



South East Woodland News

Promoting thriving woodlands in England's most wooded region

Winter 2004

Ancient and veteran trees

Our ancient trees have been likened to the planet's dwindling old growth forests because we now realise how rich they are for wildlife and the importance of retaining their biological continuity. Each ancient tree is an individual, dynamic 'island' full of biodiversity: essential habitat for a multitude of organisms.

In the UK we have many 'superstar ancient trees'. Many have gained a place in history through the service they have given their country such as the Boscobel Oak, where King Charles II is said to have hidden from the roundhead soldiers.

Through looking at ancient trees, arborists are increasing their understanding about tree ageing and learning about survival strategies that involve decay and hollowing. Landscape historians and scientists are looking at how these trees have lived their lives and the clues they can provide about past landscapes. Yet, unlike structures of brick and stone, these living edifices are virtually unprotected. We do not know where they all are, how fast they are disappearing or if there will be future generations to take their place.

The care and protection of our ancient trees is perhaps the UK's single biggest obligation to the conservation to biodiversity in northern Europe. Although we know that the continent has its magnificent marshes, rivers, mountains and forests, many of us have not fully recognised that the old trees stop at Dover!



Ancient trees are often fat and usually hollow!



The deadwood stump of an old beech tree - perfect habitat for fungal life.

Editorial

This issue of South East Woodland News focuses on veteran and ancient trees. We are particularly blessed with these 'old timers' in the South East where we have more ancient woodland than any other region, and many grand estates with historic parkland dotted with veteran trees. Windsor Great Park holds more ancient oaks than Belgium, Luxembourg and The Netherlands put together!

Our opening article highlights the importance of ancient trees; trees that support a vast community of wildlife, ranging from insects and birds to lichens and bats – the subject of this issue's Signs of Life on page 2.

It is worth noting that deadwood is an important element of the habitat provided by veteran trees. Sometimes it's difficult to accept that a tree in apparent decline is in fact supporting a variety of other life.

Despite their apparent ability to endure, veteran trees require careful consideration. A recent article on the NFU website: www.nfucountryside.org.uk highlights the long-term threats to our ancient trees, specifically changes to the landscape which surrounds them. But there's plenty of advice on how to preserve these leafy veterans. A good place to start is the Ancient Tree Forum's website: www.ancient-tree-forum.org.uk, which is packed with information, along with their first Ancient Tree Guide on Trees and Farming.

How to... care for veteran trees in woodland

Veteran trees are fantastic features within any woodland. However, their longevity often means they have not developed in the company of other trees and they are ill suited to woodland conditions. Younger trees, which have grown up around a veteran, can crowd its canopy. Excessive shade can also be detrimental to the wildlife living on and within veteran trees.

This can be overcome by 'haloing': removing the trees immediately surrounding the veteran. But beware! Sudden exposure can also be detrimental with increased sunlight and exposure causing leaves to scorch, bark to dry and split and even death through drought. But it's not only the tree that may be at risk. Hasty exposure can also be harmful to the organisms living on and within the veteran.



Haloed veteran trees at Windsor.

Because of this, gradual removal of surrounding trees is crucial. Staggering felling over several periods, selective tree removal, or ring-barking undesirable trees so they slowly die back are all ways in which veteran trees can slowly be given space.

Ultimately, even the oldest oak tree will crumble to dust. Therefore it is important to consider the next generation of old growth within woodland, especially in an actively managed wood. The first step in this process is to retain a number of trees (5–10 per hectare) during any harvesting operation. These trees, ideally long-lived native species such as oak and beech, should be given space to develop spreading roots and full crowns.

For more guidance on the management of veteran trees in and outside of woodlands, see English Nature's comprehensive publication: *Veteran Trees: a guide to good management* (price £15) or the free leaflets: *Veteran trees – the future for veteran trees* and *Veteran trees – an introduction to surveying ancient trees*, all available from English Nature:

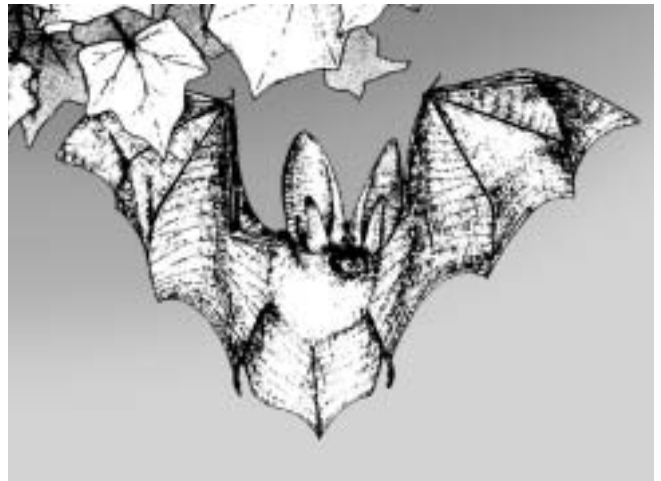
Tel: 0870 1214 177

Website: www.english-nature.org.uk

Signs of life – Bats

Bats are the real 'stars of the night'. Of the 16 species found in Britain, many are associated with woodland both as roost sites and as foraging areas.

Bats live in colonies and naturally roost in trees and caves, though nowadays suitable conditions are just as likely to be found in buildings. For some species the availability of roost sites in trees is the key to their survival. Natural holes, crevices and shelter within ivy can all serve as bat roosts – as can artificial bat boxes where other sites are in short supply.



The brown long-eared bat, a species widespread across the UK (courtesy of the Bat Conservation Trust).

The woodland visitor will often only be aware of bats as dusk approaches on a summer evening. However, sympathetic woodland management can benefit populations throughout the year.

Mature trees, including those that are dying and dead, are obviously more likely to provide suitable roost sites than younger specimens. A 'tidy' woodland is rarely compatible with the rich biodiversity most of us now wish to see and the retention of old trees and 'deadwood' is now a core objective of most managers. Where public safety is an issue it may be possible to prune a tree rather than fell it completely.

Since 1991 all bats have been protected by law and any proposed work that is likely to disturb or destroy roosts must be discussed with English Nature.

There is lots of useful and interesting information on bats, including bats and the law, on the Bat Conservation Trust's comprehensive website: www.bats.org.uk

To discuss work which could affect bats, contact your local English Nature office. Contact details available from:

Website: www.english-nature.org.uk

Tel: 01733 455101

The ambitious task – Tree for All!

Mid-September saw the launch of Tree for All, a Woodland Trust project that aims to plant a native tree for every schoolchild in the UK – twelve million trees. Tree for All will see events taking place across the whole of the UK over the next few years.

These events do not just involve tree planting. Children are also shown woodlands, and their importance is emphasised. The aim is simple: to engage children with the countryside.



Getting close to nature at 'The Task'.

So far the project is proving a success. For example, at 'The Task', a 20-hectare planting scheme in Buckinghamshire, The Woodland Trust is working in partnership with the owners Mr & Mrs Jensen, with the aim of planting 39,000 trees over the next two years. Twelve hundred of these will be planted by schoolchildren and others at events this winter.

This planting links two ancient woodlands, and events have helped to educate children about the countryside, while grant aid and the Woodland Trust's facilitation of the events has helped minimise the planting costs to the landowner.

The ancient tree hunt – mapping a future for ancient trees

You can get involved in the conservation of ancient trees by reporting your meetings with remarkable trees to the Woodland Trust's Ancient Tree Hunt. This project aims to record the location of the UK's thousands of ancient trees, compiling a living UK-wide database of ancient trees.

To find out more log onto www.ancient-tree-hunt.org.uk where you can view the current map of ancient trees and register your own meetings with remarkable trees on line.

The Woodland Trust is seeking the assistance of other landowners to help fulfil the project's objective. To find out more information visit: www.treeforall.org.uk.

Taking the long view

It is incredible to think of the changes that have taken place within the life of some of our ancient trees. Take the Ankerwyke Yew at Runnymede, Berkshire for example. It was near this tree that the Magna Carta was sealed and an oath sworn in 1215.

A significant starting point when charting time against our ancient trees is about one thousand years ago. The Conqueror's oak in Windsor Great Park was believed to be a significant tree in William the Conqueror's time. About three hundred years forward in time (1348) the Black Death spread across Britain. As the population declined so did farming, allowing tree cover to increase. Many of our ancient trees exist because of the plague.

Many of our ancient oaks have stories relating to royalty. For example, Queen Elizabeth I is said to have visited a massive oak tree at Cowdray Park, West Sussex and been amazed at its size. This oak can be seen today and is one of the largest trees in Britain.

Ancient pollards can commonly be found across the south east. One notable example being the Cage Pollard, one of many ancient pollards surviving at Burnham Beeches.

Find details of ancient trees in your area at tree register www.tree-register.org

Ask the expert...

As a veteran tree owner, what are my responsibilities?



The Veteran Tree Initiative has published a helpful leaflet (see below) which should be of interest to everyone who has veteran trees on their land. It points out that these trees usually pose no more risk to public safety than other trees –after all, their very age is an indication of their robustness.

However, the deadwood, rot holes and hollows which make veteran trees such important wildlife habitats are precisely those features which ring warning bells for those carrying out safety assessments. Landowners have a duty of care to visitors, neighbouring properties and those who use adjacent public highways and the leaflet explains how these landowners can meet their responsibilities.

While safety must always take precedence, the leaflet points out that, depending upon the circumstances, there may be options for reducing risk which do not involve felling the tree or lopping off branches such as re-routing pathways or installing fencing.

Copies of the leaflet Veteran Trees: A guide to risk and responsibility can be downloaded from the English Nature website: www.english-nature.org.uk

Regional forestry framework launched!

Seeing the Wood for the Trees: A forestry and woodlands framework for South East England was launched at Windsor on 19 October 2004.



The framework has been produced after an extensive period of consultation. It sets out a simple vision for the future of woodlands and forestry in the south east: for our woods to make an increasing contribution to the sustainable development of the South East region, in both rural and urban areas.

To find out more about the framework and to download a copy of the publication visit the website:
www.seeonline.net/woodlandsframework.

Coppice products

The idea of using local woodland products is all very well in theory, but sometimes it's hard to know where to find the product you're looking for. Now help is at hand in the form of a new website. Listing a huge range of products and suppliers, the website can put you in touch with people who can supply anything from arbours to walking sticks.

To start your shopping, see www.coppice-products.co.uk

Good reading and viewing

Champion Trees of Britain and Ireland, edited by Owen Johnson. A new book for all tree lovers from the Tree Register. 'A celebration of exceptional trees and an indispensable reference work' – Roy Lancaster OBE VHM Whittet Books, 2003.

Ancient Trees – Anna Lewington and Edward Parker's illustrated description of ancient trees from around the world includes living examples of trees at least 1000 years old. Collins and Brown, 2002.

Veteran Tree Survey – A very useful video and accompanying booklet explaining how and why to survey our ancient trees. Produced by Suffolk County Council and available from: Veteran Tree Surveying Videos, Gary Battell or Rose Morford, Suffolk County Council E&T Countryside Services, Endeavour House, 8 Russell Road, Ipswich, Suffolk, IP1 2BX.

New grants

Two elements of the successor to the Woodland Grant Scheme – the England Woodland Grant Scheme (EWGS) – are now open to applications.



- **Woodland Management Planning Grant** – supports the creation of management plans that guide the long-term sustainable management of woodland. This grant can help woodland owners achieve certification under the UK Woodland Assurance Scheme (UKWAS), helping them prepare a UKWAS-compliant management plan. Even without applying for the grant you can obtain a management plan template and associated guidance from the Forestry Commission.
- **Woodland Assessment Grant** – supports the evaluation of areas/features of special interest in woodlands. Where a need is identified, the grant is available towards assessments of: ecology, landscape, historic and cultural heritage, and stakeholder interest.

Woodlands over 3 hectares are eligible for these grants and joint applications from neighbouring woodland owners are encouraged.

For more information about applying for these grants please contact: The Forestry Commission's South East England Conservancy (Tel: 01420 23337).

Subscribing to South East Woodland News

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:



**Forestry Commission
England**

- | | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| Bracknell Forest Borough Council | Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead |
| Buckinghamshire County Council | Slough Borough Council |
| East Sussex County Council | Surrey County Council |
| Hampshire County Council | West Berkshire Council |
| Isle of Wight Council | West Sussex County Council |
| Kent County Council | Wokingham District Council |
| Oxfordshire County Council | Chiltern Woodlands Project |
| Reading Borough Council | Oxfordshire Woodland Project |