

We are lead to believe that at the end of the last ice-age 80% of the United Kingdom was covered in trees and that around 1900 somewhere between 4% and 5% of the land area was such.

Of course, with the former figure, there would be a significant percentage that would naturally not be available for tree cover. i.e.land covered by water and sand dunes.

In between the last ice-age and today man has managed the land for his own needs, and indeed the environment has always been managed and in itself is dynamic without the intervention of man. The very word Forester originates from a person who managed the veni and the vert for the Crown. In this case it included all land including woodland and farmland and it was managed for Hunting.

We see many programmes on the Television where the discovery of ancient sites including woodland is heralded as important discoveries. These of course will consist of Bog Oak and the like or tree stumps which appear at the low water line in estuaries and along our coasts. Much of Scotland was tree covered only to be denuded of trees for sheep (and in some cases people) for farming

Man has always managed woodland to suit his needs. Usually he owns that woodland or he has authority over it.

Although I have now retired; when I was working I came across people, usually not land owners or foresters, who had grand designs on woodland management. Each was trying to create a moment in time which to them was a golden age in the environment. Many were different golden ages to the exclusion of other considerations.

The Forestry Commission should not be removing woodland. It should be increasing the total land area. It is expected that the Forestry Commission manage the land for Forestry.

Managing (on a macro scale) for conservation benefits ought to be the province of English Nature (Natural England) and any requests for the permanent removal of forested land in the public estate should be compensated for by the afforestation of at least an equal area of land.