in nature. Perhaps, 100 years from now, the trees that we plant this year will be splendid specimens that spark joy, wellbeing and beauty in the eyes of visitors. We hope so.

Bec talks about the work at Tortworth on Woodlands TV. Read more about the conservation, restoration and wellbeing work, as well as Tortworth's volunteer days: tortwortharboretum.org.

MEET THE MAKER

ROB DUCKMANTON makes beautifully handcrafted heirloom chairs from his workshop in Yorkshire. He specialises in an American-style Windsor chairs.

How and when did you realise you wanted to be a chairmaker?

I first realised I wanted to be chairmaker just after my son was born in 2010. We decided against spending money on childcare so one of us needed to be at home. There were outbuildings at the house we were in at the time that I could use and I was in love with making things from green wood. A friend gave me a copy of *Living Wood* by Mike Abbott and I was away. Every minute of spare time I had went into chair making.

How did your style develop?

My style hasn't developed so much, as I make very traditional American chairs. It would be better described as finding chairs that are the pinnacle of what I had been learning to do, and finding ways to push the raw materials as far as possible without compromising strength. I follow the fibres of the wood to get the most strength out of it, meaning I can use very thin components but still make very strong chairs. This means they are flexible and therefore very comfortable.

Where do you look for your inspiration?

I get a lot of inspiration from nature. I'm fascinated with the Fibonacci sequence and how often the golden ratio appears in life. That same ratio can be applied where you put your splitting tool on a log to split into equal parts.

Rob steam bends the curved pieces on the chairs using very specifically selected ash and oak. Turned components are made using a foot powered pole lathe, the same tool Windsor chairmakers have been using for centuries.

The makers who inspire me most are those who have committed themselves to the craft well enough to sustain a living, which is no mean feat. Mike Abbott was particularly inspirational for me: he is a great spreader of the word of green woodwork. You can trace the roots of many of the professional green woodworkers working today back to time spent with Mike. It was in his old wood, **Brook House Woods** (which, incidentally, still runs a good selection of craft courses) where talented maker Jojo Wood and I decided together that we'd both give the professional craft career a go.

American chairmaker, **Curtis Buchanan**, is another huge influence. Curtis makes Windsor chairs in much the same way they were made 200 years ago and I went over to Tennessee to learn from him. The invaluable time I spent there is how I became the chairmaker I am today.

Where do you source your wood?

I get most of my green wood from a local estate which has 900 acres of excellently managed woodland. I also know a few tree surgeons who are aware of my rather fussy requirements for a log. I also use wood from coppice where possible. I feel coppice workers are an important part of the countryside and are hugely undervalued.

I get my dry boards for seats from wherever I can. Elm, my first choice, is not easy to find in the dimensions I use – 20in wide and 2in thick – so I go where I can find it.

If I'm painting the seat, I can be much less fussy and use local wood yards to source the timber. I have two within a half-hour drive of my home.

How do you start a piece and how long does it take to complete a chair?

I begin with fresh logs but assemble the chair dry, so I have to begin the process by splitting tree trunks down with wedges, then with a tool called a froe. The strength kept in the wood by splitting between the fibres, instead of sawing through them, can't be matched.

A side chair will take me around 40 hours to make, arm chairs closer to 70 or even 80 hours, for the most complicated ones.

Tell us about your workspace and the tools you use

I work from a 13ft x13ft sawn log cabin at the bottom of my garden, in a village in rural north Yorkshire, beween York and Harrogate. I used to work exclusively with hand tools and I still happily teach chairmaking in that way, but out of physical necessity, a few power tools have been introduced just to give my body a bit of a break.

I have both a power lathe and a pole lathe now. I get better results with my pole lathe turner than with the powered version, but 13 feet square is not a big space for a pole lathe. The other power tool I sometimes use is a drill. I prefer a brace, but I have to be kind to my elbows to keep on making.

Among other traditional old tools I use are draw knives, inshaves, travishers, spoke shaves, and a horseshave. No powered abrading tool will ever give you the satisfaction or provide the same feedback from your raw material that sharp steel cutting into clean wood will provide. Edge tools, as we call them, are beautiful things.

Another part of my set-up is the steam-bending kit. Carefully selected and prepared wood will bend surprisingly well with heat applied to it. I use steam to provide the heat and all of my chairs have at least one steam bent element; some have many.

What does the craft mean to you?

My craft means the world to me. Imposing your will onto natural products in order to get them to perform a task for you is one of the most natural things that there is to a human being. Being able to make a lot of what you need is a lovely way to live. Teaching other people to do the same is big part of what motivates me, too. I run one-to-one courses from my workshop and have plans for bigger classes from a woodland in the not too distant future.

What's your proudest achievement?

My proudest moment as a maker should probably be when I won best arm chair and side chair at the Bodgers' Ball a few years ago. But I've also had orders for chairs from makers I really admire and I think that sort of acknowledgement from my peers just pips the competition wins at the post.

ROB DUCKMANTON is a bespoke chairmaker and wood worker. He owns Redwood Chairs, a company based in North Yorkshire, making hand crafted American-style Windsor chairs from locally sourced wood. **www.redwoodchairs.co.uk**

A PROPER GOOD SHOW
STRUMPSHAW TREE FAIR

Strumpshaw Tree Fair harks back to the traditional fairs of folk memory and was the brainchild of **CANDY SHERIDAN,** who moved heaven and earth in Norfolk to realise a dream.

Fed up with commercial shows packed with burger vans and sellers of double glazing, Candy Sheridan wanted to fill her own woodfair with purveyors of local Norfolk produce, makers and artisans, traditional crafts people and Gypsy wagons. Candy launched Strumpshaw Tree Fair in 2016 and four years on, with Strumpshaw going from strength to strength, it seems as though she has succeeded. We asked her how she had done it.

'Our family-run Strumpshaw Tree Fair is now in its fifth year. We are so much wiser then when we first began. It is always hard to find a venue for a show. It was important to find a location with trees, a lovely landscape, and importantly, a venue with a successful history of running events. I was lucky with Strumpshaw Hall in north Norfolk, which is well known for its annual steam rally and we have built up a great deal of goodwill.

'Four years ago, the hardest thing after convincing the Trustees was actually getting the wood folk to talk to me and book in. Ironically, I knew many of them from attending fairs across Norfolk and Suffolk. I felt it was really important to champion rural artisans, and give them an opportunity to exhibit their skills and crafts.

'The original dream was to mix all of us together – Gypsies, Travellers, craftsmen and others that are part of the countryside – to develop a narrative about our overlapping lives and work.

'Setting up a woodfair is certainly not a way to make money. The costs are huge, from toilets, to security, to first aid to infrastructure. But the biggest reward is getting to know so many interesting and very talented people.

'We added to our expense with the solar-powered bus that powers a stage with folk musicians. Last year we introduced the Dance Tent, with Romany step dancers, morris dancers, folk singing, old ballads, a pop-up ceilidh, fiddle and squeezebox workshops – the most fantastic and entertaining mixture of folk music and dance.

'This year we are holding Strumpshaw Talks and have our own professor, Dr George McKay from the University of East Anglia, who will be using us as a research project: how did we start, who are we and what are our unique aims. He is interested in counterculture and why East Anglia has so many fairs and festivals – more than anywhere else in the country.

'With writers and experts on trees, commercial flower growers, forest schools and woodland social enterprise businesses, Strumpshaw is more than just a fun day out.

'Strumpshaw has a unique mix that all the family contribute to. It's a real labour of love, perseverance and belief. We know it's a lovely event and people are finally agreeing with us. We had 5,000 visitors last year including lots of young families with children – under 16s are free and they can attend all their workshops they like! We're always on the look-out for more talented wood folk, do come and visit or even better join us!'

STRUMPSHAW TREE FAIR
18-19 July 2020 Strumpshaw Hall, Norwich, NR13 4HR

strumpshawtreefair.co.uk

BRANDLER'S BARN RECYCLING

Cabinet maker **CHRIS BRANDLER** is well aware of the sustainable qualities of timber and maximises its potential by using reclaimed wood to build beautiful bespoke fitted furniture.

In 2010, recalling his own childhood, Chris Brandler decided to build his young son a garden den, known as 'The Hideout'. Chris was dissatisfied with the standard materials available to him, which did not match the aesthetics of his garden or his passion for ecology. He wanted to find a sustainable option that had true character.

A chance discussion with a colleague alerted Chris to the possibility of buying a barn in Europe that was due to be demolished. On impulse, he booked a flight and on arrival quickly persuaded the farmer to sell him the timbers of the century-old barn. The barn was lovingly dismantled and the salvaged timber transported back to the UK. The Hideout was constructed, and has proved to be the first of Chris's projects that reflect his passion for quality and character in timber. He realised that the barn wood could be recycled to fabricate furniture and joinery.

As the founder of Brandler London, he and his team source old, weathered barn wood from farm buildings in Europe on the verge of demolition and salvage the timber. It is then processed and treated before being used in bespoke furniture projects in Britain. Chris explains how Brandler sources and processes the timber.

From old barns to new furniture

Once we had discovered the barn wood and shipped it to the UK, we began the task of figuring out how best to use this wonderful material. At the time, we were refurbishing residential properties in London. The plan was to use the newly sourced barn wood to clad walls, stairs, window sills, kitchens and wardrobes to add character to our developments in a bid to help them stand out from the crowd.

A European processing facility was established to store the our barn wood and begin the clean-up operation.The timbers that were laboriously hand-cut anything up to 100 years ago are strewn with relics of their past. Rusted nails, old agricultural ironmongery and renders are all removed, revealing

Note the dovetail joints and the beautiful grain on the timbers of this old barn, which has been enhanced by decades of weathering.

wondrously preserved wood grain and tremendous texture. This must all be done with the same care and dedication that the original barn builders used to erect these wooden structures. Before being sent to the UK, the boards are finally kiln-dried to stabilise the moisture content and to kill off any infestations.

Cutting down the 100mm thick boards was the next challenge. No local sawmill wanted to touch the old boards, so we had to find another way to reduce the vast chunkiness of these timbers. We fashioned an Alaskan mill – a chainsaw running on a metal guide – which had a few drawbacks but did the trick. However, this was a slow and labour-intensive process, and the chainsaw mill ripped a large kerf, meaning we lost too much material and produced a lot of waste, which was not sustainable.

We returned to the drawing board, set up our Hersham workshop and invested in a Centuro R800 Resaw, a massive bandsaw designed for exactly this type of job. The blades (5 metres long, 100mm deep, 3mm thick) are powered by a 20hp motor and assisted by a pneumatic auto feeder. Combining this with our new 3m panel saw and 600mm planer, we now had a process for sawing and planning boards to size quickly and efficiently.

Joining the boards using tongue and groove joints cut on the spindle moulder, or with dowels made by Festool Domino jointing system helped us convert these raw cut boards into solid, stable furniture.

Really raw materials

Though we had found a process that worked, it remained slow due to the difficult nature of barn wood as a raw material. Extensive work must often be done to stabilise these flat, sawn boards, especially as our kitchen and wardrobe doors may hang on hinges and so are completely unsupported. When the thick boards are cut down lengthways, the tension held inside is released and they naturally start to cup, bow, crook and most difficult of all… twist. We needed to find a way to reduce the time and energy spent on processing the timber and improve the stability of solid barn wood. Using the Resaw we were now able to cut a 6–8mm veneer of barn wood, allowing us to fabricate our first barn wood-engineered panel. Using the same method, we created engineered flooring, which solved the problems of solid wood flooring and enabled us to resolve the stability issues, too.

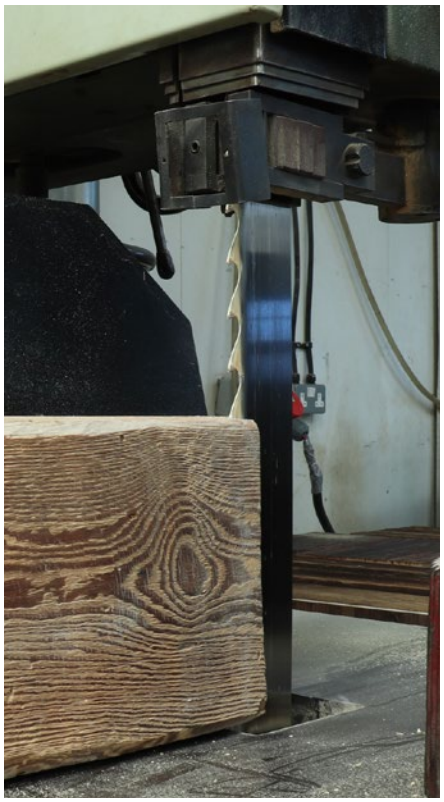
These engineered boards are lighter, more stable and easier to work with. With increased efficiency in manufacturing, we were able to pass on the cost-saving to our customers, making our barn wood doors, kitchens and other furniture more affordable.

Finished wood

Once we had improved the manufacturing process, we were able to focus more of our energies on expanding the range of finishes to give more options and applications to our growing client base. There were three main types of natural barn wood products: grey, honey and brown.

The grey barn wood is a naturally weathered finish created by exposure to UV light, mould, mildew and

Investing in a Centuro R800 bandsaw enables Brandler's team to saw and plane the old boards.



***Above*: A sideboard table of big proportions made with richly textured deep-set barn wood. *Below*: A discreet, well-crafted handle.**

rainwater which all damage the surface. This only occurs on the exterior surface of barn wood. However, for the most part the colour of the external barn wood takes on a deep rich brown. Incredible textures are present on both the grey and brown barn wood that are caused by long-term exposure to the harsh forces of nature.

Interior barn wood takes on a paler, honey colour and because it is better protected from the elements, there is less texture and scarring of the timber surface.

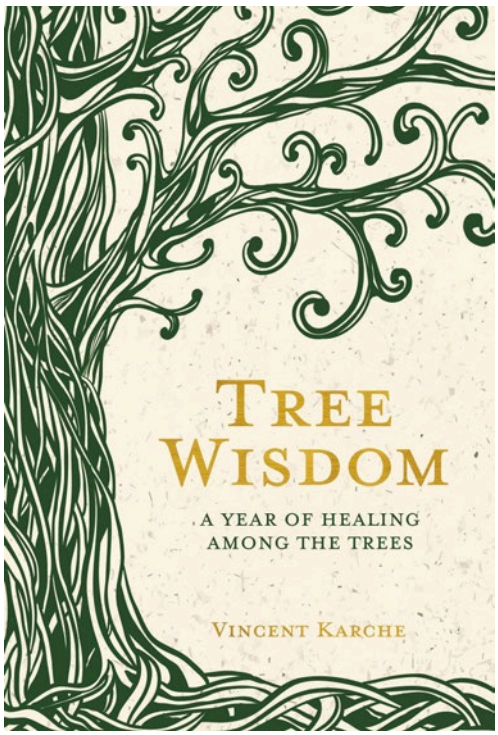
We therefore have three quite different naturally occurring barn wood finishes with their own properties and applications. We have expanded on these properties and the timbers applications by using different treatment methods. By applying stains, hardening agents and resin, we can create a myriad of finishes for a multitude of applications. Whether you want a timber good for a wet room, a dining table with an easily cleanable surface, or the most heavily textured raw timber wall cladding, we can supply it.

We now have a fantastic range of monochrome finishes, from full black to white washes and the grey areas in between. There are obvious drawbacks in using heavily textured barn wood as a worktop, because of the deep cracks and weathering of the material. However, we have experimented with applying a clear resin screed to level the surface, which retains the rich colour and depth of texture.'

People often write about the 'journey' of building a business. Brandler's raw material, the wonderful old European timbers, quite literally journey from the heart of Europe to south London, enabling the company to re-use them for another generation to enjoy.

BOOK REVIEW

Forest bathing teacher **HELENA SKOOG** reviews *Tree Wisdom* by the international opera singer Vincent Karche.



TREE WISDOM
Vincent Karche
Hay House Publishing
Paperback 224 pages £8.56
ISBN 978-1788173896

Vincent Karche lost his voice and was advised by a shamanic healer that he must find himself again in order to repair his vocal chords. The courage of this man in taking the less-trodden pathways to healing shine as an example of the essential aspects of the re-birthing journey. Vincent has created a narrative whereby his experience has been translated into the company of the trees, where he has found solace, encouragement and healing. Vincent has produced 12 meditations, linked to the seasons, to help all of us find peace among the trees.

Living and breathing, and indeed singing, with these steadfast and durable friends as close allies, Vincent has re-birthed the song of the forest. Using the forest as nature's amplification system, he activated the deep mycelium which communicates profoundly out of our immediate sight, but transmits the secret languages of the silence and darkness between all rooted plants. Singing into the wind, he calls the leaves to dance in the sunlight, the bright buds to smile in the spring air, and beckons the autumn leaves to fall with grace to carpet the forest floor with golden hues.

Through his profound shamanic journey, Vincent has found his place, both within the extant world, and deep within his soul. In this pressing time of evolutionary exponentials, it is the wisdom of the trees that patiently awaits your arrival for the true unification of souls.

Vincent, I would like to invite you to sing in my forest – and we can share languages of healing, expressions of growth and the vitality of regeneration.

Vincent Karche – I salute you! Your generous spirit has opened up fresh levels of understanding in my experience of the woods, and your joyous song of nature has brightened my soul.

As a fellow woods-person I have the honour of sharing many aspects of your journey across the seas that separate our lands, but we share the knowledge that we hear from our deep-rooted friends and companions within our forest floors.

The timing of this important work of nature recognition is so vital, and truly essential for these current times, when the world's attention is being seduced by the ubiquitous blue screen. With the elemental balances of both nature's essences and our own vital energy balances crying out for harmonisation, Vincent has set the tone for a clarion call to all nations and cultures.

At times it seems as if the blinkered look no closer than their computer interfaces, hooked and plugged into a noisy (but strangely deaf) world, a colourful (yet fearsome) realm, where disturbing visions of the future are called into being. This book envisions the cultural world seven generations hence, describing how trees will outlive and survive us, providing shelter, company, companionship, fuel, sustenance, joy and beauty for our descendants.

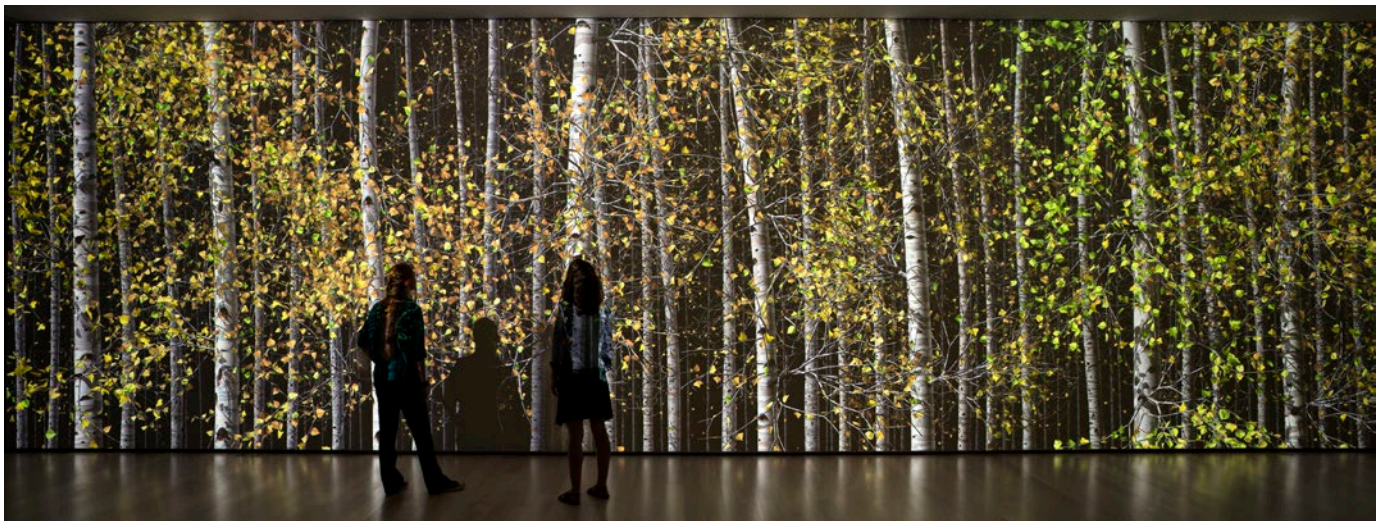
Opera singer and one-time forester,

Swedish teacher and workshop leader, **HELENA SKOOG** runs forest bathing workshops in her Sussex woodland.
markgolding.co.uk/forest-bathing
helenaskoog@hotmail.com

AMONG THE TREES

TREES IN CONTEMPORARY ART

'Serene, timeless, fascinating' – **ANTONY MASON** finds plenty to admire in *Among the Trees*, the current exhibition at London's Hayward Gallery.

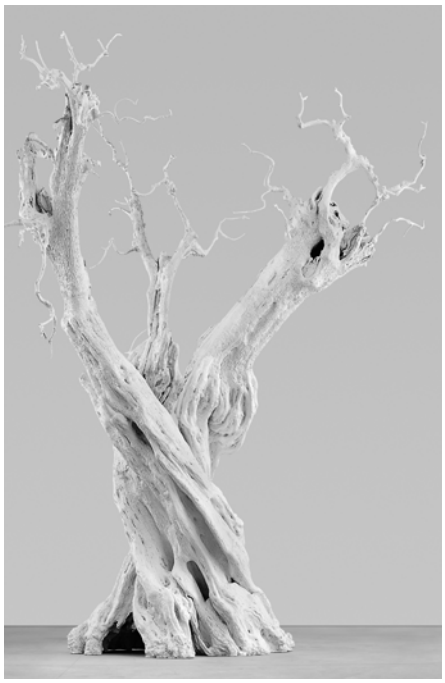


Jennifer Steinkamp, Blind Eye, 1, 2018 Video Installation 2.77 minutes
© the artist 2020 (Courtesy greengrassi, London, Lehmann Maupin, New York and Hong Kong) Photo by Jennifer Steinkamp

Trees have always been a major feature of art. Think of Lucas Cranach's versions of the Garden of Eden, or Paolo Uccello's *The Hunt in the Forest*, or Van Gogh's electrifying cypresses. But how can we do that tradition proud? Singled out, it's a subject that can easily become a little, um… wooden.

But this is not a problem with the new exhibition at Hayward Gallery. *Among the Trees* is exhilarating. Hayward's Director Ralph Rugoff says that he has been thinking about this project for some 25 years – I think it shows: this is an impressively planned and deeply thought-provoking show.

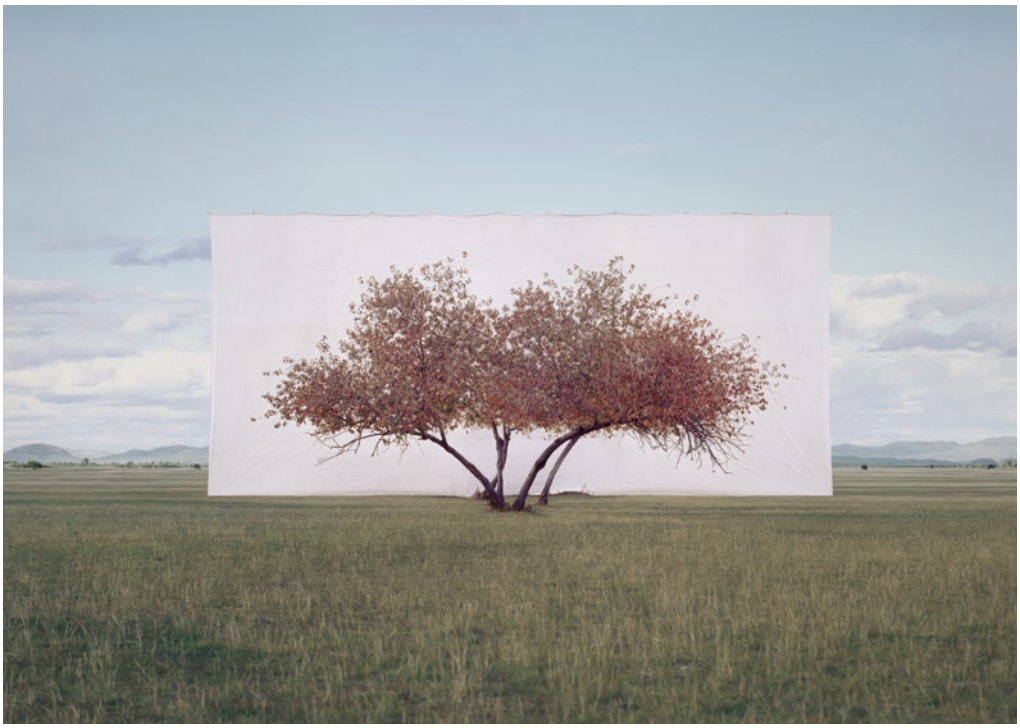
It features 38 artists from around the world, and work created over the last 50 years or so. There's a bit of everything: traditional painting and drawing, pristine photography, mixed-media installations and large-scale video works.



Ugo Rondinone, Wind Moon, 2011
Cast aluminum, white enamel 520 × 600 × 460cm
© the artist 2020 (Courtesy Studio Rondinone)
Photo: Stefan Altenburger

The exhibition is divided into three thematic sections. The first focuses on the scale and complex structures of trees. This includes, for instance, *Pine* (2016) by the Chinese artist Shi Guowei, a view into the branches injected with a sense of heightened reality by his technique of hand-coloured photography. Here you will find also Peter Doig's enchanting oil-on-canvas *The Architect's Home in the Ravine* (1991): the house seen through an intricate lattice of winter twigs and branches. Next to it is *Forêt Palatine* (2013) by the French artist Eva Jospin, a huge, eye-catching relief-sculpture depicting what might be a larch forest in winter, made entirely of cardboard and twigs.

The second section explores the intimate relationship between human beings and trees. Not always a happy story: witness the shock delivered by Steve McQueen, the artist and film director in his film *12 Years a Slave*

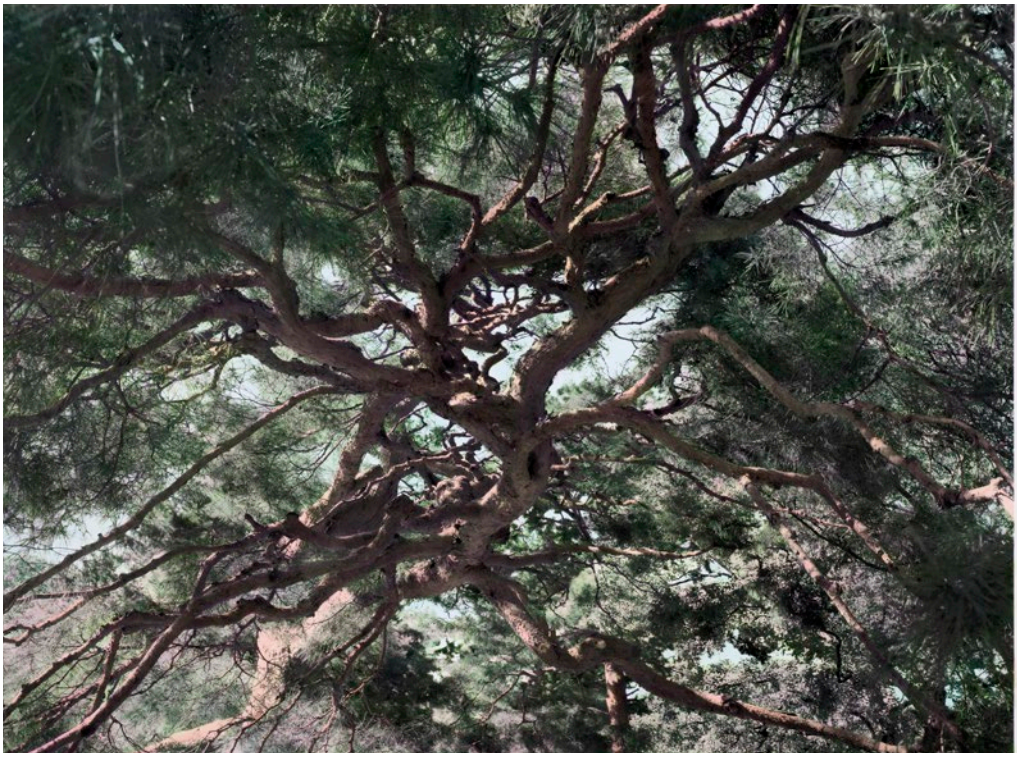


Myoung Ho Lee
Tree... #2, 2012
Ink on Paper
104 x 152cm
© the artist 2020
Courtesy Myoung Ho Lee and Gallery Hyundai

(2013). His contribution here is *Lynching Tree* (2013), a still of a poplar tree just outside New Orleans – a profoundly haunting image.

Time is the theme of the final section. Here you will find a monumental aluminium cast of a 2,000-year-old southern Italian olive tree, from the *Moon* series (2011) by the Swiss artist Ugo Rondinone: 8m tall and covered in white enamel, it is a ghostly reminder that it shared the planet with the Romans. Equally remarkable are three works by the American photographer Rachel Sussman, who in 2004–14 set out to record the oldest living things on earth, including *Jomon Sugi*, a Japanese cedar 2,180–7,000 years old. *Underground Forest* shows the shrub-like crown of a buried 13,000-year-old clonal tree in South Africa; it has since been destroyed by road-construction.

The fragility of the relationship between humans and trees is an underlying theme. Before it gets you down, watch the wall-sized video called *Blind Eye 1,* (2018) by the American artist Jennifer Steinkamp: a birch wood seen through all four seasons in under three minutes (on YouTube here). Serene, timeless, fascinating – three words that might also be applied to this exhibition.



Shi Guowei
Pine, 2016
Painting on photograph
142 x 190.3cm
© Mr. Xi Tao 2020
Courtesy the artist and Magician Space, Beijing

AMONG THE TREES
Hayward Gallery
4 March to 17 May 2020.
www.southbankcentre.co.uk

ANTONY MASON runs the Woodlands Awards for Woodlands.co.uk. He is also the author of *A History of Western Art: From Prehistory to the 20th Century* (Abrams, 2008)

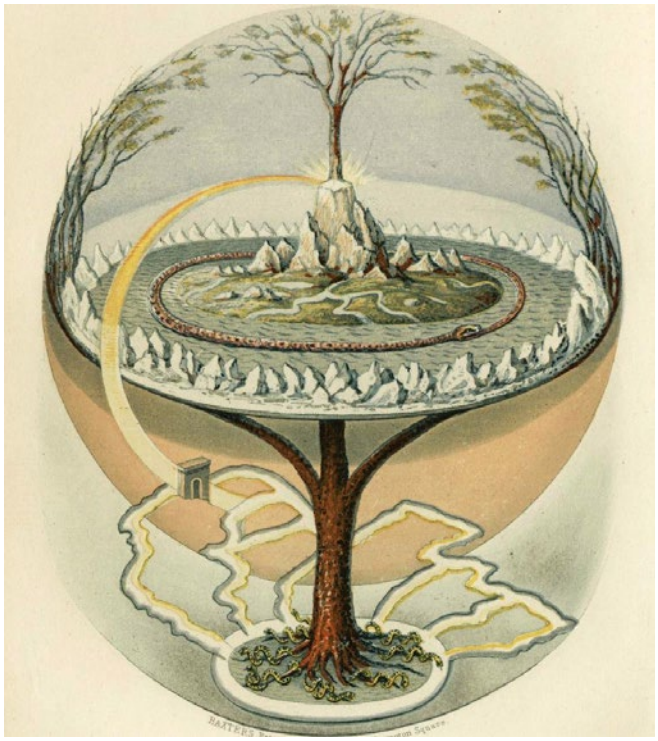
SYMBOLS IN TREES

In the light of ash dieback, it's easy to forget how important the ash tree is in the mythology of many cultures. **CLARE GIBSON** looks at the symbolism surrounding ash, 'the tree of life'.

Although the common ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) and Ash Wednesday have only their name in common, some folk customs link the tree and the first day of Lent. In Germany and Scandinavia, for example, libations were once poured over ash trees on Ash Wednesday in the hope of propitiating the malevolent supernatural females thought to be living within them. Such *Eschenfrauen* (German for 'ash women') are rare examples of a negative aspect of the ash, a tree that has otherwise traditionally been regarded positively.

Its tall, straight trunk and widely spreading branches make a full-grown ash tree an imposing sight, and it is not difficult to see why Yggdrasil, the mighty cosmic tree of Scandinavian myth, might have been envisaged as an ash. A symbol of the universe, Yggdrasil's trunk acted as a world axis, linking the sea, the earth, and the human world. Its branches constituted the heavens, while three enormous roots led to the underground realms of the Norns, or Fates; the well of Mimir, a source of wisdom; and the underworld ruled over by the goddess Hel. Four stags, symbolising the four winds, grazed on its perpetually renewed foliage, and Yggdrasil was home, too, to all manner of other creatures, including gods and giants. As a tree of life, Yggdrasil symbolised vitality and immortality, as well as provision and shelter, linking the underworld, the mortal world and the heavenly realm.

The ash is sometimes known as 'Venus of the woods', perhaps on account of its graceful appearance. Its association with the nurturing female principle was reinforced in the past by the use of its nutritious foliage as fodder for livestock. A number of myths relate that the ash was not only a provider of food and shelter, but also a progenitor of humankind. In his *Works and Days*, the ancient Greek poet Hesiod wrote of the Meliai, cloud goddesses and nymphs of the ash tree, who gave birth to the 'brazen' (bronze) race of men. 'Sprung from ash trees', these exceptionally strong men were war-loving and hard-hearted. In Norse myth, the first man, Askr, was created by the gods from the ash tree.



'Yggdrasil, the Mundane tree', a colour plate in the English translation of the *Prose Edda* by Oluf Olufsen Bagge (1847).

Because of its straight trunk and tough, flexible wood, the ash was also considered a symbol of stability and strength. Spear shafts were fashioned from straight-grained ash wood, and certain ashen spears were celebrated in mythology, notably the spear that belonged to the Greek hero Achilles, and that of the Norse god Odin, whose spear was called Gungnir. Ash timber was used for all manner of other implements, including tool handles, oars, wheels and walking sticks, which reinforces the ash's symbolism as a provider.

As well as having practical uses, the ash was once believed to have magical properties. In his *Natural History,* the Roman writer Pliny the Elder related that snakes were utterly repelled by ash trees. (Coincidentally, St Patrick was said to carry a staff made of ash, but it is not known whether it played a part in his legendary feat of driving snakes out of Ireland.) The Welsh *Mabinogion* tells of the divine magician Gwyddion, who used his ashen staff as an instrument of healing and transformation. The handles of witches' broomsticks were said to be made from ash, and folk rites drawing on the ash's supposed power of healing were performed in Britain until relatively recently. One example was passing children suffering from ailments like rickets, hernias or warts between the gap created by splitting an ash tree's trunk into two; after this symbolic 'rebirth', the two parts of the divided ash would be bound together to encourage the child's healing. The ash was once sacred to Poseidon, the Greek sea god, which may be why sailors harnessed the ash's apparent powers of protection against drowning by carrying ash crosses with them when they set sail.

Not only is the ash beautiful, but its mythological status and role as both a potent provider and protector marks it out as special tree in any woodland.

WOODFAIRS 2020

MAY

THE ARB SHOW
15–16 May 2020 Westonbirt Arboretum, Gloucestershire

SMALLHOLDING AND COUNTRYSIDE FESTIVAL
16–17 May 2020 Builth Wells, Royal Welsh Showground

WOOD FESTIVAL
15–17 May 2020
Braziers Park, Oxfordshire

DEVON COUNTY SHOW
21–23 May 2020 Clyst St Mary, Exeter, Devon

THE BUSHCRAFT SHOW
23–25 May 2020 Beehive Farm, Rosliston, Derbyshire

ROYAL BATH & WEST SHOW
28 May–30 May 2020
Shepton Mallet, Somerset

JUNE

ROYAL HIGHLAND SHOW
18–21 June 2020 Edinburgh, Scotland

JULY

TIMBER FESTIVAL
3–5 July 2020 Feanedock, National Forest

KENT COUNTY SHOW
10–12 July 2020 Maidstone, Kent

GREAT YORKSHIRE SHOW
14–16 July 2020 Great Yorkshire Showground, Harrogate

STRUMPSHAW TREE FAIR
18–19 July 2019 Strumpshaw, Norfolk

ROYAL WELSH SHOW
20–23 July 2020
Builth Wells, Wales

NEW FOREST AND HAMPSHIRE COUNTY SHOW
28 July–30 July 2020
Brockenhurst, Hampshire

AUGUST

SOUTH DOWNS SHOW
15–16 August 2020 Queen Elizabeth Country Park, Petersfield, Hampshire

WILDERNESS GATHERING
20–23 August 2020
West Knoyle, Wiltshire

STOCK GAYLARD OAK FAIR
29-30 August 2020
Sturminster Newton, Dorset

SEPTEMBER

WYCHWOOD FOREST FAIR
6 September 2020
Cornbury Park, Oxfordshire

THE OFF-GRID SURVIVAL SHOW
5–6 September 2020
Newark Showground, Notts

BELMONT WOODFEST & COUNTRY FAIR
12-13 September 2020
Faversham, Kent

SURREY HILLS WOOD FAIR
12–13 September 2020
Cranleigh, Guildford, Surrey

APF EXHIBITION
24–26 September 2020 Ragley Estate, Alcester, Warwickshire

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