



South East Woodland News

Promoting thriving woodlands in England's most wooded region

Spring/Summer 2004

Visit a wood today, keep the doctor away

It's official! Woods are good for you. Recent studies have shown that looking at wooded landscapes slows your heart rate and reduces your blood pressure, and those who commute through wooded landscapes arrive at work in a more productive state. A study of surgical patients found that those with views of trees from their windows took ten percent less time to recover and made fewer requests for painkillers than other patients.

Recreational activities in woodlands have been shown to account for significant reductions in heart disease, stress and obesity. Activities such as tree planting, digging and tree felling use more calories than conventional aerobics.

By improving air quality, trees help fight diseases such as asthma and bronchitis, and the noise absorption effect of trees helps reduce levels of stress and anxiety in busy areas. All in all, woods are providing quite a health service.

The South East region is home to eight million people – with another seven million in London, right on our doorstep. If any region could do with a second health service it's ours. Fortunately we're the most wooded region in the country, and with a large number of woods open to the public, many people can take advantage of the benefits that they provide.



Enjoying an adventure playground



Family out for a woodland walk

Editorial

Not surprisingly, with all the benefits that they offer, three-quarters of people in the South East visit woodlands. Though some owners may think it difficult or impossible to combine public access with traditional activities, the reality is that more than a third of woodland in the region is open to the public.

Many more have rights of way running through or past them, and the majority of owners seem to be tolerant of some informal use being made of their woods by local people. Reflecting the importance of public access in the South East, in this first issue of South East Woodland News, we're taking a closer look at the subject.

If you're a woodland owner, you may be interested in our tips about opening your wood to the public, and how to tackle some of the 'challenges' that access can bring. Or perhaps you will be inspired by hearing about how a wood in the region is being managed as a visitor attraction.

If you'd rather visit somebody else's wood, how about choosing somewhere where you can see red kites, as featured in this issue's 'Signs of life' – definitely something for which it's worth going down to the woods.

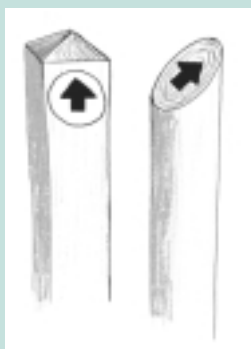
But it's not all about access. In a change from our usual historical focus, this issue's 'Taking the long view' looks into the future, reporting on an innovative new scheme from the Woodland Trust. Page 4 reports on new grants for restocking woodlands... and don't miss our fantastic reader offer.

How to...

open a private wood for public access

Perhaps your wood is crossed by a public right of way from which visitors occasionally stray, or maybe you already tolerate local people walking dogs in your wood. Waymarking and maintaining paths, stiles and gates is the best way to ensure people keep to the places you want them to visit – and stay away from more sensitive areas, such as wildlife sites, pheasant rearing areas or your home.

Start by identifying existing public rights of way and places where people are likely to enter your wood. A signboard at the entrance can be used to make your visitors feel at ease, while a few picnic benches within sight of any entrance area will assure visitors that they are welcome to venture further.



Locate interesting features such as a stream, pond or attractive viewpoint and be aware of areas where there could be some conflict. Design any new routes to take account of these places. While a map at the entrance to the wood can be useful for visitors, waymarking can be a better way of keeping them to

the paths. Generally yellow waymarkers are used for footpaths and blue for bridleways. How about using timber from the local area for waymarkers, gates and stiles?

Provide variety by setting out alternative circular routes of different lengths and, if possible, make at least one of the routes an easy access route suitable for wheelchairs. If the woodland is likely to be well used, consider separate routes for walkers, cyclists and horse riders.

Whether or not your wood is 'officially' open to the public, it could, unfortunately, be subject to unwelcome problems such as vandalism, fly tipping or use by motor vehicles. There is insufficient space here to describe how to deal with all such problems, but the publications outlined below should be helpful.

For a comprehensive guide to managing footpaths see *Footpaths, a practical handbook* priced £13.95. This can be ordered from BTCV:

Tel: 01302 572200

Website (where you can also read the publication online):
<http://handbooks.btcv.org.uk/handbooks/index>

The Woodland Trust has produced helpful guides packed with useful advice on dealing with problems. These can be downloaded from their website:

<http://www.woodland-trust.org.uk/communitywoodlandnetwork/publications/woodmgnt.htm>

Signs of life – the red kite

Once one of Britain's most widespread and familiar birds, by the end of the 19th century the red kite had been completely lost from England through human intervention. But now, in a major conservation success story, these magnificent birds of prey are a relatively common sight in the skies of the Chilterns.

From 1989 to 1994 red kite nestlings were imported from Spain and, after acclimatising to the area in cages, the



Red kite

birds were released into the wild. Fifteen years on and there are nearly 180 breeding pairs in the area – and chicks are being exported to other parts of the country.

Kites are not hard to spot if you visit the Chilterns. For a start, they are enormous, with a wingspan of

nearly two metres. In flight their deeply forked tails and russet, black and grey colouring make them very distinctive.

Their nests are large, untidy structures lodged in the forks of trees - usually at the edges of woods or glades. The nests are often decorated with rags, paper or plastic, and some birds go much further in their decoration, having been known to add unusual items such as teddy bears and ladies' underwear!



Watching the kites

If you would like to see red kites for yourself, the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty website gives details of good places to visit: Website: www.chilternsaonb.org/caring/red_kites.html

Nestwatch CCTV at the Charwood Garden Centre on A40 is part of a year round programme of red kite events:

Contact: Cathy Rose – 01844 271306 crose@chilternsaonb.org

For more information on the red kite reintroduction programme, English Nature has an interesting free leaflet:

Tel: 01733 455101

Website: www.english-nature.org.uk/pubs/publication/PDF/Redkite.pdf

Visit a wood – with the forester

The Royal Forestry Society provides a unique opportunity to look around some great woods in the region, with the added bonus of expert guides. This year's programme includes some of the major forestry estates such as Albury and Windsor, as well as private and community woodlands. For details of meetings, see the fixture list on the RFS website or contact your local divisional secretary:

Website: www.rfs.org.uk

Divisional secretaries

South East: Neil Humphris - 01798 342502

Southern: John Brunton - 02392 240358

Oxon-Bucks: Peter Hale - 01295 688100

If you go down to the woods today...

The owners of Wilderness Wood have not only invited the public into their woodland, they have also made it into a visitor attraction. Some 20,000 paying visitors each year come to this 23 hectare working wood to have fun or find peace and quiet, learn about growing trees and using wood, buy garden furniture made from Sussex oak and chestnut, or simply have tea in relaxing surroundings.

For 25 years Chris and Anne Yarrow have managed their wood near Uckfield in East Sussex with visitors in mind.



Getting close to nature

Three thousand of those visitors are schoolchildren who probably don't realise they are following the National Curriculum at the same time as they follow the discovery trail, fill out spotter sheets and enjoy the adventure playground.

The diverse events programme has something for everyone, from arts and crafts to bug-hunts, from camping overnight in DIY woodland shelters to digging-your-own Christmas tree. 'Such events', says Chris, 'are great for encouraging new people to visit the wood.'

In recent years the catering side of the business has been expanded. With a strong emphasis on local produce, visitors can buy food and drink and hire a barbecue for picnics in the wood.

Constantly open to new ideas, Chris and Anne are considering encouraging local doctors to prescribe walks in the wood as health treatments – and who knows what will be next? In running somewhere like Wilderness Wood, Chris says, 'you've always got to keep an open mind and be alive to new possibilities'.



The Green Lady of Wilderness Wood

To find out more about Wilderness Wood and to check out the events programme, see:

Website: www.wildernesswood.co.uk

Tel: 01825 830509.

Taking the long view

Have you ever thought what might happen to your wood when you are no longer around to look after it? After all the hard work you have put in, you are sure to want it to remain in secure hands into the future. To help with this, the Woodland Trust has set up the Conservation Land Trust. This includes a brokerage service which tries to find a new owner for land, someone who will carry on looking after it in an appropriate, environmentally positive way.

Another part of the service is to provide a legal safeguard ensuring that the land is maintained for conservation through a 'conservation covenant'. The Trust will monitor the site and take appropriate action should any covenants not be adhered to.

More information about the Conservation Land Trust can be obtained from:

Tel: 01476 581100

Website: www.clt.org.uk

Ask the expert...

What do I need to know about public liability?



If you are encouraging visitors into your woods, you do owe them a duty of care. But don't be put off by concerns over liability, because by following a few simple guidelines you can ensure that both you and your visitors enjoy your woods in confidence and safety.

One of the first things to do is devise a simple plan for managing access to your woods. Look at the places where visitors will go, note any possible hazards and carry out a simple risk assessment. If something looks as if it might pose a risk to safety, for example a damaged path, overhanging tree or perhaps a broken rail on a footbridge, take steps to remedy the hazard.

Carry out an inspection of your site at intervals, and when you check it, keep a written record of the date and findings. Frequency of inspection will vary depending on the use made of your site, but you should try to check it at least three times a year. Remember, too, that you must ensure that any work activity is carried out safely, to protect any visitors.

For added peace of mind you may like to consider insuring yourself for property owner's public liability. The Small Woods Association (SWA) recommends a scheme for the owners of small woods which costs just £53 per wood per year (special offer of £38 until June 2004).

In such a short article we can only give general advice. Since all sites will differ, individual owners should always take professional advice if they have any concerns.

For further details, contact SWA:

Tel: 01743 792644

E-mail: enquiries@smallwoods.org.uk

So, you own a woodland? ...then we've got a free booklet for you!

Aimed primarily at those new to woodland ownership, the Forestry Commission booklet *So, you own a woodland?* is packed with advice and information, given in a practical and accessible style.

The booklet:

- helps you find out more about your wood
- looks at ways of caring for your wood
- shows you where to go for more help and information.

We have a free copy for every subscriber to South East Woodland News. To claim your copy, contact the Forestry Commission on:

Tel: 01420 23337

E-mail: fc.seeng.cons@forestry.gsi.gov.uk



Charcoal: check it out

Using locally produced charcoal on your barbecue this summer is a great way to support the management of local woodlands. Not only is local charcoal easy to light but it's also easy to obtain now that B&Q and Sainsbury's offer charcoal produced through the Bioregional Network. Look out for the bags with bluebell pictures on them!

Bioregional is looking for charcoal producers to join its network - contact Sarah Mooney on 0208 404 2300.

A good read

Spring and Summer are ideal times for observing wildlife and there are some excellent pocket-sized books to take to the woods.

Collins Tree Guide by Owen Johnson and David More. Complete field guide to the trees of Britain and Europe. HarperCollins, London. £25.

A Field Guide to the Birds of Britain and Ireland by Habitat, by Mark Golley. Perfect for use at home, out in the car or in the field, available June 2004. New Holland Publishers (UK). £14.99.

Pocket Guide to the Butterflies of Great Britain and Ireland by Richard Lewington. A new handy-sized guide, illustrated with award-winning artwork. British Wildlife Publishers, Rotherwick, Hook, Hants. £8.95.

Wild Flowers: an Easy Guide by Habitat and Colour. Green Books Ltd, Totnes, Devon. £7.95.

All photos from Forest Life Picture Library except page 3: Green Lady courtesy of Wilderness Wood.

New Regeneration Grants

As from 1 April 2004 new Forestry Commission Woodland Regeneration Grants (WRGs) became available, replacing all previous restocking grants.



The new grants work on a similar basis to Woodland Improvement Grants (WIGs) in that a percentage contribution is paid. The percentage varies from 30 to 80% depending on the type of site and the species being regenerated.

As an example, if restocking or regenerating native broadleaf trees on an ancient woodland site previously planted with non-native species, the FC will pay 80% of the 'standard cost' for the job.

The 'standard planting cost' for that operation has been set at £2100 per ha, so in this example, the FC would pay 80% of that, i.e. £1680 per ha.

For more information on applying for Woodland Regeneration Grants please contact your local Forestry Commission office:

Kent and East Sussex: 01580 211123

West Sussex, Surrey, Hampshire, Isle of Wight: 01420 23337

Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire: 01296 681381

PAWS Seminars

The seminars on restoration of Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS) advertised in the last issue of South East Woodland News will now be held on 28 September and 5 October 2004. If you would like further information, please contact us on 01420 23337, or preferably by e-mail at fc.seeng.cons@forestry.gsi.gov.uk.

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To subscribe to this free newsletter please call 01420 23337 or email fc.seeng.cons@forestry.gsi.gov.uk, or write to The Forestry Commission, South East England Conservancy, Alice Holt, Farnham, Surrey, GU10 4LF.

This edition of South East Woodland News was brought to you by the Forestry Commission and the following counties, unitary authorities and Woodland Initiatives of the South East Region:



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