



South East Woodland News

Promoting thriving woodlands in England's most wooded region

Issue 5 Summer 2005

Coppice woodland and management

A stone age man felled a tree: it re-grew from the stump. He did it again, and again – and so began coppice woodlands. Coppicing is a deceptively simple method of woodland management that has been used since Neolithic times to provide a regular supply of fuel and wood products for building, agriculture and industry.

Although many coppice woodlands are valuable ancient semi-natural woodlands comprising native species such as ash, hornbeam and hazel, in the south east there are large areas of coppiced chestnut. This is not a native tree but does form an important part of our cultural heritage, reflecting land use at the time of establishment. Due to the range of habitats that occur within regularly managed coppice woodlands they are often associated with a wide variety of wildlife. The flora and fauna typically associated with these woodlands occur in the open habitats that are present immediately after felling and during the subsequent early phases of re-growth.

As society industrialised, the need for coppice products declined and many woodlands became neglected. During the latter part of the 20th century the recognition of coppice woodlands' biodiversity value has revived interest in their management. This has also been stimulated by efforts to harvest saleable material. Management can improve biodiversity and commercial value but good practice is essential. For example, deer can devastate recently managed woodland and the retention of a dense overstorey can suppress shoot growth.

Ralph Harmer, *Forest Research*



Commercial sweet chestnut coppice in Kent (photo: FC Picture Library).



Old hornbeam stools (photo: FC Picture Library).

Editorial

As you wander through the region's woodland this summer you are bound to see evidence of this issue's main topic: coppicing. Ralph Harmer has already set the scene as to why coppicing is important: an ancient method of woodland management that provides many ecological benefits. Yet many of the stools seen in today's woodlands are neglected – straggly hazel starved of light or mature stools with thick poles. Other stools are important cultural features – look out for ancient stools on the top of wood banks as these are often historic boundary markers.

Today there is a growing interest in restoring coppice woodlands. 'How to...' on page 2 explains some of the key things to consider when restoring coppice. 'Signs of life', also on page 2, focuses on butterfly food plants, most of which depend on the open conditions periodically created by coppice woods. And as this issue's Success story on page 3 shows, humans can also find coppice produce very useful.

Last issue featured a photograph of an ancient tree taken by Emily Preston, the Forest of Bere's Project Officer; many apologies to Emily for not acknowledging her as the photographer. Check out page 3 of this issue for details on the discovery of a particular noteworthy ancient tree in the Forest of Bere!

Alec Rhodes, *Editor*

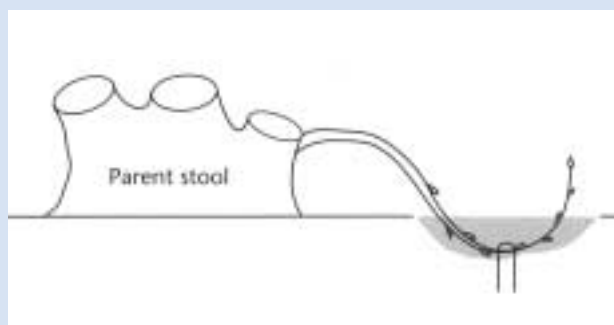
How to... Restore derelict coppice

There are three essential requirements for productive coppice.

1. Stocking

Stocking is critical. Stools must be tightly packed to encourage upward growth of slender rods and limit branching. In newly established areas, a density of at least 2500 stools per hectare is the minimum for good quality rod production. Large, old stools may produce acceptable quality at half this density.

Stocking can be increased by planting ('gapping-up') and, on drier sites, by layering. Layering involves pegging the rods of coppice stools into the ground so that they can sucker and form new stools. The better the contact with mineral soil, the more likely the layer will strike.



Simple layering (from *The silviculture and management of coppice woodlands: see Good reading, page 4*).

2. Light

Coppice species thrive in bright sunlight. This encourages the rapid growth of the rods – reducing branching and the time re-growth is at risk to browsing and frost damage. If you want to grow coppice effectively the canopy cover of any overstorey should be no more than 30%.

3. Protection from browsing

New coppice re-growth must be protected from browsing animals. Piling brash onto stools is not an effective solution where stool densities are high because of the high number of stools to protect. This practice can also be ineffective: browsing animals simply wait until the shoots appear from the mass of brash. Temporary deer fencing is a better solution. Stake and binder fencing is one such method, which uses woodland products, helping protect markets as well as the new growth.

Information on coppice restoration courses and further advice can be obtained from David Rees by emailing owp@oxfordshire.gov.uk or the Sussex and Surrey Coppice Group: iwhite2000@aol.com

Signs of life – butterflies and their larval foodplants

Until relatively recently almost all woodlands in the south east would have been an intimate mix of recently cut areas, older stools and occasional standards. The resulting jigsaw of light and dark was home to many species of woodland butterfly which take advantage of food sources provided by plants, such as nettles and violets, that grow in open conditions. As our woodlands have become darker, the result of less frequent thinning and felling, the numbers of many butterfly species have plummeted.

If we want to encourage more butterflies into our woods we need to provide open sunny spaces – within the trees, along the roads and rides and adjacent to our woodland boundaries.



Common dog violet, an important food plant which thrives in sunny conditions.

Most butterflies are able to feed on the nectar provided by a variety of plants, however different species require very specific plants for their developing larvae; these 'food plants' are key to butterfly populations.

The list below gives an idea of some of the food plants you should welcome into your woods if you want to see more of our most brightly coloured insects.

Common dog violet	Many fritillary butterflies including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Silver washed • Pearl-bordered • Small pearl-bordered • High brown
Cocksfoot grass	Speckled wood
Meadow vetchling	Wood white
Honeysuckle	White admiral
Willows	Purple emperor
Primrose / cowslip	Duke of Burgundy
Blackthorn	Black hairstreak
Cow-wheat / ribwort	Heath fritillary
Bird's-foot trefoil	Common blue

The Butterfly Conservation website is an excellent place to find out more: www.butterfly-conservation.org.uk

Success story...

Ben Law has been living in the sweet chestnut coppice at Prickly Nut Wood for nearly 15 years. In all he manages around 100 acres of coppiced woodland in West Sussex, which forms part of an SSSI. Rather than following traditional cutting cycles, Ben cuts the coppice to market demand ensuring that much of the timber is pre-sold. Any extra is converted to charcoal on site.

Ben supplies a whole range of chestnut products: timber framing poles, lathe for walls and ceilings, spikes for securing straw bales, roofing shingles, waney edge boards for cladding, pergolas, arbours, rustic furniture, trellis, post and rail, hedgelaying stakes and tree stakes, barbecue and artists' charcoal and culinary mushroom logs.



The house that Ben built (photo: Ben Law).

As coppice woodland, Prickly Nut Wood is not dissimilar to many other chestnut coppices. Ben feels his success has come from being in one place where people can find him, where he has become known as a supplier of coppice products in his local area. Good business sense, modern marketing and Ben's life within the wood have put woodland life and his coppice business on a sustainable footing.

Ben also benefits from the woodland in another way. His latest book, *The woodland house*, tells how he built his house from natural materials, predominately the sweet chestnut that surrounds him. The house was featured on Channel 4's *Grand Designs* and was the most popular of the series. The book is an illustrated journey of the build that should appeal to practical house builders and armchair architects alike (see page 4).

Ben runs training courses on a 3 to 6 month basis for people who are hard working and serious about making a living from the woods. Contact Ben at Prickly Nut Wood, Lodsworth, West Sussex GU28 9DR for more information.

Greatest oak tree in Hampshire discovered

An ancient oak tree dating to before the time of the Norman Conquest has been 'discovered' in the Forest of Bere. Almost 10 metres in girth, it is over a 1000 years old! It is thought to be an ancient boundary marker or perhaps, because of its location on the highest point in the Forest of Bere, even an Anglo-Saxon ritualistic tree. The tree has been named the Bere Oak.



The Bere Oak (photo: The Forest of Bere Project).

With the help of the owners, the Forestry Commission, Soberton and Newtown Conservation Group, the Tree Council and Ancient Tree Forum, The Forest of Bere project will provide this tree with the management needed to ensure its long-term preservation.

For further information on the Forest of Bere and the project visit the website at www.forestofbere.org

Ask the expert...

The Forestry Commission has published a briefing note for landowners which explains how woodlands interact with the Single Payment and the Environmental Stewardship Schemes, recently launched by Defra. The note, entitled *Woodlands in England: interactions with other Defra schemes*, details the grant aid available for woodlands under these schemes and explains the requirements for registering on the Rural Land Register.

The briefing note is available from the Forestry Commission England website: <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/england>, or by post from The Forestry Commission, Upper Icknield Way, Aston Clinton, Bucks HP22 5NF



Grants for woodland creation and regeneration

The English Woodland Grant Scheme will continue to open applications in the coming months. In addition to the Woodland Planning and Assessment Grants already available, the Woodland Creation Grant (WCG) will open to applications.

WCG offers support for planting new woods and will be awarded through a point scoring system. Regional points will be awarded to proposals that help fulfil specific objectives of the Regional Forestry Framework.

WCG is competitive and will open to applications on 18 July. The Woodland Regeneration Grant re-opens at the same time. WCG will close to applications to plant in the 05/06 season on 30 September.

Woodland Management and Woodland Improvement Grants will open for business in the autumn.

For more information visit: www.forestry.gov.uk/ewgs

Good reading

Looking for some reading matter for this summer's holiday? Then look no further:

The silviculture and management of coppice woodlands by R. Harmer and J. Howe.

An essential guide to the management of trees, stools and woodland. Forestry Commission, Edinburgh, 2003. £12.

The woodland way: a permaculture approach to sustainable woodland management by B. Law.

An insightful book explaining in both practical and philosophical terms the author's reasons for living in the woodland and the silvicultural practices undertaken. Permanent Publications, East Meon, 2001. £16.95. Tel: 01730 823311.

Trees and Woodland in the British Landscape by O. Rackham.

An excellent history of Britain's trees and woodlands. Weidenfeld & Nicholson History, London, 2001. £14.99.

Weald Woodfair 2005

This year's Weald WoodFair — the leading woodland, wood-use and woodcraft event in the South East — will take place during 23–25 September at Bentley Wildfowl and Motor Museum, Halland, East Sussex.

For more information: Tel: 01273 482 920
or visit: www.eastsussex.gov.uk/woodfair

A Very Important Visit to Magdalen Wood, Oxford

Buying local wood products can help local communities and woodlands! That was the message delivered to VIPS invited to Magdalen Wood in March. Guests, including Oxford's Mayor, Bryan Keen, saw just some of the benefits woodlands can provide to local communities. Woodfuel was given special emphasis as a product that can heat new developments while stimulating woodland management.



Mr Hugo Brunner, Lord Lieutenant of Oxfordshire, begins proceedings at Magdalen Wood, Oxford (photo: Alec Rhodes).

The event, organised by Oxford City Council and the Oxfordshire Woodland Project, was sponsored by the Forestry Commission and marked the beginning of an ambitious work programme - the first management of the wood for over 70 years! Under a Woodland Grant Scheme the City Council will thin the woodland, restore areas of derelict coppice and improve the access though this well-used woodland.

For more information about the Oxfordshire Woodland Project e-mail: owp@oxfordshire.gov.uk If you are interested in knowing more about woodfuel visit: www.woodfuelresource.org.uk

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