

CoppiceCuts

Winter 2009

For suppliers and users of coppice materials



Trust promotes coppicing

A collaborative approach to management of a Wildlife Trust woodland could be repeated across the country

Treswell Wood is a great example of sustainable woodland management. The coppice sector and Nottingham Wildlife Trust have joined forces to create a model that benefits all, and which could potentially be repeated across the country. The 120 acre site has been owned by NWT since 1973, and although it has a history of coppicing, dating back more than 1000 years, this site has been both exploited and neglected in the 19th and 20th Centuries.

Located down Wood Lane, three miles east of Retford, Treswell Wood stands as part of a fragmented ribbon of woodlands above the Trent Valley. The Trust has implemented a management plan since the 1980s, aiming to restore 15 acres of the wood back to coppice with standards on a seven-year cycle, and a further 32 acres coppiced on a 20-year cycle.

Tender for coupes

The short rotation coppice is cut by coppice workers, who each tender for the different coppice coupes ready to cut. The tender document provides a specification which details the expected standard of coppicing and a start and completion date. The coppice worker is expected to leave one 3m rod uncut on every stool. This rod will be layered by Trust volunteers at the end of the coppice contract. Cut material is allowed to be stored on the ride side until September, and an agreement to undertake thinning works provides timber for local log supplies. The good working



Treswell Wood now benefits from the work of both Wildlife Trust volunteers and local coppice professionals

relationship between coppice workers and the Trust may be due in part to the Trust's Woodland Reserves Officer, Robert Atkinson, who worked these woods himself as a coppice worker before joining the NWT. Robert understands the main issues facing the coppice sector.

The wood now produces two coupes of in-rotation coppice each year, the quality of which is sufficient to attract professional coppice workers. The Wildlife Trust is able to fine-tune its management through working closely with these professionals while volunteers (who were previously involved in the restoration of the coppice) are better able to catch up with the endless maintenance jobs on the site.

As a result, material that was often wasted now regularly produces a wide range of products, including hedging stakes and binders, walking sticks, furniture, hazel hurdles, ash gate hurdles, charcoal and firewood. Faggots are collected by a local potter to fire his kiln. Working with



Hazel binders and faggots are amongst the many products being produced from Treswell Wood for local businesses

a wide range of coppice professionals has greatly increased the Trust's ability to carry out the management of the wood in order to maintain and enhance the wildlife interest of the site.

A visit to Treswell Wood to explain the full management plan has been arranged for 2009, and should be of interest to woodland owners and coppice workers, as well as other Wildlife Trusts. If you are interested, please contact Robert Atkinson on 01777 713943 or Phil Tidey at the Small Woods Association on 01952 432769.

National Beanpole Week

National Beanpole Week will run from 25th April to 3rd May, covering two weekends for extra opportunities to encourage gardeners to buy locally-grown hazel sticks. See p4 for more details.





Ruth Goodfellow is in her second year as an apprentice with Brian Williamson at Westonbirt Arboretum. We met them in August when they were making shingles for the new timber-framed classroom at Westonbirt. She says that she'd like to see more women coming into the sector, and says there is no aspect of her work that couldn't be done by female coppice workers with the right training and experience



Restoration project recruit

A project officer has been appointed for the National Coppice Restoration Project by the Small Woods Association

The Small Woods Association has appointed Richard Thomason as Project Officer for the National Coppice Restoration Project. Responding to recommendations in the report *Crafts in the English Countryside*, the project was developed with three key objectives. It aims to help secure long-term management agreements for coppice groups and workers to guarantee a supply of materials. The project expects to develop and improve marketing strategies, and to promote the formation of a National Federation of Coppice Workers.

The project will promote the need for the continuity of coppice management to develop a national

coppice resource, and to aid biodiversity. "Coppice woodlands should be seen as a unique woodland habitat rather than just a management prescription to benefit a single woodland species," Richard Thomason explains. "I am interested in the benefits to wildlife that adapt around the coppice cycle, but this has to be based on a sustainable model of woodland management."

Richard is planning to start a directory of coppice workers, but would like to know the views of the sector on the possible criteria for membership. Please contact him on 01952 432769 or email groundsforconservation@hotmail.com.

Selling firewood

With oil prices fluctuating and sales of woodburning stoves on the up this might be a good time to remind customers of the possible dangers of burning treated timber. In particular there is concern about the burning of old sheds, fencing and decking wood which might well have been treated with chromated copper arsenate (CCA), which was restricted in 2000 because of growing fears of its risk to health.

Customers new to woodfuel may not know that burning CCA-treated wood releases arsenic into the atmosphere, and the ash can contain high levels of arsenic and copper, which may then be spread on the vegetable plot.

It is an extra reason for people to choose coppiced firewood, which you can also guarantee to be locally grown. However a shortage of supply is forcing some coppice workers to buy in timber for processing. The potential is there to restore neglected coppice, but landowners need to be confident that the market will continue into the future if they are going to put their woodlands into long-term rotation plans.

Sticking question

An estate manager's ledger dating back to the early 1900s was recently saved from a bonfire. The ledger is filled with accounts of the management of the Dorset estate at that time. The record describes the normal coppice products you'd expect, including spar gads, faggots, hedge pegs, poles and brushwood, but also a coppice product lost in time. The term 'sticking' is clearly indicated in the ledger, with a value higher than both faggots and hedge pegs. This may be a local term for bundles of hurdle-grade material. Do please let us know if you've heard of this term.

CoppiceCuts

CoppiceCuts is brought to you by the Green Wood Centre and Small Woods Association. CoppiceCuts aims to keep readers informed of developments within the coppicing community.

If you have any news or stories you'd like to share, please send them Richard Thomason by email to groundsforconservation@hotmail.com or by post to the Green Wood Centre, Station Road, Coalbrookdale, Telford TF8 7DR, 01952 432769.



North West group puts can in CANW

Secretary of the Coppice Association North West, Alan Shepley reports on an exciting year ahead

The regular six-weekly meetings of the committee of CANW (Coppice Association North West) are usually pretty mundane affairs. The one held this month, however, promises an exciting 2009.

The second Thursday in September is always the start of the Westmorland Show and this coming year it will see the formal launch of a 12-month-long Cumbria Wood and Forestry Festival in which CANW will play a significant part. Like everyone else we are always on the lookout for chances to get to the public at large and make converts to the coppice and greenwood cause - and make some sales too! In 2009 we shall be doing this not only at the Westmorland Show but much more actively across the whole county. Westmorland Damson Association has a successful Damson Day in April and we shall be teaming up with them and others for demos and displays.

A couple of Beanpole Festivals have been held in the past - organised by Cumbria Woodlands - and the intention is that the Festival Team will re-establish these, hopefully on a more permanent basis and possibly at more than one venue during the Festival year. Just before this happens (on 15-16th August) our annual Weekend in the Woods will be held at Staveley in Cartmel once again. Hopefully there will be some new courses on offer



Romola Acland cutting five-year old hazel in Oaks Wood, near Burnesdale, Cumbria, and Vince Adamson (a former BHMAT apprentice) clearing neglected coppice Photos by Edward Acland

as well as old favourites. Later in the autumn we shall be putting on the follow-up meeting to the 21st Century Coppice Conference held in 2006: precise dates and venue to be confirmed. This will be firmly focused on the active world of coppice and greenwood and will, we hope, finally see the establishment of some sort of national link-up between groups.

It is always a great sadness when one of the older practitioners of the coppice art departs for the 'Great Greenwood' and a great loss too, since so much of what they know and remember of past ways of working goes with them. A goodly number of CANW members are currently involved in a Woodland Recollections project (run by Wood Education Programme Trust), and you can find out more at woodlandrecollections.org.



COPPICE CUTTINGS

In Hampshire

The Hampshire Coppice Craftsmen's Group produces an impressive six-page newsletter, with the latest issue of *The Teller* just out and available as a pdf from



"Putting Life into your Landscapes"

Looking to the Future

Listening to the media over the past few weeks the changing economic climate will mean for challenging times ahead. Small businesses such as the craft are believed to be resilient, but there is no reason to disagree as we have certain advantages in difficult times. Our businesses are small and self-financing, with low overheads and a high level of experience, discipline and equipment. The grass is not yet green, but it is worth looking for opportunities, of which I see many.

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Gardeners key to pole events

Nick Gibbs speaks to Geoff Sinclair of Allotment Forestry about the importance of selling to gardeners

The idea of making a day of selling locally-grown beanpoles to gardeners started some 15 years ago in woodlands in Suffolk. Geoff Sinclair, who runs the group Allotment Forestry and also works for the Woodland Trust, began selling beanpoles to gardeners at a large Ipswich allotment field. "We gave masterclasses in using wood in the garden at Northgate Allotments," Geoff says. Since then the group has learnt how to use beanpoles as a way of connecting with the public.

"The big lesson is that you have to drop woodland, drop coppicing, drop environment. The language is to talk about gardening and go where gardeners go," he explains. In their case the Ipswich Beanpole Festival has been preaching to the semi-converted, with many of the gardeners at Northgate working organically and sympathetic to the message of the locally-grown, sustainable beanpole. The ideal situation is to use such 'friends' as the backbone of a beanpole event, while making your festival accessible to a wider range of gardeners.

"That these are local products is the important message," says Geoff. "They promote a healthy local environment." He goes on to say that it is Women of a Certain Age who tend to be most receptive to buying local wood products for use in the garden. "The toolbox is the male domain. If you do rustic woodwork courses you tend to get men in army fatigues, but the gardeners tend to be female." Geoff thinks that only a small lack of knowledge and a bit of fear is stopping some women from

Staging an event

Some ideas to add to a beanpole event to connect with the public.

- Wildlife gardening, perhaps by showing how to make a simple compost heap.
- Show some ideas for family gardening with children.
- Get other organisations involved, like beekeepers or a chicken club, to widen the interest and make more of the event.



Louise Lomax, Councillor for Ironbridge, opening Beanpole Week 2008 at the GWC, and Matt Beech bundling pea sticks for sale. This year Beanpole Week runs from 25th April - 3rd May

taking on simple garden woodwork, potentially growing their own beanpole coppice in their garden.

"It can become an annual gathering for the alternative gardening scene," he explains, while also advising a little caution. "Hold it at the same time every year, but don't make it too big as a one-off. It needs to be sustainable." His latest idea is to add children's toys and folk toys to the mix.

Last year coppice groups and individual coppice workers held Beanpole Week events, or supplied local garden centres and allotment societies. This year's campaign will be promoted more widely through local and national media, with a listing on the website, coppice-products.co.uk. The SWA has produced a flyer and leaflet which will be distributed to anyone who wants to hold an event.

Most gardeners agree that a good beanpole should be at least 8ft tall. Some want straight poles, others prefer kinks and stubs to help the beans climb. Thinner poles are easier to handle, but



thicker ones last longer. Most gardeners agree that traditional beanpoles are easier to wind and grip, than bamboo. Geoff sells his beanpoles in bundles of 11 as these can be built into a simple climbing frame of five each side and a ridge pole along the top. You can usually sell them for 30-50p per pole, which compares well with bamboo.

Some gardeners will buy their poles just on price, others on the benefits of wooden poles over bamboo or the look, and others on the environmental message of growing a sustainable crop that supports the businesses of local coppice workers. Surprisingly, far from all gardeners put the environment first.

For help arranging an event during NPW (25th April - 3rd May), contact Richard Thomason on 01538 756138 or email at groundsforconservation@hotmail.com. Or visit coppice-products.co.uk.