

The state of the region's woods

Every 20 years or so the Forestry Commission carries out a detailed survey of the nation's woodland. This is how we can say with authority that the South East is England's most wooded region.

The latest National Inventory of Woodland and Trees for England has recently been published and is available in England and Regional formats, priced £15. The Forestry Commission internet site also has free downloadable versions and additional information by county. For a quick snapshot of England there is a free A1 sized wallchart.

- 14% of the South East is woodland. Surrey is the most wooded county with over 22% cover. This compares with the national average of 8.4%.
- Broadleaved woodland accounts for two-thirds of all woodland in the South East. A quarter of the trees are oak.
- Woodland cover in the region increased by 20 000 hectares (50 000 acres) over the last 20 years.

To obtain copies of the inventory:

Telephone: 0870 121 4180

Website: www.forestry.gov.uk/inventory



The Royal Forestry Society is an organisation dedicated to furthering the appreciation, understanding and knowledge of trees, woods and forests. It runs informal but structured visits to see and discuss how others are managing their trees. There are meetings in woods across the region this year, some of them in woodlands not normally open to the public. Why not go along and join in?

For locations of meetings, see www.rfs.org.uk and check out their 'News and Events', or call 01442 822028.

This edition of South East Woodland News was brought to you by the Forestry Commission and counties of the South East region



The editor can be contacted at: Forestry Commission, Alice Holt, Wrecclesham, Farnham, Surrey, GU10 4LF.
Tel: 01420 23337, email jo.ellis@forestry.gsi.gov.uk

Grants for woodland work

The Forestry Commission (the government's forestry department) offers grants to help with the costs of planting and managing woods.



Grants for creating new woodlands are allocated on a discretionary basis, giving preference to those which will provide a wide range of benefits to the public. Grants for managing existing woodlands commonly contribute up to 50% of the cost of operations – sometimes more.

Later editions of the newsletter will look at Forestry Commission grants in more detail, but if you would like more information now, your local Woodland Officer is your first point of call:

Kent and East Sussex: 01580 211123
West Sussex, Surrey, Hampshire, Isle of Wight: 01420 233337
Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire: 01296 681381

Woodfairs

This year the Weald Woodfair, the region's largest woodland, woodcraft and wood-use show, will be held on Fri 19th, Sat 20th and Sun 21st September at Bentley Wildfowl and Motor Museum near Lewes in East Sussex. More details from Jane Stevens on 01825 840870 or see www.eastsussexcc.gov.uk/env/events/woodfair/

Hampshire Woodland Week, a celebration of the county's rich woodland heritage, will be from 7th to 15th June. More details from Jonathan Rau on 01962 845995 or see www.hants.gov.uk/countryside/woodfair/woodlandweek.html

The Chiltern Wood Fair, telling the story of wood from tree to final form, will be from Fri 27th to Sun 29th June at the Chiltern Open Air Museum, Chalfont St Giles, Bucks. More details on 01895 237729 or at <http://www.chilternwoodfair.co.uk/>

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SouthEastWoodlandNews

Promoting thriving woodlands in England's most wooded region

Our green and pleasant land

It surprises many people that South East England is the country's most wooded region. However, take a look at a map and you will see that London is surrounded by a green mantle. From the chalk hills of the Chilterns and Downs to the Wealden sands and clays, woods make their presence felt.

This outstanding woodland heritage is the result of centuries of working woodlands, providing timber and wood products to the industries and people of the region. Today, the region's desirability as a place to live, work and visit is closely linked to its pleasant rural environment.

So what is the true value of our woods? A lot more than you might imagine. Less wooded parts of the country are investing millions of pounds in planting new woodland to create a green and pleasant environment for attracting new industry, to provide woodland recreation, to ameliorate the effects of pollution and climate change and to encourage wildlife. We in the South East are fortunate enough to have woodlands in place already – but we tend to take them for granted.

South East Woodland News aims to do two things.

- The first is to raise awareness about the value of woods and about the care that they need if they are to survive and thrive.
- The second is to help those who are not yet managing their woods and those relatively new to woodland management, by pointing them to sources of woodland-related information, advice and support.



A view from the Downs

Editorial

People often think that a wood is best 'left to nature'. But much of our best-loved wildlife, and the wooded landscapes which we most value, are there because woods were intensively worked in the past.

Woods used to be hives of activity, with the woodman systematically coppicing and felling in the wood, making sure he could maintain his livelihood by producing a continuous supply of wood products from the area.

From a wildlife point of view, this meant that the habitats found in worked woodland were also provided continuously – as one coppice area grew up and became shaded, for example, the dormice could move in while the butterflies moved on to a freshly cut area.

When woods are neglected, such wildlife habitats disappear. Many species can't just move on to the next wood because roads and houses form an uncrossable barrier, so they die out in that wood. Now that more than half of the woods in the region are neglected, it is not surprising to find that species are becoming extinct from large parts of the South East.



Pearl-bordered Fritillary Butterfly

So what's needed are more woods in working order. In this and later issues we will be pointing you to sources of advice and support to help you do your bit for the woods of the region.

Are you looking for new garden furniture this year?

Did you know that there are many local craftsmen and women making garden furniture in our region? If you are looking for something just the right size, different from the neighbours and environmentally friendly then look up these producers.



Robert MacLeod
Producers in East Sussex have recently been working with sweet chestnut coppice grown at Great and Little Earls Wood in Surrey. Owned by the Woodland Trust, this wood is coppiced to promote endangered species such as the dormouse as well as to encourage a brilliant display of wild flowers.

While local producers often have innovative designs (such as full sized benches designed to be wheeled like a wheelbarrow), they often specialise in pieces that are traditional and fit perfectly with the local architecture and countryside.

For more information, a good place to start is www.woodnet.org.uk, click on Woodlots South-East and look at the latest adverts.

How to... care for planted trees

Remember those trees you planted so lovingly a few years ago? When was the last time you gave them any tender loving care? For the first few years after planting, a weed- and grass-free circle a metre in diameter should be maintained around the trees. This reduces competition for water and nutrients and allows the trees the best start in life.

Long-neglected trees may need freeing from brambles and bracken. Application of an approved herbicide during the growing season is the easiest and cheapest way of keeping competing weeds at bay. Do make sure though that spray drift does not reach the tree itself.

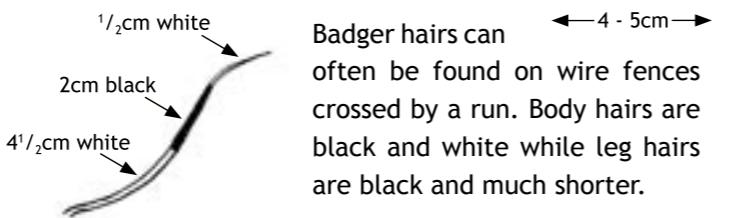
Fast growing species like cherry and ash may well have filled their tree shelters – split any shelters that are tight, but leave them in place to prevent fraying damage from deer.

A free leaflet: *Weeding young trees - avoiding trouble* is available from the Forestry Commission.
Telephone: 01420 23337.

Signs of life - the badger

The badger is found in woodland throughout the South East but is rarely seen except in the glare of car headlights. The most distinctive sign of badgers in your wood will be the earthworks associated with the set, often dug on sloping ground and characterised by an extensive system of tunnels and openings. Nettles and elder are often found at set entrances.

Badger tracks: five distinctive toes can often be seen in soft ground. The front feet are larger than the back, so pad marks around a set of more than one size may indicate fewer badgers than you think.



Badger hairs can often be found on wire fences crossed by a run. Body hairs are black and white while leg hairs are black and much shorter.

Badger droppings are cylindrical and often contain undigested remains of berries, bones and hair. Regular latrines near the set are left uncovered.



Badger pathway

Badgers are protected animals and any forestry operations must ensure that their sets are not damaged.



© Steve Jackson

For more information, the Forestry Commission has a helpful booklet: *Forestry operations and badger sets*. Telephone 01420 23337.

Get some fresh air!

How about a walk in the woods, now that better weather is (sometimes) here? The Forestry Commission's recreation database, www.forestry.gov.uk or the Woodland Trust's directory, www.woodland-trust.org.uk/woods/index.htm can help you find a place to go.

A house from your wood

Having your house falling down around you is nobody's idea of domestic bliss, but for Mike Westphal it was a blessing in disguise. From the ruins of a draughty, uninsulated house, whose main features were rotting windows and inappropriate modernisations, he has built something much better. Inspired by the Wealden houses on show at the Weald and Downland Museum, his new home, Grove Cottage at Penshurst in Kent is constructed from timbers from his own woodland.



Rhododendron had grown densely through Viceroy's Wood, and the 1987 storm had brought down a number of trees. According to Mike, clearing the wood was the hardest work of his life and he spent weeks locating the right timber for the house in the wood. For example, he needed to find branches of exactly the right shape to form curved tie-beams under which doors would fit.

The timber was cut on site by Richard Thomlinson with his mobile sawmill, and Mike could not praise his craftsmanship too highly. And in addition to the immense satisfaction of using local materials, by using timber from his wood, Mike saved himself £32,000!

Contacts:

Mike Westphal:

01892 870136

Thomlinson's Sawmill:

01444 454554



Taking the long view

At the time of Trafalgar (1805), Nelson's flagship HMS Victory took more than 3000 prime oaks to build. That meant felling an area of mature oak woodland the size of 75 football pitches. With Portsmouth as the port at the heart of the British Navy, the woodlands of the South East were heavily affected during this period.

With a large navy as well as trading and fishing fleets, the nation soon began to run out of timber for ship building. Parliament appealed to landowners to plant oak, to do their bit in supporting the 'wooden walls' of England. Owners were expected to finance this entirely from their own pockets out of a sense of duty to the nation – there was no Woodland Grant Scheme in those days!

By the late 1800s, ships like the Cutty Sark started to be built with a combination of timber and iron. By the turn of the century all large ships were built of iron and steel. Few of the plantations of oak were ever used for ship building, but reached maturity just in time to help the nation in another time of need, the First World War.

Ask the expert...

What regulations do I need to consider before I fell trees?



Firstly, check whether the trees are covered by a Tree Preservation Order, or are located within a Conservation Area. If they are, you may not fell, top, lop or uproot the trees without the permission of the local authority.

Secondly, check with the Forestry Commission whether you need a felling licence. You may fell up to 5 cubic metres of trees on your property without a licence as long as no more than 2 cubic metres are sold. If you are not sure what 5 cubic metres of trees looks like, then you should check with your local Forestry Commission Woodland Officer. Trees with a diameter at chest height of less than 8 centimetres are exempt from this regulation, as are trees in gardens. There are a range of other exemptions listed in the booklet below.

Free booklets that explain the regulations in more detail are available:

Tree felling - getting permission (call 01420 23337)

Protected trees - a guide to tree preservation order procedures (call 0870 1226 236)

A good website explaining many aspects of tree and countryside law can be found at www.naturenet.net