

Living Woods

No.57 AUTUMN 2020

MAGAZINE

COPPICING
SUSTAINABLE
MANAGEMENT

OWNING
SSSI WOODS

plus

*CELEBRATING JOHN EVELYN

*BIRD LIFE IN THE CANOPY

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‘We had better be without gold than without timber,’ said Britain’s first published forester, John Evelyn, in the 17th century and as we celebrate the 400th anniversary of his birth, this remains all too true. Evelyn knew all about the value of coppice and with autumn almost upon us, coppicing will be no doubt be on the minds of many readers. For those that are a little unsure about the whys and the hows, we have asked Guy Lambourne of the National Coppice Federation to provide an introduction, while Meet the Maker focuses on Rosie Rendell, a coppice worker in Sussex.

New woodland owner Sam Auger-Forbes begins his woodland journey with ambitious plans for his photography business; David Alty, who is fast becoming our favourite woodland chef, solves the problem of how to deal with all those spare grey squirrels; and Dan Watson continues his spoon carving tuition.

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COVER PHOTO
Sotterley Wood, Sam Auger-Forbes

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@Woodland News

The Forest Book

Have you ever wondered exactly how many trees there are in the UK? Or about the distribution of species? Or who owns the largest woodlands? The **National Forest Inventory**, which lists all woodlands over 0.5ha in size, can supply some of the answers, but it lacks soul.

Author of *The New Sylva*, Gabriel Hemery has started work on a major new book which, he says, will be a guide to Britain's copses, woods, and forests. Inspired partly by the legacy of the Domesday Book, and more recently by the 1950s work of Nikolaus Pevsner in cataloguing the nation's buildings, his aim for **The Forest Book** is to reconnect people across Britain with nature and open their eyes to the importance of woodlands.

The guide will feature a combination of entries from landowning organisations and private woodland owners. Owners are able to 'register' a woodland but request that their name remains anonymous in the guide if they choose. The guide will be encyclopaedic in style with symbols or abbreviations used to summarise a woodland's characteristics, plus a short written description of its main features provided initially by the owner. Hemery says he would like to visit some woodlands to photograph them and interview the owner.

This ambitious project depends on many readers of this magazine – woodland owners are invited to participate and enter details of their own woods. Visit the website copsewoodforest.com for more details.



copsewoodforest.com



Biodiversity, forestry and wood

An analysis of the biodiversity benefits of modern forestry and wood production

A CONFOR SPECIAL REPORT



Biodiversity, forestry and wood

‘For many years, the biodiversity value of wood-producing forests and managed woodland of all types has been under-valued and under-recognised,’ said Stuart Goodall, Chief Executive of Confor, the leading trade body for the UK’s forestry and wood-using industry.

A new report commissioned by Confor shows how modern forestry plantations, when done right, can deliver huge biodiversity and carbon benefits, as well as high-quality timber. The report goes on to show that wood production from existing woodlands – in other words managing woodlands by thinning and coppicing – helps to improve the condition and ultimately the value of native woodlands.

‘Modern productive forests avoid trade-offs between tackling climate change or promoting biodiversity. They also deliver green jobs, economic growth at a time of recession and the low-carbon, renewable wood products that we use so much in our daily lives.’

Read the report on the Confor website.

New woodlands for London

If lockdown has underlined nothing else, it is that we all have a stronger appreciation for our open spaces, especially residents of urban areas. So the announcement that two new woodlands spanning 84 hectares are to be created in Havering and Enfield is welcome news.

The Mayor of London has awarded a grant of £748,000 to Enfield Council to restore the formerly wooded Enfield Chase area to create 60 hectares of new publicly accessible woodland. The project will also fund improvements to 3km of walking and cycling routes to improve access for local communities through the newly created woodland.

The Woodland Trust has also been awarded £493,082 to secure land and extend Hainault Forest in Havering with new tree planting, which will create a new wildlife corridor between the forest and Hainault Country Park. The project will enable year-round access to a previously private area of green space in a locality currently lacking public open space.

Some 140,000 trees will be planted, beginning in November 2020. More than 600 local volunteers are expected to plant trees at the sites on special community planting days, encouraging a connection and sense of ownership from the beginning. The projects will also create new jobs and opportunities in woodland management.

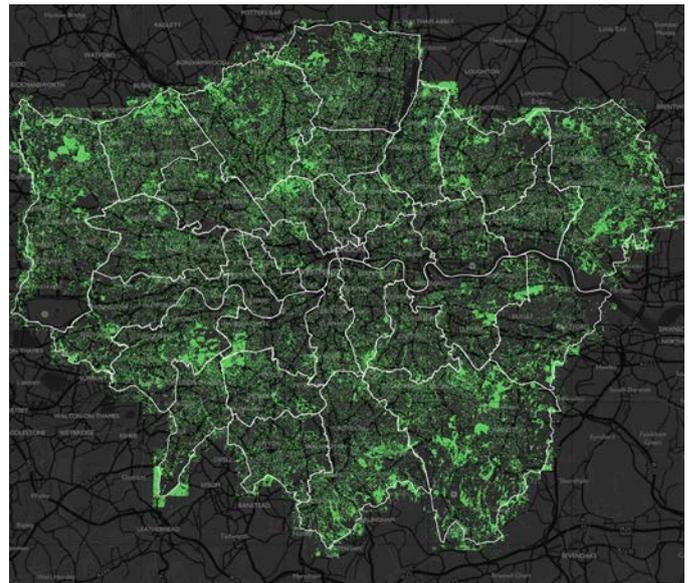


Image of tree cover in London boroughs, from the **Tree Canopy Map**, created using high-resolution satellite imagery.

The Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, said, 'More than ever, London's green spaces are not only vital to people's mental and physical well-being, but also to reducing inequality across the city'.

Woodland courses and classes

Many woodland course providers had to cancel their spring and early summer programmes, but happily, most have announced autumn schedules, with new safety measures in place. Participant numbers may be reduced, but we hope readers will take the opportunity to improve their woodland skills and support them this autumn. Visit their websites for full details.



WOODLAND SKILLS CENTRE

Bodfari, North Wales
Bushcraft, greenwoodworking, basket-making, hedge-laying, trug-making
woodlandskillscentre.uk



GREENWOOD DAYS

Staunton Harold, Leicestershire
Green woodworking, chairmaking, hurdle-making, willow-weaving, spoon-carving.
greenwooddays.co.uk



WOODCRAFT SCHOOL, EAST SUSSEX

John Ryder's courses in bushcraft, wildlife & wildlife tracking, ethnobotany and bow making.
woodcraftschool.co.uk



SMALL WOODS ASSOCIATION, SHROPSHIRE

From chainsaw training to traditional skills.
smallwoods.org.uk



VIEW THROUGH THE TREES

JULIA GOODFELLOW-SMITH gazes up at life in the canopy of her woodland

The birds in our woodland have enchanted me since that first day when I lay back on the leaves, looked up through the trees and saw a buzzard wheeling overhead. Buzzards are one of our constant companions, seemingly watching us as they soar above the trees, curious about what we are doing in their woods. We have not seen them nesting in our part of the woods, but our woodland neighbours say they have seen young every year, so they are definitely nesting nearby.

Closer to ground level, tits often visit while we're there. They come through in a mixed flock, with long-tailed, blue and great tits all foraging together. For some reason, they always remind me of the flocks of dinosaurs in Jurassic Park. Our presence doesn't seem to bother them at all – they just fly all around us, alighting on leaves and feasting on bugs.

One year, we were walking our usual route around the woods when we noticed a pile of wood chippings at the base of a beech tree. It looked exactly like the waste produced by a chainsaw, but we hadn't been working nearby and it was just one small pile.

We were baffled. We looked up but saw nothing out of the ordinary. We walked a bit further up the hill for another look. A woodpecker caught our attention as it flew through the neighbouring trees, calling. And then we realised that the wood chippings were from the



Woodland birds, from top: common buzzard (WikiCommons); nuthatch (Luca Cagnasso/Pixabay); jay (TomaszProszek/Pixabay); rook's nest (Walter Baxter Creative Commons).

woodpecker excavating its nest. From our new position, we could clearly see the hole.

On another occasion, I was sitting quietly trying to identify a mushroom when I heard a scratching sound on the bark of a nearby tree. I slowly turned and just a few metres away from me a nuthatch was working its way down a tree, searching for goodies in the bark.

Other birds flit around high in the canopy, chirping, just far enough away for us not to be able to see details. So it was a revelation walking through our woods last week with someone who can identify birds from their calls.

We have never seen a green woodpecker in the woods, but she heard one – and a greater spotted woodpecker too. We heard and/or saw jays, a raven, chiff-chaffs, wrens, blue tits and a song thrush. A flock of linnets flew over our neighbour's field as we were admiring the view.

My friend was excited to see how many birch trees we have. Mature silver birch trees like ours can provide habitat for over 300 species of insect. Their leaves provide food for a variety of different moths and, of most interest to my bird-loving friend, siskins, redpolls and greenfinches eat the seeds. This winter, I will be searching the silver birches with my binoculars, now that I know what to look for.

And towards the end of winter, my friend will be back, looking for nests being built before the canopy hides them again next spring.

LIFE THROUGH A LENS



Photographer and wildlife enthusiast, **SAM AUGER-FORBES** wanted a woodland as an adjunct to his photography business. This is the story of how he sold his home, purchased an SSSI woodland and somehow emerged smiling at the end.

It is probably true to say that Sam Auger-Forbes was the moving force in his family behind the drive to own a woodland. Sam and his wife Lucy wanted space for their young son to roam as they had done during their childhoods. In addition to his day job as a medical account manager, Sam runs a photography business, with an emphasis on wildlife photography, so the prospect of offering wildlife hides as part of his photography courses was another attraction. He realised that if he had access to his own hides, one aspect of his business would be a little more profitable – and as he said, the added bonus was that he and his family would have woodland to enjoy. A family of diverse interests, Sam and Lucy also keep bees, breed cats and have acquired a recent interest in bushcraft.



The Auger-Forbes knew they really wanted a woodland, but like many people, got stuck on how to make the dream a reality. In the end, it came down to improving the family's work-life balance: they realised that they could move away from their home in Essex commuterland to a new property in Suffolk, and with the spare cash from the sale, buy a woodland too. Irrepressibly enthusiastic and driven, Sam set off in search of one.

Many potential woodland owners spend years triangulating location, price and size in order to find the perfect woodland. With a clear idea of what he wanted, Sam very quickly found the perfect woodland in Suffolk and made an offer on the first wood he saw.

The road to woodland ownership is sometimes rocky and having decided to sell their home to fund the purchase of a woodland and new house (in that order) in Suffolk, the



ABOVE: Taken in one of the Sotterly Wood hides, this dramatic photo captures a tawny owl devouring prey.
BELOW: Sam's young son helps to mark the woodland pathways.

Auger-Forbes endured the vicissitudes of broken house purchase chains and disappearing buyers. Somehow, the woodland he had seen several months earlier was still available and last November the Auger-Forbes became the proud owners of a five-acre hornbeam woodland in Suffolk (and a new house nearby).

Woodland planning

Sam's plans for the five-acre hornbeam wood were ambitious: he wanted to cut trails, install a few wildlife hides and establish a camp spot with a fire pit and tarp. He knew that the woodland was home to a rich variety of birds and in January he set to work with a few friends, keen to get the work underway before the March deadline of bird-nesting season.

At this point, readers may reasonably be asking how much experience Sam had of woodland management. Those of you sucking your teeth and muttering 'he'd have been better to wait a year to see what comes up' have a point. And his neighbours were not impressed because, unlike Sam, they were aware that the glorious Suffolk hornbeam woodland was SSSI – a protected Site of Special Scientific Interest.



OWNERSHIP

Sam is utterly honest about his lack of experience in woodland management and although he perhaps found the restrictions of an SSSI frustrating, he understands them and has worked with Natural England to ensure that his vision creates minimal disturbance in the woodland environment. Foot traffic and fires are particular issues, as they have the potential to destroy the valuable understorey and the sensitive ground biodiversity established over the centuries. A spirit of compromise has ensured that Sam has two hides rather than the five he originally hoped for. His plans for a bushcraft business have also been scrutinised, with limits imposed on the positioning of a fire pit and woodland trails.

Neighbours

Running a business from an amenity woodland can be a controversial topic. Most owners want to enjoy an element of solitude in their woods and are not keen on the visitor traffic that may be associated with a woodland business. Sam's neighbours are no different, but he has listened to their concerns and met all the conditions raised by Natural England to ensure that the biodiversity of the whole woodland is unharmed and, hopefully, improved.

Sam ensures that the photography clients park off-site and either they walk to his woodland or he drives them along the track himself. The constraints of the SSSI site mean that with only two photography hides in operation, customers are limited to two at a time. Covid-19, of course, has imposed even more stringent restrictions.

'It's been a steep learning curve. I've learnt that owning a woodland is a process of collaboration, but I'm committed to preserving the wildlife we have here. Looking after the habitat that provides a home to so many wonderful bird and animal species is a crucial part of that. Most of all, it's been fun, and a real bonus is involving three generations of our family.'



ABOVE: Erecting the parachute canopy over base camp.
BELOW: With bee hives installed, Sam has recently harvested 150 litres of honey.



To visit the bird hides at Sotterley Woods, contact Sam Auger-Forbes via his website saafphotography.com or via his Facebook page [SAAFphotography](https://www.facebook.com/SAAFphotography).

Bushcraft and Survival Suffolk courses are available at bushcraftandsurvivalsuffolk.com

Sam and Lucy featured on Channel 5's **A Country Life for Half the Price** with Kate Humble in April.





COPPICING IN A NUTSHELL

GUY LAMBOURNE, of Wassledine in Bedfordshire, strips back the brash to explain why coppicing and coppice workers are vital to a sustainable woodland economy.

Our ancestors must have learned very early that many tree species, when cut low to the ground, throw up vigorous new shoots the following spring. If trees are grown close together, the fast-growing shoots, in competition with one another, grow long and straight, producing poles small and light enough to be cut and moved easily, strong enough for construction and versatile enough to find uses in all manner of places. That's coppicing, and after thousands of years it's still happening in the UK.

A brief history

Coppicing has had a long and somewhat chequered history, waxing and waning with demand for its products. In Britain it appears to date to the Neolithic period, around 4000 BC, when migrants from Europe and beyond introduced a settled culture, a lifestyle that required both clearing trees and using wood. One amazing piece of evidence is the Sweet Track, an ancient wooden walkway found preserved

in the Somerset Levels and subsequently dated using dendrochronology. The nature of the wood used to support this walkway suggests it came from a coppiced woodland.

Turning to a life in the woods is now the pinnacle of escapist career moves to some, but coppicing's past associations with heavy industry (iron and leather production were two important ones) would have made the woodland life a less than idyllic prospect in past times. Small incomes, squalid housing and poor working conditions meant life was hard for the coppice worker of old. Things have improved

a bit. Although there are no fortunes to be made, a slowly growing band of professional coppice workers is spreading into the woods. We benefit from a buying public, increasingly aware of the link between a locally grown product, the good management of woodland and the conservation of birds, mammals and insects associated with woodlands near where they live. There is definitely a demand for the products of coppice.



Gathering twigs, Simon Bening (Flemish, c.1483–1561)
(Courtesy The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, Ms. 50, verso.)

Why coppice?

Coppiced trees can go through the cutting and regrowth cycle time and time again; they provide a genuinely sustainable source of wood and there are woodlands still worked in the UK where coppicing has been documented since the early Medieval period. In the first spring after cutting, the established root systems of the cut stumps or 'stools' provide resources for new shoots to grow much more vigorously than a newly planted tree can manage, reaching perhaps 1.5m or more in that first summer.

Many species of tree and shrub coppice readily but only a few are still commonly exploited commercially: hazel, sweet chestnut and willow are probably the top three, but there are others. The reason? Their woods have particular qualities for making a great range of things that people want to buy (see box). Each is grown on its own rotation which varies from as little as one year for some willows to twenty years or more in the case of sweet chestnut and other larger trees. It all depends on what's going to happen to the resulting poles.

Coppicing has many benefits in addition to a huge collection of really great products, and that's where it scores as a woodland management technique. Whilst its environmental credentials are unquestionable it does require the buying public's commitment to make it financially sustainable. With this support small woodland-based businesses can thrive, maintaining and passing on traditions and crafts. History shows that a profitably worked woodland is one that is more likely to remain in the landscape.

Biodiversity

Biodiversity benefits are the icing on the cake. Coppicing had declined dramatically by the 1970s but around that time an environmentalist revival began, less based on an interest in craft and money-making than a commitment to woodland wildlife. Opening up areas within woodland by coppicing allows a flood of light and warmth to reach the woodland floor; creating ideal conditions for numerous plants such as wood anemone and celandine. These attract butterflies and insects, which are in turn a food source for birds. The progression of cutting through a wood over years results in a mosaic of differently aged growth providing a wider range of habitats than an evenly aged plantation. Many woodland species have adapted over thousands of years to live in coppiced woods – they need them to survive and without them, these species will disappear. Variety in the natural world is very much the spice of life. On a personal note, I think an actively coppiced woodland is a lovely place to be.

Most modern, professional coppice workers manage to combine various skills and enthusiasms - tree lover; wood fancier; crafts person, entrepreneur and environmentalist. In the next edition I will talk more about the practicalities of coppicing to give you a feel for what's involved in taking on a bit yourself.



Using a billhook to work through hazel.

Coppice products

Some products and their uses have remained unchanged through the centuries – thatching spars and walking sticks are two good examples. However, even though the most ancient of products such as charcoal and woven fences might be identical to those produced in past times, their uses have changed somewhat; most are sold to gardeners now. Not many hurdles are used to pen sheep and not much charcoal to smelt iron, but there are markets for locally produced, well made, well presented products, cut from well managed woodland where native wildlife thrives.

- Beanpoles, pea sticks and other plant supports for the allotment or garden, often hazel and ash;
- Stakes (hazel and ash) and binders (hazel or willow) for the traditional craft of hedge-laying;
- Materials for making thatching spars, baskets, walking sticks and chairs;
- Rods for making woven panels (hurdles) and fences – hazel and willow;
- Charcoal for barbeques and drawing, and biochar as a soil conditioner and fixer of atmospheric carbon; a variety of hardwoods make great char for cooking;
- Poles for fence posts and cleft fencing – sweet chestnut is king here, for its beautiful cleaving properties and natural durability.



Hazel bean poles, sharpened and bundled.



LEFT: Hazel pea sticks in bundles of 50 and 15.

MIDDLE: Regrowth on a hazel stool in May.

BOTTOM: Woven willow panels using hazel stakes (All pictures courtesy Guy Lambourne)

National Coppice Federation
Supporting the Coppice Industry
enquiries@ncfed.org.uk



The National Coppice Federation

If you are interested in coppicing, consider joining your local National Coppice Federation (NCFed) group, or if there isn't one, how about starting your own? Local groups are run by and for members, providing information, training, networking opportunities and support. Membership gives access to a national network through NCFed, insurance deals and attendance at the Annual Gathering and AGM usually held each October – not this year though. For more information visit ncfed.org.uk

Of course if you think your woodland would benefit from the introduction of coppicing and it's not something you want or are able to do yourself, there may be a coppice worker nearby who would be delighted to meet you. Money may or may not need to change hands depending very much on the quality of what's there already and what needs doing. Introducing or restoring coppice can be a long process and often there's very little that's saleable to be had from neglected coppice, apart from firewood. A coppice worker will probably be interested in a long-term relationship that will allow them to benefit, in the future, from the initial work.

The best way to find a local coppice worker is to contact your local coppice group via the list in the Federation's web site (ncfed.org.uk/about/groups). The group rep should be able to send a message to all their members asking for interested workers to contact you direct.

Guy Lambourne and his partner Jane run a small coppicing and farming business in Bedfordshire, selling hazel and willow products. Jane is also a storyteller and environmental education practitioner wassledine.co.uk



‘We had better be without gold than without timber’

DR GABRIEL HEMERY celebrates the 400th anniversary of the 17th-century scholar, environmentalist and forester, John Evelyn.

The father of British forestry, John Evelyn, was born on 31 October 1620 at Wotton in Surrey. Among those of us with a passion for trees and forestry, Evelyn is known to us as the author of *Sylva: or, a Discourse of Forest-trees, and the Propagation of Timber in His Majesties Dominions*.

The family home was Wotton House and its surrounding country estate in Surrey was founded on the business prowess of his father Richard who established a successful gunpowder manufacturing business. This strategically important business, plus his father's role as Sheriff of Sussex and Surrey, meant that the family was well connected, and such factors undoubtedly 'greased the wheels' for Evelyn later in life.

Evelyn was a fastidious diarist and although overshadowed in the same era by Samuel Pepys, he documented life more comprehensively and for a longer period. He commented in one entry recounting his early childhood in 1625, 'This was the year in which the pestilence was so epidemical, that there died in London five thousand a week, and I well remember the strict watchers and examinations upon the ways as we passed; and I was shortly after so dangerously sick of a fever, that (as I have heard) the physicians despaired of me.'

All of us reading this in 2020 may understand such sentiments much more than we would have less than one year ago.

He matriculated at Balliol College in Oxford in 1637 aged 17, but later admitted that the experience was 'of very small benefit to me.'

In 1641, England was in political turmoil and Evelyn left the country to tour the United Provinces (modern Belgium, Luxembourg and Netherlands). He returned the next year and was superficially involved in some military activities of the Civil War but otherwise kept a low profile at Wotton. With royal consent he left for the continent again the next year, this time travelling extensively through Europe and remaining abroad for a period of



nine years. He returned in 1652 a changed man, having married the daughter of the French Ambassador of King Charles I, and become very widely read in classical literature. In his growing collections of books, he often wrote his motto, 'Explore everything, keep the best.'

Evelyn's new residence was Sayes Court, situated near the royal dockyard in Deptford, this being the ancestral home of his wife. The 100-acre estate fuelled his interest in plants and gardening, and he soon became known for his passion and expertise in both.

With the restoration of the monarchy and the coronation of Charles II in 1660, the staunchly royalist Evelyn soon found that he had much favour in high court circles. He immersed himself in public affairs and was frequently called upon to complete public commissions, including on architecture, coinage and air pollution. He later became well known for a discourse on salads and wrote a popular book on horticulture *Terra; The Compleat Gardener*.

In late 1660, the inaugural meeting of the Royal Society was held at Gresham College in London. Forty-one men listened to an astronomy lecture given by Christopher Wren, among them John Evelyn, who is listed ninth among the attendees. Among others, the society soon included amongst its members luminaries such as Robert Boyle, Robert Hooke and Isaac Newton.

Two years later the Royal Society was asked to respond to 'Quaeries' initiated by the Royal Navy which highlighted the scarcity of timber fit for shipbuilding and the need for land fit for tree planting. Evelyn is thought to have co-ordinated the Royal Society's response which was published as a report in late 1662. Just 14 months later, Evelyn presented an expanded version of *Sylva*, now published as a book, to Charles II. This was the first book ever published by the Royal Society, and it underlines the importance of timber and forestry to the economy of 17th-century Britain. A sentiment perfectly summarised by Evelyn who wrote, 'We had better be without gold than without timber.'

TOP: Frontispiece of first the edition of *Sylva*, 1664.

BELOW: The detailed caption to this tree winch engraving from the 1670 edition of *Sylva* instructs the reader in its use: 'A The hand that keeps the Rope, b close upon the cylinder c which is moved by a Pinnion of three or four teeth: which moves a larger Iron Wheel f.e. the Handle put upon the Spindle of the Pinnion, to turn it withall.'

BOTTOM: John Evelyn's pen and ink sketch of his family home Wotton Hall shows the improvements made in the 1640s, including the formal gardens. (British Library)

The first edition (1664) *Sylva* explained the strategic importance of forests to the reader, who were most likely to be the landed gentry, or as Evelyn put it, 'I did not altogether compile this work for the sake of our ordinary rusticks, meer foresters and woodmen, but for the benefit and diversion of Gentlemen and persons of quality.'

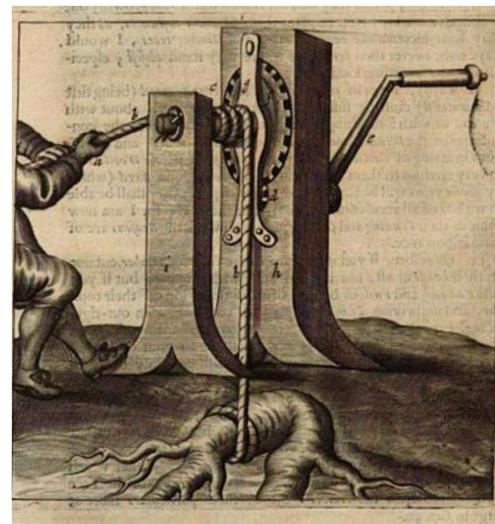
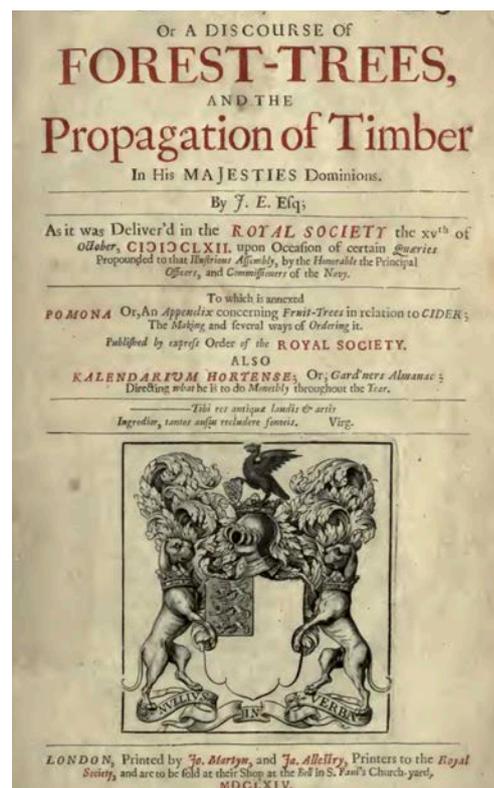
The work, arranged in sections of 'books', dealt with the natural environment and all nature of practical issues in the raising of trees from seeds and cuttings. It then dealt in turn with the different main tree species, with 50 pages dedicated to oak alone. A third section ('book') explored what we would now term silviculture.

In a second edition dated 1670, some engravings appeared, including one showing a winch for lifting a tree butt with roots, a sawmill, and a cider press. A third edition appeared in 1679, while the fourth and last edition printed in Evelyn's lifetime appeared in 1706, and this was spelt 'Silva' for the first time.

Posthumously, six further editions appeared, the best ones edited by Alexander Hunter in 1786, 1801, 1812, and 1825.

John Evelyn died in 1706, survived by his wife Mary and by only one of his eight children. He is buried at the Evelyn Chapel at St John's Church in Wotton.

Evelyn's *Sylva* was not only the first book published about forestry in the English language, but it inspired generations of landowners to embrace tree planting and care, and despite Evelyn's intended audience, undoubtedly inspired many people to find a passion in trees especially when literacy rates improved and more 'rusticks' could access his words. Evelyn certainly inspired me to become a 'meer forester' and shaped my professional life. I founded the Sylva Foundation in 2009 to revive Britain's wood culture, and I launched my writing career by co-authoring *The New Sylva* which was published in 2014 to celebrate the 350th publication anniversary of his great work.



FURTHER INFORMATION

The New Sylva: A Discourse of Forest and Orchard Trees for the Twenty-First Century, Gabriel Hemery and Sarah Simblet (Bloomsbury Publishing 2014). Copies are available from all good bookshops.

Sylva Foundation More information about the environmental charity can be found at

sylva.org.uk

Gabriel Hemery More information about Gabriel Hemery's writing and photography can be found at gabrielhemery.com



Working the Weald

Having cantered along the path of a brief history of working horses in woodlands in the last issue, **FRANKIE WOODGATE** now focuses on the low-impact management benefits of horse-drawn timber extraction systems in contemporary woodland management.

A low-impact approach to the management of a woodland, be it large or small, requires much careful consideration, a degree of head-scratching and time spent walking among the trees to familiarise oneself with the woodland. The next phase is to embrace some simple objectives of custodianship that will serve the wood well.

Management planning

First, think about implementing Low Impact Silvicultural Systems (LISS) appropriate to the woodland's structure and to your vision for management. Whether that vision is the restoration of a coppice cycle, conversion to a Continuous Cover system or selectively thinning softwoods to favour emergent or existing broadleaved species, the principles of LISS can be delivered in a micro or macro management situation. Nevertheless, before you even consider putting saw to tree, foremost in the mind

should be a few important questions. Why? What for? How is it to be moved? Where is it to be moved to and What, if anything, is in the way?

Second, it's all about connectivity. The management of existing rides and access tracks or the creation of new ones is a fundamental element of good woodland care. Not only do they provide open space and edge habitat so essential to the enhancement of a biodiverse woodland, but they are also the main arteries that enable the safe transport of plants, nutrients, animals, people and timber through a wood. Small woodlands may only have a single main ride, or if the wood has been left unmanaged then rides may be non-existent or have fallen into decline. Often, rides and tracks surrounding the wood are shared by individual owners. No matter whether the wood is large or small, keeping those 'arteries' healthy by reducing risks of compaction and other damage to the soil structure is crucial.

Finally, owners often need to embrace chaos theory, which has affected every woodland throughout time.

It has led many an owner or manager to remark ‘Oh bother, that’s inconvenient’ or perhaps more relevantly ‘How on earth are we going to clear that lot up?’ Strong winds can do unexpected things to trees, and windblow and windsnap are abiotic factors that require very careful consideration. It may be how to implement the safe clearance and conversion of trees now arranged, entirely by nature, on the woodland floor or hung up in neighbouring trees. Then with the long view in mind, how best to manage the open space left behind.

Although small woodlands provide smaller volumes of timber relative to their larger cousins, parcels of harvested material will still require extraction from the felling area. Smaller volumes and the characteristic of the felled coupe (type, area, topography, access etc) may be unsuitable for mechanised extraction.

Fur and Brimstone

Brimstone Wood is a 10.5 acre Plantation on Ancient Woodland Site (PAWS), west of Ashford, Kent. It has a clay soil and tends towards waterlogged conditions in the conifer plantation on the southern edge. Under the thoughtful ownership of Margaret Johnson since 2006, this small woodland has changed from an unmanaged, partially coniferised site, to a diverse and abundant woodland in line with its status as ancient semi-natural woodland. Good PAWS management requires a gradual change to the existing woodland structure in terms of altering light levels, favouring existing native broadleaves over plantation species and encouraging natural regeneration of native field, shrub and tree layers.

Weald Woodscape has carried out a range of management operations over the last decade or so, including the restoration of the main ride, selectively thinning areas of conifer (Norway spruce), clearing windblow, replanting with native broadleaved stock, coppicing areas of mixed broadleaved species and respacing in another area. Where we have felled, our horses have worked too, extracting timber at Brimstone for the past 14 years.

In Brimstone Wood there is a strong focus towards LISS, with coppicing and selective thinning forming the basis of felling operations. The woodland has only one main ride that forms a linear boundary between the conifer plantation and the existing native broadleaved component. This ride serves as the only extraction route out of the woodland and onto a shared access and stacking area beyond. In 2015 chaos theory, in the form of three consecutive storms, knocked for six three acres of Norway spruce, leaving behind a calamity of conifer.

Extraction of windblown Norway spruce

The area hit hardest by the windblow was the unthinned area in the centre of the conifer block. It takes experience and training to tackle a windblow site, which is characterised by root plates lifted left, right and centre, and blown trees trapped and under tension. The clear-up



Frankie manoeuvres Tobias, a Brabant, through a coupe to extract coppiced timber with minimal disturbance to the woodland floor.

operation took many months, but once the area had been made safe, we were left with converted timber randomly placed and a great deal that lay in drifts this way and that. It was definitely not the textbook presentation of timber that we would expect from a felling operation. The horses were the most viable means of extracting this produce, as there was minimal room to move or turn a machine without damaging the main ride. Using the versatile lightweight draft bar and traces, and a timber arch where



Frankie and woodland owner Margaret Johnson in Brimstone Wood.



Clearing up the chaos of windblown trees in 2014 was a challenge that took many months of work. Once the trees had been felled and extracted by horse-power, the area was replanted and has sprung into life.

possible, the horses were able to work in very tight places, boxed in on all sides by timber. They were able to turn in a small space, navigate round stacks and root plates and step over logs to access the produce. We also used the horses with an offset ‘snatch block’ to safely bring down any hung-up trees. In total we extracted about 125m³.

Extraction through replanted area

Once the windblown material had been removed, what was left behind was a blank canvas, with only a few standing dead wood trees that had been retained. So, began ‘Project Replant’. Over the next three autumns and winters, Margaret, with the help of my colleague Richard and a few excellent volunteers from Kentish Stour Project, planted the area up with over 2,000 native trees and shrubs.

As sections of the blown area were restocked, we also began to fell more of the spruce trees in the adjacent plot, many of which, having lost the mechanical support provided by their neighbours, had started to move in the ground. We reduced the edge of the compartment by feathering and scalloping along the outside boundary (to reduce wind flow) and selectively thinning within the conifer plot. We milled some of the timber on site for use in the

woodland and the rest we forwarded out for sale as saw logs and chip produce.

This part of the woodland is now just a glorious profusion of native trees and ground flora. It has been a wonder to watch it unfold and is proof, if proof were needed, that far from proving catastrophic, the windblow incident provided a wealth of potential and the gift of space and light.

Less is more and small is beautiful

Small woods can be the jewels in the broader green crown. Brimstone Wood and others we help to manage are testament that, for Small Low Intensity Managed (SLIM) woodlands the less is more approach is a vital consideration. By less, I mean less damage, less carbon inputs, less compaction and less noise and visual impact. By more, I mean, more harvesting potential, more biodiversity and resilience, more management options and more freedom to imagine the long-term potential for woodlands. The use of horses as a system of extraction plays an important role in the future management and care of our woodscapes. It’s a management system that offers the woodland owner and manager a sustainable, carbon-neutral, low-impact option that fits perfectly with the challenges our woodlands face today.

Benefits of horse-drawn timber extraction

- No compaction or damage to woodland soil
- No damage to regeneration or standing crop
- No noise or fuel pollution
- Provides light soil scarification
- Low carbon footprint (carbon-neutral)
- Ability to work on a wide range of sites
- Ability to extract the full range of timber types and specifications
- Softer visual impact

LINKS

Weald Woodscapes is a company dedicated to the goal of sustainable, low impact woodland management and the wise use of timber as a renewable resource.

Contact Frankie:
wealdwoodscapes.co.uk



Continuous woven sweet chestnut fencing. (Photo courtesy Alan Pilkington)

MEET *the* MAKER

Hedge-layer, hazel-weaver and coppice worker, Rosie Rendell explains why she loves the variety of her work.

How and when did you realise you wanted to be a coppice worker?

I have always loved spending time outdoors and I realised at an early stage that I would be happiest working with my hands and being outside.

I started out as a gardener but retrained over ten years ago while my oldest children were very young, and became apprentice to Alan Waters of WildWood. We met on a hurdle-making course he was running at West Dean College and that was me hooked. Working with wood like this and creating something beautiful and useful in the fresh air was the recipe for my perfect job. Alan and his wife Jo took me under their wing and were very supportive and keen to pass on their knowledge and skills.



Photo courtesy Alan Pilkington

As soon as I started working the coppice I knew this was what I wanted to do.

How do you use coppiced wood?

Coppicing produces suitable wood for a huge number of products with very little waste. These are just two of the reasons that I'm so passionate about it.

I often use sweet chestnut for making products but I mainly cut hazel coppice. I sell hazel garden products such as bean and pea sticks, stakes and binders for hedge-laying, weaving rods and plant labels but the main purpose of the coppice that I cut is for more decorative work. I weave fences in-situ using thick hazel rods – more modern take on traditional stock fencing. I also create plant supports and arches as



Above: Hedge-laying using twisty field maple. Above right: Woven hazel fencing encircles a garden tree.

well as framed woven panels, trellis and decorative screens. My partner Phil and I are also taking on WildWood Charcoal next season so any 'waste' wood from coppicing will be turned to charcoal.

It is important for anyone trying to make a living from coppicing to be as versatile as possible in the ways they use and add value to their wood, and to ensure that any material cut has a value as an end product.

Which is your favourite craft?

This is a difficult question to answer as it's actually pretty hard to choose.

One of the main things I love about coppicing is that my work is so varied. I can't think of any aspects of my job that I don't find fulfilling. It covers so many bases. I enjoy working alone in the woods and in my workshop with our dog and I also like meeting clients and working alongside other coppice workers and craftspeople, landscapers and designers.

I enjoy the process of coppicing – the satisfying feeling of harvesting wood which is largely sustainable. This ancient practice is so great for the environment as it creates such a valuable habitat for all kinds of insects, birds and mammals.

I enjoy the repetition of working the coppice and selecting wood for various uses, the hot smoky bonfires on cold, grey days, the look of the new shoots sprouting from the cut stools in springtime and the feeling that I've used my body and hands to cut and trim, drag and burn, tie and carry and dig and weave.

If I absolutely had to choose, it would be a close call between weaving my fences and hedge-laying. Both are creative processes and I thrive on the challenges that both of these jobs throw at me.

When weaving, I love to create fences which incorporate a curve or a height change as I think this best showcases the

materials and I like to maximize the capabilities of the wood I'm working with. It's great to see these fences going up in rural settings, but they also complement and add contrast to more modern gardens.

Laying hedges is a rewarding process. It's of great benefit to the hedge itself as it increases density whilst encouraging regrowth. It rejuvenates old and gappy boundaries, can provide flowers, food, shelter and nesting sites for wildlife, and adds many years to the life of the hedgerow. Hedge-laying is like creating a living sculpture, making careful cuts in the stems and manipulating them into the desired position. A lot of thought and concentration goes into each job so, once complete, I really feel like I've invested some of myself into what I've created and it's exciting to watch it burst into life every spring.

Tell us about the woods you work and the tools you use

I cut hazel in a few different areas, mainly on the West Dean and Leconfield Estates in West Sussex.

Young growth is particularly susceptible to deer damage and in this area we have a very healthy deer population, so it can be a battle to prevent new growth from being grazed and damaged by the rubbing of antlers. I am lucky to be cutting a fantastic coupe of hazel currently, which is permanently deer-fenced, so the quality of the wood is top-notch.

Due to the size of the area that I cut, I use a chainsaw, although where I can I use a Husqvarna 536 battery saw which is a great bit of kit and perfect for hedge-laying too. I originally started using one around three years ago when I was hedge-laying while heavily pregnant, so the reduced noise and lack of fumes were important. I would thoroughly recommend these battery saws for anyone, pregnant or not!



Splitting hazel. (Photo courtesy Alan Pilkington)

“
*I enjoy the process
of coppicing – the
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of harvesting wood
which is largely
sustainable*
”



For trimming I use both a lovely old Elwell billhook passed on to me by Alan during my apprenticeship, and a more modern Fiskars solid brush hook which, while it is not as beautiful, is a great tool as it cuts really well and is very lightweight and easy to use all day long.

What does the craft mean to you?

Coppicing and all of the crafts associated with it are so important. There is now so much detachment between humans and their environment that these skills and crafts are in danger of being left behind. I feel lucky to be a part of keeping this going, but more coppice workers are needed to work and restore the many areas of coppice that are being left untouched. These areas are important not just to the craft, but for biodiversity and for the habitats they provide.

I think that more young people are starting to see the importance of crafts such as coppicing, but I feel that more could be done to inspire and educate young people so they are able to recognize that you really can make a living from what is ultimately playing in the woods.

I have plans in motion to set up a hub where people can come and experience many different crafts and skills. This will include many coppice crafts and I will also run coppicing days where groups will come into the woods and harvest the materials needed to make particular products so that they can experience the entire process. I would like to extend this to school groups too. We'll be up and running in 2021.

What is your proudest achievement?

My proudest achievement may be yet to come once I have fully established my new enterprise.

To date I think I am most proud of having managed to run a successful business alongside bringing up children and them being able to see me doing a job that I thoroughly enjoy. That, to me, is a good example to set as I feel it's an important goal to aim for in life.



Top: Rosie's froe and split stakes.
Above: The Wishbone, made from sweet chestnut.
Below: Digger the Dog in a hazel coupe.



CONTACT ROSIE

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COOKING A SQUIRREL IN A CLAY BALL

So you've saved your trees from a few pesky grey squirrels. What next?
DAVID ALTY shows how to ensure that they don't go to waste.

The much-maligned grey squirrel was introduced into Britain in the 1870s, as a fashionable addition to the estates of the landed gentry. As is often the case with such human meddling in the affairs of nature, this proved to be an ecological disaster. 150 years later, the native red squirrel has been largely displaced by the intruder and now only survives in a few isolated areas of Britain.

Fortunately, here in Cumbria there are scattered populations of reds and several projects are active in culling the greys in an attempt to ensure the native squirrels' survival.

Although considered vermin and a major pest, the grey squirrel is delicious to eat and it is perfectly safe to do so. I have tried several different methods of preparing a squirrel for cooking, but all suffered from one major setback – it is



remarkably difficult to remove the skin. Unlike a rabbit, whose skin simply peels off, the grey squirrel's pelt is firmly attached and has to be removed step by step with a knife. On such a small animal this is both time-consuming and fiddly given the amount of meat on offer.

Having cooked a trout in clay many years ago as a young scout, I was keen to try out this cooking technique on other animals. I have successfully cooked pigeons and pheasants in this manner

and had a brainwave: why not try the grey squirrel with its tenacious skin to see if this solved the problem? It was a great success, as clay ball cooking is a combination of baking and steaming which tenderises the skin to such an extent that, once cooked, it simply peels away revealing the moist flesh beneath.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. It is essential to prepare the cooking fire well in advance. Set a fire of around 20/30cm diameter comprised of small diameter sticks. Have an ample supply of similar-sized kindling readily to hand. Feed the fire until a good bed of hot coals has accumulated. Meanwhile, prepare the squirrel.

2. First remove the head, feet and tail. Carefully slit open the belly and remove the entrails – the heart, liver and kidneys can be saved and toasted on sticks as a tasty snack whilst the squirrel is cooking.

3. Next, prepare the clay ball. I prefer to use a clay/sand mix as it is less prone to cracking than clay alone. Add enough water until it is malleable and roll out a circle of about 40mm thick and large enough to engulf the carcass.





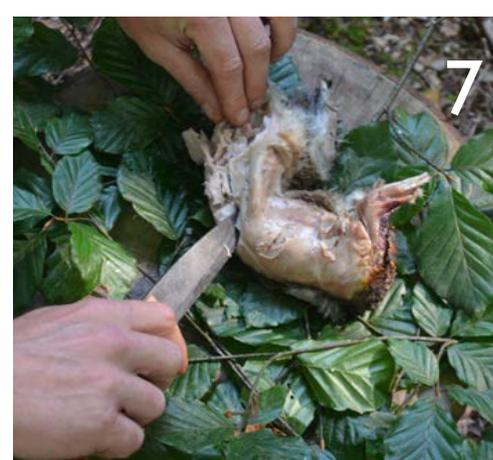
4 a&b. Place the prepared squirrel in the centre and carefully draw up the clay until it is totally encased. Any gaps can easily be patched, in the same manner as pastry, by working in with your fingertips. With wet hands, smooth the surface of the clay until any cracks have disappeared and a nice even shape has been achieved.

5 a&b. Now back to the fire. If the clay ball is placed directly on the embers this will exclude oxygen and extinguish the fire beneath. To prevent this, make a platform of sticks in the embers, spaced slightly to allow oxygen entry. Carefully, to avoid cracking, place the prepared ball on the platform. Then build a kind of log cabin affair of small sticks around and over the clay, filling in any holes with smaller sticks. The fire should now quickly spread and engulf the squirrel in flames. After 30 to 40 minutes the clay should have set rock hard. Simply tap it with a stick to test its hardness.

6. Wearing a good pair of welding or other heatproof gloves, lift the very hot clay ball from the fire and place on a suitable surface. Let it cool for while to reduce the risk of a sudden steam escape on opening.

7. Crack open the ball and remove the squirrel, carefully brushing off as much clay as possible. The skin can now be peeled back and discarded, exposing perfectly cooked moist and tender flesh.

And what does it taste of I hear the cry? Well, squirrel mainly.



SPOON CARVING

part 2



Following on from axing out a spoon blank in the last issue, **DAN WATSON** looks at some basic knife cuts for carving the rest of a spoon.

Tools for this second part of spoon carving are simple. We won't need the axe for this part of the process but will continue using the two knives and a pencil. The aim is to finish the spoon without the need to sandpaper, as the sharp knives should leave a smooth, durable surface.

Practise makes perfect, and attending a spoon-making course can really help to accelerate your learning. There are links at the end of this feature, but in the meantime, follow these instructions and see how you get on.



1. Start with an axed-out blank.



2. Cut around the marked-out line of the blank using a Mora carving knife. A number of grips will be useful for this stage. This is known as a chest lever grip: you use your back muscles and ribcage to push outwards.



3. Use a reinforced pull stroke to remove waist from the spoon handle. This grip gives a lot of control. The knife is kept point upwards and away from you. Rotate the wrist of the hand holding the knife.



4. Cut around the bowl of the spoon with the thumb pull stroke. The thumb is anchored to the bowl: to make the cut, close your grip to remove a little at a time.



5. Use the chest lever grip again to remove waste from the spoon handle.



6. Cutting around the profile of the spoon is now complete.

7. Start to shape the back of the bowl using a thumb push cut. The thumb of the left hand acts like a pivot point.



8. Working on the transition from the back of the bowl into the handle in this pull stroke, the spoon is braced against the chest while the fingers of the holding hand are used as a pivot.

9. Use the chest lever cut to remove waste from the back of the handle.



10. The handle needs to be comfortable to hold while eating, and a reinforced pull stroke will help achieve this.



11. Hollowing next. A pencil line helps to give you something to aim at, while using the hook knife.



12. Using the thumb as an anchor point, below the level that the knife will be cutting, hold the handle of the hook knife in your bent fingers, then with a small movement, open your fingers slightly and then tense them back. This motion will start removing waste wood from the top of the bowl.





13. Continue slowly and carefully, ensuring your thumb is always out of danger.



14. When the bowl is hollowed, final shape refinements can take place around the edge. The back of the bowl can also be smoothed off, together with any other small adjustments that are necessary.

15. Two almost finished, spoons. When they have had a chance to dry out a little, some oil can be applied. Walnut oil is good and sunflower oil can also be used.

FURTHER INFORMATION

The first part of this article, is available in [Living Woods 56](#)

WEBSITES

[Wood-tools.co.uk](#)
[Woodsmithexperience.co.uk](#)
[Woodlandcraftsupplies.co.uk](#)
[barnthespoon.com](#)

BOOKS

Spon, Barn the Spoon.
Spoon Carving, E J Osborne.

COURSES

[Greenfoxwildcrafts.co.uk](#)
[Woodlandmakers.com](#)
[Stevetomlincrafts.co.uk](#)
[Greenwooddays.co.uk](#)



MATT LARSEN-DAW is blown away by the sheer diversity and exuberance of the captivating tales in *Tall Trees Short Stories*.

Somewhere in Gabriel Hemery's home office, I am willing to bet, there is a hand-drawn map that charts the intricate web of connections that spreads like a mycorrhizal network through this beautifully crafted book, linking the roots of stories so that they nourish each other to create one complex but unified forest of meaning. I would love to see that map. One thing is certain – although presented as a collection of short stories, this is a book with a narrative at its heart that takes you on an arc as strong and as affecting as any novel.

On the surface, this compendium of stories could not be more diverse. In a journey through some 30 stories every genre is represented – from thriller to romance, supernatural horror to historical drama, biography to poetry. The plots dance from the past, to the future and back again, often in the lives of the same characters – or across generations in the same family. There is no shortage of big themes explored: war, religion, love, fear and science are all here. However, all are explored in the context of one underpinning theme – the relationship humans have with trees and the natural worlds they support. These themes are all encountered by the human characters in their transformative meetings with natural forces or demonstrated by trees and wild creatures anthropomorphised to bring their alien struggles and preoccupations into the familiar human sphere.

By dancing back and forth in time, Hemery ensures that the reader approaches each story afresh, the connection with characters in previous stories only becoming apparent halfway through. We are locked into the present moment – aware that it is fleeting, yet constantly reminded that it forms part of an endless chain that stretches back and forward beyond our perception. This freedom from the linear progression of time in the curation of the stories evokes one of the strong impressions that Hemery ensures we are left with: the concept of 'tree time'. While the fleeting lives of woodland creatures play out in a constant brutal ballet of hunter and prey, the loss of one life is simply part of the process that sustains the

TALL TREES SHORT STORIES Volume 20

GABRIEL HEMERY

Wood Wide Works

Paperback 264 pages

RRP £10.99

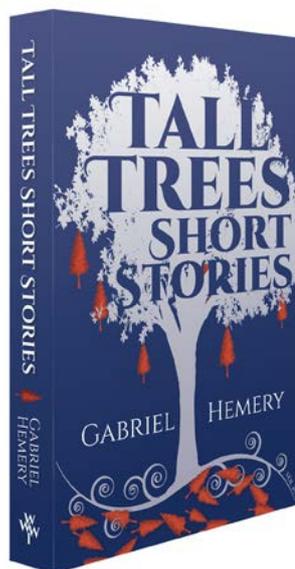
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living web. Trees live their quiet lives across spans of hundreds of years, shaping the world that those same creatures experience in ways too gradual for them to appreciate. Our human lives are shown to be no different – our experiences shaped by the slow actions of trees, the benefits we feel the result of processes started – or allowed to continue – many years before. We can feel that we have a relationship with a tree that provides a fixed certainty in our lives on which to pin memories and associations, but that tree is in a different dimension to us, moving at a different pace through time.

For animals, birds and humans throughout the book, trees are viewed with a spiritual reverence, their power to shape the world and nurture life giving them a god-like status in the lives of those who realise their dependence on these gentle giants. If trees are gods, their prophets in Hemery's



BOOK REVIEWS

religion are the foresters. They alone among humans can tune in to this 'other dimension' and see the greater pattern at work beyond the timescales we experience in our lifetimes. He describes foresters as 'time-imaginings' who work as visionaries of the future, yet with a humble appreciation of their dependence on processes started long before their birth.

They must love and respect trees, yet by being more tuned in to nature than those who simply experience trees and woods as parts of their own lives they can express that love in a way that could otherwise seem the ultimate act of blasphemy – the felling of a healthy mature tree. They see the bigger picture, and thus can spend a lifetime planting trees that they will never see grow to their full magnificence, earning the right to draw on the resource of a forest planted generations before their birth. Loss of an individual is never the end – it creates the seed of a new beginning. Hemery even writes his own death into this compendium, and of course the book he has authored continues in the chapters that follow, unaffected by its creator's demise, just as the forest grows on in time imagined by those who planted and managed it years before.

If this sounds serious and philosophical, then it is. However, this book reads with the pace and energy of a thriller. This is chiefly down to the fact that Hemery clearly loves language almost as much as he loves trees. A riot of wordplay, every page of this book

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If trees are gods, their prophets in Hemery's religion are the foresters.
”

fizzes with ideas, making it an invigorating read. The roots of a hawthorn – narrator of its own life – are described as standing 'shamefully proud of the exposed earth' and he has great fun with the names of organisations and technologies in a future scarred by loss of trees. But underneath the flurries of puns and clever acronyms the real energy of the stories comes from a driving sense of urgency. We owe so much to trees – and it truly is a dystopian future that awaits if we can't learn to see the results of our actions today in shaping the world of tomorrow. As Hemery explicitly states, we are 'following a path towards unprecedented environmental change, and perhaps even greater societal upheaval.'

This is nature writing for those who understand that nature isn't a place you visit for a spell and then return from to tell your friends. In this book, nature is the setting for everything that happens, and there is nothing in human experience that cannot be found at work in the natural world.

Upon reading this book, overflowing with literary invention, scientific detail and philosophy, you may be tempted sit down and create your own map of ideas just to stop them ricocheting around your brain. *Tall Trees Short Stories* is a truly unique book, and one that will be revisited over the years, yielding new treasures for the reader every time.

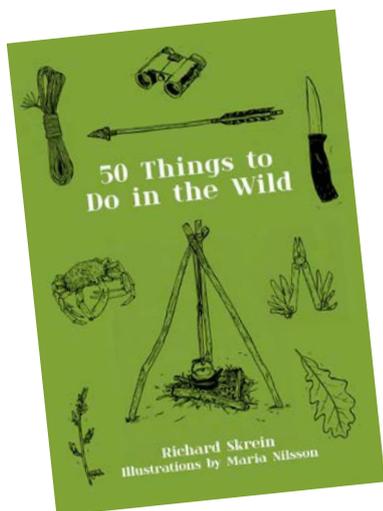
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The author is offering 50% discount on the e-book of *Tall Trees Short Stories* to readers of Living Woods Magazine. Visit gabhem.com/shop using the password swog50

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NEW AND NOTED



50 THINGS TO DO IN THE WILD

RICHARD SKREIN

Pavilion

Hardback 144 pages

RRP £9.99

ISBN: 978-1911641216

This is a well-meaning book, which promises to 'be a modern guide to the age-old art of bushcraft'. Divided into four sections, Earth, Air, Water and Fire, it offers up useful tips for (among others) making tools, foraging, filtering water, knots, navigation and fire-building.

A well-illustrated introduction to the subject, it stops short of being really useful simply because of the book's brevity. It whets the appetite, but in many instances, the space is just too short for really full instructions. It is profusely illustrated throughout with line drawings which work well in the instructional sections, but less well in the pages devoted to trees, for example, where they are simply too small to be of practical use.

It's an enjoyable book to dip into and to provide a taste for woodland activities, but many of these 'wild things' will need a little more research in order to carry them out.

LUCY TURNER of the Four Seasons Forest School in north London enjoys the outdoor adventures suggested in a new forest school book for city dwellers.

Having previously read and very much enjoyed Walmsley and Westall's best-selling first book, *Forest School Adventures*, I was looking forward to reading this much anticipated second book. As a city girl myself, born and raised in North London, I am delighted that this talented couple have created this book for parents and practitioners in urban areas. In the introduction the writers importantly identify that being outdoors and immersed in nature isn't just for those who live in the countryside and that nature is right there in the city, just waiting to be found and enjoyed.

Urban Forest School begins with an explanation of the Forest School ethos and how this may be applied to an urban setting. The book is instructional and informative and will serve as a useful reference for outdoor educational practitioners and parents living in cities and suburbs, particularly at this challenging time, as we recover from the worldwide Covid-19 pandemic.

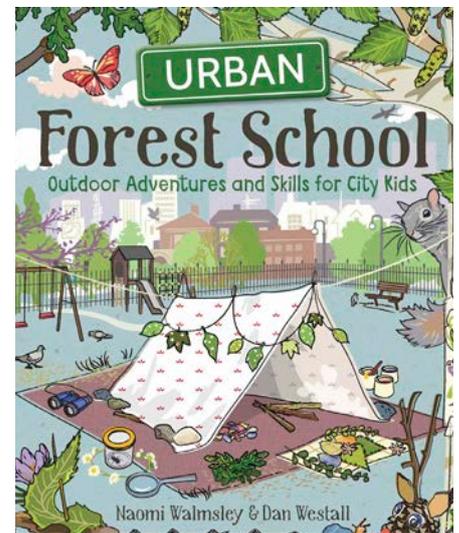
Walmsley and Westall begin with the basics: introducing urban places you could visit to explore nature (allotments, parks, cemeteries) and also highlight any potential dangers along the way. They encourage readers to 'embrace the weather' and be

prepared for the outdoors. Another suggestion is to prepare a 'nature kit', which is a very useful idea for children of all ages. In this introduction, they also importantly address the need to teach children about climate change from a young age. There are some useful child-friendly explanations of climate change and activity ideas to promote being environmentally aware. They complete this introductory section with an overview of some basic knots, which is a useful reference.

Urban Forest School is structured into four main categories: park or garden, around the city or town, home crafts and recipes. My personal favourite is the home crafts section as there are some brilliant ideas for all four seasons, including making natural seed balls, conker crafts and a pine cone deer. I will definitely be trying out the 'berries in your boots', as I think it's a fantastic way of repurposing a pair of old welly boots, for a positive growing project. Similarly, the beeswax strips are another fantastic eco-friendly craft project and encourage a love and appreciation of bee species. Another highlight of this book is the recipe section, which begins with a guide to foraging. My children are fascinated by foraging, so we will definitely be trying out many of these

URBAN FOREST SCHOOL
Outdoor adventures and skills
for city kids

NAOMI WALMSLEY AND DAN WESTALL
GMC Publications
Paperback 160 pages
RRP £16.99
ISBN 978-1784945633



recipes. I was particularly excited by a number of nettle recipes especially the nettle crisps.

In summary *Urban Forest School* is a great introductory book for city children and parents, who would like to get outside more. Walmsley and Westall have pitched it just right: their book is suitable for novice adventurers yet also offers some great tips and ideas for more experienced nature explorers. The personal recollections, 'Garden Memories', 'Dinner at the Allotment' and 'City Camping Adventure', are reminders of the beautiful simplicities of a happy and wholesome childhood. They remind us that childhood should be full of wonderful memories and experiences outdoors in a natural environment, not necessarily a time filled with materials objects.

This book will serve as a great support and inspiration for parents up and down the country.



SYMBOLS IN TREES

Tough when submerged in water, alder's usefulness as a hot-burning wood gives it an interesting place in myth and symbolism. **CLARE GIBSON**

The alder, *Alnus glutinosa*, has a number of remarkable qualities, including the stickiness of its young twigs, which explains the 'glutinous' element of its Latin name. The tree's symbolism is not due to stickiness, however, but rather to some of its other qualities.

When its wood is cut and exposed to the air, for example, the cut edge changes from white to orangey-red, a colour reminiscent of blood. In times past, this was thought a foreboding sign, a portent of bad luck – even of injury or death – which was why some considered the alder a tree to be avoided. Others, by contrast, attributed sacred qualities to the alder, associating the blood-red colour of its hewn wood with good health. Less superstitious and more practically minded people once used parts of the alder to create colourful dyes, the bark yielding red, for instance; the twigs, brown; and the flowers, green.

The alder is a monoecious tree, that is, it bears both male and female flowers, the male flowers appearing on long catkins, and the female, on green, cone-shaped catkins that harden into woody fruits. The Druids considered this co-existence of male and female catkins on alder branches a symbol of the male and female principles in balance.

Yet the alder is primarily a symbol of strength, even though its wood is not especially hard. Indeed, because its relative softness made it easy to work with, it was once clog-makers' favoured wood, while its popularity for making chairs in Scotland caused it to be called 'Scots mahogany'. Musical pipes and whistles were also traditionally fashioned from alder wood, and this connection with music may have given rise to the alder being linked with Pan, the nymph-chasing Greek god of woodlands and shepherds, who was envisaged as part

“

*For the alder-wood,
flame-red when torn
Branch from branch*

”

Planting the Alder
Seamus Heaney

man, part goat. In ancient art, Pan is depicted carrying a wind instrument that he is said to have invented after a nymph named Syrinx transformed herself into reeds in a desperate attempt to escape his clutches; it was these reeds that he used to create the first panpipes, or syrinx.

The alder was closely associated with Bran the Blessed, celebrated in Welsh mythology as a giant figure, and a heroic king of Britain. In the medieval Welsh poem 'The Battle of the Trees', or 'Cad Goddeu', Bran was identified thus: 'The high sprigs of alder are on thy shield; / Bran art thou called, of the glittering branches'. In this battle, the alder is also described as being at the front,

the vanguard, of the battle lines of trees created as an arboreal army by the magician Gwydion, perhaps again a reflection of the strength ascribed to it. Bran owned a cauldron of regeneration, which may be why the alder, Bran's tree, is sometimes said to symbolise resurrection.

The alder's identification with strength lies partly in the fact that it burns well and produces excellent charcoal, making it a top choice of wood for blacksmiths to burn in their forges. (The alder was also sacred to Phoroneus, king of Argos who, according to Greek mythology, introduced fire and the forge to his subjects.) Weapons were made in such forges, hence the alder's connection with strength.

Another superstition arose from the alder's burning qualities, as well as its aforementioned red-coloured wood: in Ireland, it was said that cutting down an alder tree was tantamount to inviting one's house to be consumed by fire. Also deemed a 'faerie tree' in Ireland, it was once believed that the alder provided a portal to the realm of the faeries, perhaps because it often grows in damp or watery locations.

Mythology, folklore and superstition apart, the main reason for the alder's association with robustness and durability is its ability to become as hard as stone and to resist rot when immersed in water for any length of time. This made it the traditional choice for vessels such as troughs and pumps, boats and buckets.

More ambitiously, piles made of alder wood have long been driven under water to support manmade structures built in watery locations, notably Venice. Scientific analysis has shown that the city was constructed on piles made of alder wood (as well as other hardwoods).



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(Pictured: The Tree Cathedral, Milton Keynes)