



The

Cleft Stick

News from NCFed and the national coppice industry



Image Guy Lambourne

Charcoal and the Minister

NCFed's Charcoal Rep, Jim Bettle, reports on progress in his discussions with MP, Simon Hoare (pictured) and Environment Minister, Rebecca Pow, on regulating imports of charcoal into the UK market.



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coppice-products.co.uk

A joint initiative between NCFed and the *Small Woods Association* to work together on further development of this important marketing resource

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Annual Gathering & AGM

Full details of this year's event, hosted by the Chilterns and Thames Valley Coppice Group in South Oxfordshire.

Don't miss it. Page 7

Safe Forestry

Herefordshire Coppice Club's Toby Allen writes about proposals for chainsaw technician training

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Woodfuel legislation... what you need to know

A small team of National Coppice Federation (NCFed) members has been working hard over the last few months to understand the regulations on woodfuel that came into force on 1 May this year. A comprehensive guide aimed at anyone who sells firewood, together with the results of a recent survey of NCFed members, on the subject, is currently being compiled and will be available on the NCFed website soon. If you sell woodfuel you will need to read it.

All subscribers to *Cleft Stick* will receive an email notification when the report becomes available. To join the mailing list if you haven't already, visit www.ncfed.org.uk/news

From the Chair

It's been a long and strange year indeed for many of us, but there is I feel, some light at the end of the tunnel. There was a sense that many coppice workers struggled through the first lockdown, both financially and mentally. Could we work? Were we allowed in the woods? Confusion was rife. But in the second lockdown it seemed that, along with most other trades, business in the coppice sector was booming. Stuck at home, furloughed, with time and money on their hands, people dreamt up an amazing array of natural coppice projects for their gardens! The humble bean pole and modest pea stick were all the rage. Let's hope that many of these new customers return for many years to come.



The biggest light at the end of the tunnel for me is that we've made the exciting commitment to run with the NCFed Weekend Gathering and AGM in the flesh for 2021. We are planning a really vibrant celebration of coppice crafts and people, with stalls, demonstrations, skill shares, craft competitions, pre-gathering workshops and an award! Yes, NCFed are developing an award scheme to honour those who have contributed to our sector over and above the norm! This decision is too recent to get details in this edition of *Cleft Stick*, but we hope to launch it and be open for nominations in time to present the first award at the gathering.

We are also in the very early stages of planning an NCFed Seminar at The Forestry Commission's (FC) Westonbirt Arboretum, aimed at enlightening FC staff about the economic and biodiversity benefits of engaging with coppicing and coppice workers. The brainchild of Brian Williamson, the event will raise the profile of coppice matters amongst key decision-making staff.

It's the time of year once again for membership renewals. This year we will be undertaking a full membership review which, with consultation with you, our member groups, will ensure NCFed are doing everything we can to support coppice groups and the UK Coppice Industry.

Finally, I would like to offer a warm welcome to our newest group, The Scottish Coppice Network. It's great to have you on board and we look forward to working with you.

Dave Jackson, Chair of NCFed

**National
Coppice
Federation**



Supporting the Coppice Industry

Editorial



Welcome to the Spring 2021 edition of *Cleft Stick*. How do you like the new format? We thought it about time to make CS look and read a bit more like a magazine.

There are no reports from groups this time, for obvious reasons, but as you all start to meet and do things again this summer, please jot down some notes and take some pictures – I'll be chasing Group Reps for news come the autumn.

As you will read, NCFed have been busy in plenty of areas - we are in discussion with government on charcoal imports; there's a new set of guidelines and a response to the new government Woodfuel regulations on its way very shortly (it's important, large and complex enough to be published as a separate document. Watch out for this via email and on the Fed's web site - see page 2); there's an important new joint initiative coming into being with the Small Woods Association and there's a piece on the future of training for chainsaw technicians. National Coppice Week and the Fed's own weekend Gathering and AGM both look to be going ahead later in 2021, subject of course to continued positive pandemic progress.

In addition to all of that, there's a great mix of coppice, tree and wildlife habitat related writing, so sit back and enjoy. And of course, there's a poem.

A big thank you to all contributors. I hope you enjoy this edition. Please let us know what you think via news@ncfed.org.uk
Guy Lambourne, Editor

*Copy deadline for the next edition:
30 October 2021. Publication 1 December.
Please send comments, criticism, contributions and of course
poetry to: news@ncfed.org.uk*

NCFed Personnel Changes

Tim Roskell, NCFed Director, has moved to West Dorset and stepped down as Secretary and Representative for the Avon and South Cotswolds Coppice Group (ASCCG). Tim still retains his positions as an NCFed Director and Secretary to the Media and Marketing Sub-Committee (MAMSC). He has joined his local Dorset Coppice Group as a member.

Chris Letchford of the Surrey and Sussex Coppice Group and Pete Etheridge of The Dorset Coppice Group have both recently become Directors. Tom Coxhead of the newly affiliated Leeds Coppice Coop, has been co-opted as a Director and Treasurer of NCFed. Helen Waterfield stood down as Treasurer.

Honours for Coppice Workers

Two British Empire Medals were awarded to coppice and woodland workers in Southern England last year; fitting recognition for their long service to the industry, in very different ways. Our congratulations to both Paul Brockman and Mark Warn.



Mark Warn BEM

Mark Warn, Forestry England's Wildlife Ranger for the Dorset area has been awarded a British Empire Medal for his prolonged service to forestry. Mark has more than thirty years under his belt as a Wildlife Ranger. In the aftermath of the Wareham forest fires last year, Mark spent eighteen days in the forest working over 16 hours a day. As is well known in the area, Mark is passionate about the wildlife value of the woods and forests in and around Dorset. He is a leading expert in the management of the nation's rare lowland heath and forest habitats, an expertise he has built through his own research and monitoring of wildlife.

Hampshire Coppice Group's Paul Brockman was awarded the British Empire Medal for services to woodland management and nature conservation. For some years, Paul taught children of various ages at Bashley but has set up his own woodland consultancy and is teaching secondary school youngsters woodland management and traditional skills. He also runs adult wellbeing courses. Teaching youngsters who may not do well in the classroom is valuable for their development and also for potentially bringing on a new generation of coppice workers.



Paul Brockman BEM

With thanks to The Teller and Dorset Coppice Group's Woodland Whispers for permission to reproduce these articles.

Charcoal and the Minister

New hope for a fairer UK charcoal market

In the autumn of 2020 I was asked to respond, as the NCFed National Charcoal Rep, to DEFRA's invitation to give feedback on the proposed new Environment Bill, specifically with regard to forest risk commodities <https://consult.defra.gov.uk/eu/duo-diligence-on-forest-risk-commodities/>

This I duly did, asking for imported charcoal to be taken into consideration as one such commodity. When told that actually charcoal and no timber products would be classed as such, I decided to involve my local MP, Simon Hoare (North Dorset). He enquired of the Environment Minister whether this was true and was told it was indeed so. Fortunately we were able to convince the Minister that the issue of charcoal imported into the UK deserved more consideration.

In early March, myself and Simon Hoare MP met Rebecca Pow (Environment Minister) and her team. It was agreed that the charcoal issue should be addressed either by updating the new UK Timber Regulations to actually include charcoal, or to include provision within the new Environment Bill, for charcoal to be considered a Forest Risk Commodity.

The advantages of this representation as I see it, are two fold: as people of the woods I would assume we are all environmentalists and to that end any reduction in deforestation and illegal

logging overseas must be welcome. Secondly, reducing the importation of dirty, cheap, unregulated charcoal into the UK can only help level the playing field and make UK producers' prices more competitive on the market.

We await clarification of what happens next and when... but at least we can say we have raised the issue, had it acknowledged and most importantly won the argument on it being a matter in need of action! Watch this space!!

*Jim Bettie,
Dorset Coppice Group*



Image Jim Bettie

Producing charcoal in ring kilns



Image Jim Bettie



Timber bob

Also known as a 'jigger', 'neb' or 'janker' a timber bob was used to haul large logs through the woods to the road and was pulled by horses, more agile and less harmful to the woodlands than the tractors that replaced them. To move the timber, one end of the log was lifted off the ground and chained between the pair of wheels. The other end was left to drag on the ground behind.

This bit of kit is part of a bigger display at the Weald & Downland Living Museum in West Sussex. The museum covers 40 acres with over 50 historic rescued and rebuilt buildings dating from 950AD to the 19th century, along with the amazing timber grid shell building, working woodlands (charcoal making, coppicing etc.), gardens, rural trades and skills exhibitions, farm animals, glorious walks, mill pond and a whole lot more. www.wealddown.co.uk

Tim Roskell, Dorset Coppice Group



Image Tim Roskell

Federation News

coppice-products.co.uk Joint Initiative

It is with great pleasure that I can announce that NCFed has entered a joint initiative with *Small Woods Association* (SWA) over the development and promotion of the coppice-products.co.uk website.



subscribed coppice suppliers clearly needed to be addressed.

Secondly, further probing uncovered some issues with the website's search, functionality and admin setups which would need to be fixed before there was to be any campaign to increase patronage. We (NCFed) did not have a database of our members' services and products to use as an alternative, and we desperately wanted one.

There was no point in producing a rival to the coppice-products website, so we approached SWA who were keen to work with us to ensure that the website is developed and works beautifully in the future.

I have been working with Graham Morgan, Woodland Management Advisory Officer at SWA, to ensure that the sign-up process for new listings works. We have identified a long list of issues that are being addressed behind the scenes to improve the website's functionality and am happy we can push ahead with getting as many of you to register as possible, so that it can be used as powerful a tool in future national campaigns, as well as helping the public find those wonderful products.

Whilst many of you are already on the site, some may never have heard of it. The coppice products website was a SWA initiative whose seeds were sown prior to NCFed's

launch. It is a directory of coppice workers and crafts people from across the UK whose sole ambition is to help a public, hungry for coppice products to find a local supplier. Whilst I am aware of how effective a marketing tool this is for many crafts people, investigations have shone light on two areas in need of improvement.

Number of
coppice workers
currently listed on
www.coppice-products.co.uk
340

Firstly, there are not enough makers and suppliers signed up to the on-line directory. This became apparent earlier this year when I was trying to decide whether to proceed with a National Beanpole Campaign. Any national campaign would use the coppice products website as the main vehicle for directing the public to their nearest coppice professional. On searching for beanpole suppliers however, the relatively low number of suppliers listed across the UK could easily lead to public frustration at not being able to easily source beanpoles. The numbers of

SO SIGN UP NOW.

www.coppice-products.co.uk

Dave Jackson

A word from Graham Morgan of SWA

The Covid 19 pandemic and an ever-increasing urgency to act to address the climate and biodiversity crises have meant many people have been taking stock of what matters, what works, and what could be made better.

(cont'd on page 6)



Image Guy Lambourne

(from page 5)

As a coppice worker, I am passionate about demonstrating a more responsible and ethical way of living. I know the Coppice Products website is a vital tool that helps support the coppicing sector, so I was delighted when NCFed suggested a joint initiative to undertake a root and branch (or should that be stool and rod?!) review of the coppice products website.

The Coppice Products website went live in 2014. It has done a good job in helping potential customers find producers; all credit to the people at that time who helped it come to fruition. It continues to do that. However, having conducted a thorough review of it with NCFed, there is room for improvement, to make sure it stays fit for purpose in the future.

The website will still look and feel much the same as before, however we continue to make some tweaks behind the scenes and to the content you see on the internet. This will make the website easier to run and administer, more streamlined in its purpose and functionality and will ultimately provide a more user-friendly experience for both coppice product makers and customers.

We want more producers to be registered on the website and more customers buying coppice products. This means more coppice workers can make a viable livelihood from the good management of woodlands. Actively managed woodlands, managed to a good standard, provide a broad range of benefits to the environment and wildlife, people's health and wellbeing and the local economy. We believe the refreshed website will play a vital role in doing just that.



Image Guy Lambourne

Snippets

The Fed's Facebook discussion group

had 1,000 members by the beginning of 2021 and the total has now turned 1,300. There has been a stream of thought provoking content posted recently; it's there to be used by everyone - not just NCFed members so if you haven't already, why not take a look?

<https://bit.ly/3frbavO>



Social media savvy?

The Media and Marketing Sub-committee is looking for someone to help look after the Fed's Instagram and Facebook content - to keep things fresh and post regularly. This would need to be a person with a good amount of knowledge of the coppice world and of course at least some social media experience. Could that be you or do you know somebody who fits the bill? If so please contact us via news@ncfed.org.uk



Image Guy Lambourne

National Coppice Week

will be on this year in a very low-key way. Opened officially at the Gathering (15-17 October) it will simply feature events that member groups or individual members can put on given the continued uncertainty over Covid-19. So if you or your group is already planning an open day, guided walk, talk or sale, during this time, or if you are thinking about it, please consider making it part of National Coppice Week. We hope to make more of it in 2022, but it's important to keep it in our minds this year so it can go on to bigger and better things in future. We will be in touch. And if you fancy helping the Media and Marketing Sub-committee with the organisation of the week, please let us know via news@ncfed.org.uk

NCFed Zoom account

Covid has changed a great deal about how we do things and some are likely to stay changed. However much some of us might dislike online meetings, they are likely to remain a fixture, especially for groups who aren't close geographically.

NCFed has purchased a Zoom account, primarily for the directors' and committee meetings that go on throughout the year. However, the account will also be made available for the use of affiliated groups. This means that groups can have a Zoom meeting of more than forty minutes without interruption or without having to use a borrowed account.

Full details are still to be finalised, but the intention is to make it available for affiliated groups soon. Details to follow.

Weekend Gathering & AGM

15-17 October 2021

• Craft Stalls • Demonstrations • Skill Sharing • Workshops

• Craft Competitions • Tool Auction • Pre-Gathering Courses

• Food • Fun • Friends • Fire • Camping • Bar • Discussion • Inspiration

National
Coppice
Federation



Supporting the Coppice Industry

Hosted by the Chilterns & Thames Valley Coppice Group in South Oxfordshire

For full details & bookings visit www.ncfed.org.uk



Have you been missing going to your usual shows and seeing old colleagues and friends? Did you miss the Fed's Gathering last autumn, providing as it does, a fitting beginning to the cutting season. If so, here's the solution.

We are pleased to announce that the 2021 NCFed Gathering & AGM is going ahead in the flesh, in South

Oxfordshire, hosted by the Chilterns and Thames Valley Coppice Group. So, book your place now and join in the coppice fun!



New for 2021

In addition to all the attractions the Gathering usually offers, new for this year will be an element of competition. Bring your best pre-made craft items to enter in various classes in our new craft competitions (all details on the web site now). There will be skill sharing sessions throughout the weekend for

Have-a-go sessions and visits

which ample hazel and chestnut will be provided. We also invite you to bring your own craft demonstrations and



Plenty of discussion

stalls for display or sales; innovative or interesting tools, devices and woodland equipment to inspire and fascinate colleagues, and get stuck in to a series of master classes, on the Friday. These classes are aimed at honing specific fundamental skills and will be run by tutors recognised as experts in their fields*.

There will also be a large fire pit, the *Froe up and Split Bar*, warming food, plenty of camping and a roaring fire in the hall hearth! As ever the Gathering will be an opportunity to meet friends - old and new, talk shop, learn some stuff, chomp on great food, visit some woods, enjoy the odd glass and show off your work a bit.

Don't miss it.

Dave Jackson, Chair of NCFed and member of the Chilterns and Thames Valley Coppice Group

For further information, an itinerary and to book visit:
<https://ncfed.org.uk/members/agm2021/>

Enquiries - please contact Martin Wise on martinwise10@hotmail.com

*** Please note - Friday master classes will require separate pre-booking and will incur an additional charge.**

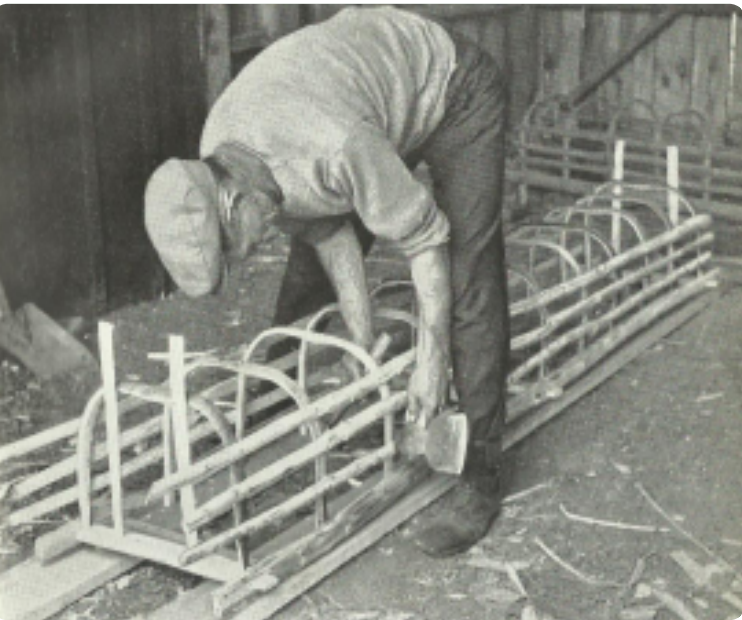


Heritage Crafts Association Survey

Earlier this year, the *Heritage Crafts Association* (HCA, www.heritagecrafts.org.uk) held a Zoom meeting jointly with NCFed and the *Smallwoods Association* to look at issues currently facing Greenwood and Coppice Crafts.

The HCA is the national advocacy body for traditional crafts which fall between heritage and art and receive no recognition or support from government. In 2003, UNESCO adopted a Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, including traditional craftsmanship. 178 nations have signed up to this but not, unfortunately, the United Kingdom.

The HCA is particularly concerned with 'living' crafts, where the living aspect relates to people earning a living from their craft. It publishes a Red List of crafts in four categories – Viable, Endangered, Critically Endangered and Extinct. Whilst the general decline of our crafts over the last two centuries has been well documented, apart



Making sheep feeding cribs
(image CFF Snow, from 'Crafts of the Countryside' by EJ Stowe)

from the work of Professor Ted Collins of Reading University (pub 2004), there is no modern recording of the number of practitioners in the various trades.

Some, like the making of sheep feeding cribs are effectively extinct, but could be re-created from the skills present in a number of existing crafts. Others, like wet cooperage, require a range of skills and knowledge that would make them much harder to revive were they to disappear.

From the NCFed's point of view, having accurate figures for the numbers of people earning a living, whether in whole or in part, from the various crafts is vital when arguing for their support, and we'll be continuing to work on accruing data for the Red Book lists. Alongside that, we'll be trying to assess the various threats (and benefits) affecting our traditional crafts and using the knowledge



Image Brian Williamson

Ladder making

gained to assist them in the future.

The survey will be ongoing for a number of weeks, so if you haven't yet seen it or filled it in, please go and find it here: <https://forms.gle/xnS6sumNPYYbv2qx8>

The more data we can gather the better prepared we will be to argue the case for greenwood and coppice crafts.

Brian Williamson, Avon and South Cotswolds Coppice Group

Rebirth of an Oak

At the Stock Gaylard Oak Fair in Dorset, in 2008, one oak tree in the park was felled and the event organisers decided to make it a feature of the Fair that year. They invited local craftspeople to take the timber and craft something which would be put on show in a special exhibition in the week leading up to the Fair in 2009. The range of crafts produced from this oak tree was incredible and not all in oak. Here's a poem Jill Snelson of the Dorset Coppice Group wrote about the experience.



*An acorn fell upon the ground, so many years ago,
it put down roots into the earth and so began to grow.
As time passed by the acorn grew into a fine young tree,
standing tall, here in the park, a symbol, proud and free.*

*But this tree was never meant to reach a ripe old age,
for disease had placed its iron grip around it, like a cage.
At last the axemen had no choice, it had to be brought down,
and so the mighty oak tree fell - its limbs spread on the ground*

*But this once gentle giant, would not be left to rot,
nor would its age old legacy be a thing that man forgot.
For all the local craftsmen would take a limb or two,
and use their skill and artistry to fashion something new.*

*From totem pole to jewellery, turned bowls and furniture;
that fine old tree will live again, of that we can be sure.
And so we hope that all the crafts, made by us humble folk,
do justice to that noble tree - the mighty English oak.*

The Stock Gaylard Oak Fair is back - 28/29 August 2021.
<https://www.theoakfair.com/>

Safe Forestry

Chainsaw work has changed since I started out. Machines are more capable and because it's more efficient (and safe) to use mechanical assistance where possible, chainsaw work has been pushed to the margins. Anything a machine is incapable of cutting is the job of the hand cutter. This can be steep slopes, big timber, valuable hardwoods, coppice, felling trees for the harvester to reach or presenting for the winch and so on.

There is a shortage of labour in the industry, especially the awesome type with the skills to tackle these jobs. As a landowner or employer it is your responsibility to ensure the crew on the hill are trained and competent for the work you are asking them to do and the choice of operator has to be based on ability rather than price. Chainsaw tickets (NPTC, Lantra) have been the standard for a while, getting the training refreshed every three or five years depending how often you use the saw. While this is a really useful system, it fails to demonstrate the experience or skills of the people we employ. Someone fresh out of a five day course, arb guys, and occasional users are in the same class as professional forest workers. We need a way to separate out the awesome.



Image Toby Allen

Skill, training and experience are needed to fell trees like this

This was a problem posed by HSE to Calum Duffy (duffskylining.co.uk) during a site visit. If there was an incident, how could he show to investigators the chainsaw operator was an appropriate choice for the task? Recording time spent on the saw, any training given and the time consolidating those skills seemed a logical step. As Calum explains, "The Chainsaw Competency System was created to answer a challenge from the HSE on how to prove the competence of chainsaw operators on site, not just by certification. If the system is implemented and followed, it answers a problem that was previously very



Image Toby Allen

Skidding an ash stem

difficult to deal with. It quantifies the skill level of the operator and provides a professionalism to this highly skilled occupation." As an active member of the Forestry Contracting Association, and member of the FISA Chainsaw Working Group, Calum and Stephen Hailes from H&W training brought others round to the idea. At the same time they invested in developing a mobile app, Safe Forestry, to help with the practical management of risk on site, which also has the function to record skills and experience as part of a daily routine.

In my opinion there is a need for this system. It provides a framework for improvement, and a path to follow, after completing the chainsaw ticket. Starting as a basic operator, then gaining skills and experience to work towards achieving the next level - chainsaw technician. With more training and working in more complex operations they can be further recognised as a specialist and leader. At this level it's expected they will pass on their skills and help audit people on the way up. The FCA, FISA and HSE are behind the system. FISA are currently hosting the system for Safe Forestry, and it is by no means a finished article. Gillian Clark (CEO FISA) describes how it works. "Traditionally chainsaw technician competence was mainly judged on a training ticket; the proposed chainsaw competency system offers a clear way to support the competence and experience of a technician and to demonstrate their ability to undertake particular types of chainsaw work.

Safe Forestry and the FISA Chainsaw Working Group drew up the Outline Chainsaw Competency System which is available on the FISA website. Successful pilots of the system are being run by Safe Forestry; considerable development will be required before the system can be rolled out industry wide, we expect this development to take at least 18 months. FISA will of course keep you informed as this development progresses.

Experienced chainsaw technicians would be able to enter the system at an equivalent to their current experience. Trainees would still take the existing initial training and certification route. Users of the system can either progress through the competency system; or remain established at a set competency dependant on their own requirements/work. The Chainsaw Competency System will gradually supersede the Chainsaw Refresher – so you would not need to do both."

(cont'd page 10)

Safe Forestry *(from page 9)*

Continuous Professional Development (CPD) is built into the system, and people are expected to attend CPD events as part of their journey. These will be on topics such as felling on steep banks, cutting diseased ash, and using felling aids, amongst others. Forestry is a varied industry and the outline on the FISA website can be used to create a system suitable for your business.

To get started it's a simple case of carrying out a skills audit: which level would you and your staff fall into? Where are the gaps in your knowledge and how should these be filled? If there isn't someone in the business with the skills to carry out an audit, you can request an external auditor to do so. Logging hours/experience can be done in a few ways. The Safe Forestry app is purpose built as an easy way to do this, there are other apps available such as MySafety, or it can be done on paper. Skinflints like me have been experimenting using social media such as Whatsapp to communicate with the forestry team at the same time recording what they are doing.

The beauty of the Chainsaw Competency is that it is voluntary and seen as an aspiration for those wanting to stand out as a professional handcutter working to be at the top of their game. The system is designed by chainsaw users for the benefit of chainsaw users. I feel this system has the potential to make a real difference to the safety of those working on the ground by raising the status of the hand cutting trade. A site visit by a high level technician will help landowners understand which are the complex tasks needing high level operators and which can be done by less experienced people.

I'll finish with an extract from a message I received from a chap starting a forest career. He recently finished his small tree felling course and is gradually building up a portfolio of experience. "I'm up to 83 hours now and I do feel there is an improvement. Today I helped with crown breakdown, clearing small birch and chomping down brash. With some coaching I'm more proficient at tension and compression cuts, just got to remember sideways tension! There's still a way to go and I can see why 500 hours is a suggested milestone". Awesome!

For more information on the Chainsaw Competency System please email info@safeforestry.co.uk or the website is safeforestry.co.uk

Toby Allen, Herefordshire Coppice Club

With thanks to Confor for permission to reproduce this article

The Effects of Drought

Do you remember July 2013? It was so hot and there was a 25% ground cover of green leaves in my chestnut plantation. I measured the girths of ten sweet chestnuts, planted in 2000, at 07.00 and 17.45 hours to check the effect of the heat, if any. Between these times, one tree was 5mm smaller, one 4mm smaller, one 3mm smaller, two 2mm smaller and two 1mm smaller. So I presume the heat stress caused the shrinkage, but why not in all the ten trees? It seems likely that the trees that did not shrink had access to more ground water.



Image Bill Blight

This young ash recovered from wilting after severe drought

This comes to mind because of the sapling ash, pictured. In the heat of July 2013 the new year's shoot wilted over to end below the terminal bud from which it grew. It then partially recovered to have an unusual kink in the stem. It was also notable that many Douglas fir also wilted in that period.

It's not only people that suffer when it's hot!

Bill Blight, Dorset Coppice Group

Hazel Hedge Advice

Cutting a line of massive hawthorns with a chainsaw, fencing the stumps both sides and laying the regrowth five years later is "coppicing" of a sort. But why do I bang on about hedges?

Well, I've realised that there's a glaring omission in hedge literature and received wisdom. To quote Hugh Barker in *Hedge Britannia* [Bloomsbury, 2012], the monograph *Hedges* by Pollard, Hooper & Moore [Collins, 1974] "has near biblical status for hedgerow enthusiasts". It is indeed highly influential but the authors collected their data wherever they could in their spare time. A map purporting to show the distribution of hazel in UK hedges has no data for much of Southern England! Nor has another showing where hedge laying was (or had been) practised.



Image: George Darwall

George Darwall takes products whilst laying hazel hedges

The authors were clearly unaware of the former management of (originally) pure hazel hedges. These were planted on banks and laid at a typical coppicing frequency (seven years say) without intermediate trimming. Stems of indifferent quality for other uses were laid to form the new hedge, allowing better rods to be harvested.

I have restored a few hedges to this regime, laid some three times in succession and established that:

- Unlike an overstood wood which typically requires two cycles before, hopefully providing a decent harvest, an overgrown hazel hedge, once laid, will be productive next time. Even if the stool density is still low there will be vertical secondary growth from the laid stems.
- Regrowth from the stools is protected from deer by the hedge. Roe would rather be in the woods. There's so much secondary growth they are welcome to some. Damage is negligible.
- Keeping a hazel hedge in-cycle not only saves the cost of trimming but also makes it much easier to lay. Initial experience suggests each laying will yield numerous beanpoles and pea-sticks, a walking stick per yard and sufficient hazel rods to provide a three foot hurdle fence of equivalent length in perpetuity.
- This traditional management regime is compatible with hedgerow trees, costly obstacles whenever hedges are trimmed mechanically. Saplings can be left to grow at one laying and are eventually harvested at a later one without damaging the hedge.

My advice to anybody wanting to pursue a hazel craft in a suitable region is: learn to lay hedges; get paid to restore them; and persuade owners to let you manage hazel ones in the traditional manner. As time passes you'll spend less time laying and more working up the increasing by-products.

George Darwall, Dorset Coppice Group

This is the second in a series of pieces written by George for Clef Stick - more next time

Darwall Strikes Again!

Letters to the Editor

Sir, Hedges can indeed play host to trees (letter Apr 15) but they obstruct mechanical trimming, increasing its cost. Replacements are discouraged. Traditional management of hazel hedges avoids this problem. Regularly laid but otherwise left untrimmed, hazel hedges supply rods as a special form of hazel coppice. Saplings can be spared during laying, and mature trees ultimately harvested without damaging the hedge.

George Darwall
Hurdle maker and hedge layer,
Fontmell Magna, Dorset

The Times 16/4/21

The Sylva Foundation

Many readers will know of Sylva, the environmental charity that is "helping trees and people grow together". Their "Sylva Suite" a collection of connected online tools appears particularly useful to coppice workers: MyForest for Education, Deer management, Woodland Wildlife Toolkit and MyForest. They are mostly free resources aimed at woodland owners and managers. MyForest enables anyone to map their management ambitions and results electronically. The "Lite" version is free and adequate for fairly simple mapping. The paid for accounts give more options for mapping. Woodland Owner accounts cost £24/year or £120/year for an agent account. The Deer management tool could be something NCFed should support. It aims to share stalkers' activity – success and otherwise. Have you used Sylva's toolkit? If so, please let us know via news@ncfed.org.uk <https://sylva.org.uk/home>

When you're down in the woods bundling up your sticks, do you get yourself in all of a tangle with reams of baler twine in knots? Well, look at this for a neat little solution. Get yourself a little bin with a lid, make an'ole in the top to thread your twine through, and fix the lid down with some old bungee. I never get strung along by knots now. Of course if you wanna be really good, use natural sisal. But I'm a bit long in the tooth for change! Happy days.
Terry

Editor's note - Good Tip Terry! But you can do better. Do you know any horsey or cattle types locally who use small bales of straw and hay? If so, they probably have loads of baler string knocking about and it's better for you to reuse it than let it end up in landfill - it can't be recycled as far as I am aware. You won't be able to use Terry's genius string thing though.

Failing that, buy sisal or another type of natural cordage. Hey Terry, what about making your own out of nettles!?



Image Dave Jackson

The String Thing

Bats and Their Roosts

From Facebook – Rob Goodrick posted in the Facebook group *Woodland Management, Coppicing, Coppice Crafts & Products*, in March this year.

"I do hope everyone considers bats and their roosts when undertaking coppicing works. I have seen some posts going up that might suggest otherwise. Aside from a moral duty to look out for their welfare, they are highly protected in law and destroying roosts can incur hefty fines. For anyone unsure of what to look for and the laws around bats and their roosts I would also recommend doing some research. I have been coppicing for the last twenty five years and will always leave any tree with a potential roost feature in it... after all isn't that why most of us do this work, to look after the woods and their inhabitants?"

Publications to consult on the subject:

Woodland Management for Bats

This good practice guide aims to strike a balance between the needs of bats and the diverse objectives of woodland managers. It gives general principles and practical advice to assist in the management of your particular woodland, while recognising potentially conflicting management interests and objectives. The guide examines the management of woodland in blocks or stands, ranging in size from an avenue of trees to large wooded landscapes. It is designed to help you sustain entire bat populations in woodland habitats, rather than focusing on each individual bat roost.

Published by the Forestry Commission for England and Wales in partnership with The Bat Conservation Trust, Countryside Council for Wales and English Nature.
<https://www.forestryresearch.gov.uk/research/woodland-management-for-bats/>



Bat Roosts in Trees – A guide to identification and assessment for tree-care and ecology professionals

Evidence-supported throughout, with summary reviews of roosting ecology. Covers the 14 tree-roosting species found in Britain, with illustrative photographs and data. A practical analysis framework with clearly identifiable thresholds for action. Pelagic Publishing, £40
<https://pelagicpublishing.com>

Bat Tree Habitat Key – 2020

The chapters provide additional, more in-depth descriptions, which support summaries that are provided in tabulations and bulleted lists within BRiT. However, as the bats native to the British Isles do not make the features within which they roost, the narrative in this text approaches tree-roosting ecology from the perspective of the trees. Available free as a download from http://battreehabitatkey.co.uk/?page_id=43

BTHK 2020. Bat Tree Habitat Key – 4th Edition. AEcol, Bridgwater



Tree Hay

At our forty-five acre, twenty-five year old rewilding project in Rutland, the pioneer goat willow is demanding our attention. We are too small to have cows to manage the landscape and keep areas open, so over the last few years we have been wading into the undergrowth and cutting down the twenty foot willows that are dominating. Of course they come back very vigorously. What should we do with increasing amounts of beautiful straight willow? Inspired by Ted Green on his Knepp video, we thought we would experiment with tree hay.



Sallow in catkin

We couldn't find a tree hay production manual on-line but surely it couldn't be that difficult. The first consideration was when should the hay be made? The best grass hay is produced in late May taking advantage of the spring growth. That was out of the question for us as we had to wait for the bird nesting season to be over. So, at the beginning of August 2020 when the ground-nesting bird signs were removed we set to with bill hooks, loppers, secateurs and an occasional hand saw. Children, grandchildren and our wonderful volunteers joined in enthusiastically. What length should the stalks be? (About 4 to 5 foot we decided). Can we use these thicker-stemmed 2 year-old ones? (Yes, but they required more processing to get rid of the thickest stems and make the bundles manageable). Do we need to dry out the branches in the sun as if it were grass hay? (No, we just tied them up and stacked them straight away.) We used recycled baler twine to make tightly-packed "stooks" which we then stored upright, closely packed, well ventilated and under cover.

Fast forward to February, and we scouted round for "guinea pigs" to try our tree hay. The most enthusiastic customers were the horses. One owner was told by a vet that as willow contains salicylic acid (the basis for aspirin) it has some therapeutic value. One of her horses has had

an operation and will be on box rest for six weeks. The tree hay will not only give some relief but will also keep her occupied by preventing her from eating too quickly. The equine dentist says that it is good for teeth too as it provides excellent roughage.

The reindeer were also impressed and seemed to appreciate a change from their usual winter diet. The pigs were a little less enthusiastic. They did eat the tree hay, but they didn't have the patience to pluck the leaves from the stalks. They were, however, happy using a bundle as bedding, most of which was eaten whilst they were meant to be asleep! Our only failure was a flock of Jacob sheep which turned their noses up and walked away.

This summer we will watch with interest to see how the willow recovers. We are anticipating a return with vigour. We plan to make some more tree hay this August and will be looking out for some cattle to try our product. Perhaps the demand from the equine fraternity will be such that we will not have to look very far for customers. There will need to be negotiations between the competing demands of the willow obelisk maker (requiring one-year willow growth), the willow screen maker (two to three year growth) and the hay makers.

If you are a tree hay expert we'd love to learn from your experience.

Suzie Manley and Min Burdett are members of the Rockingham Forest Coppice Network

Please send comments and experiences direct to Min and Suzie at min.burdett@gmail.com and copy them to news@ncfed.org.uk



Making tree hay stooks

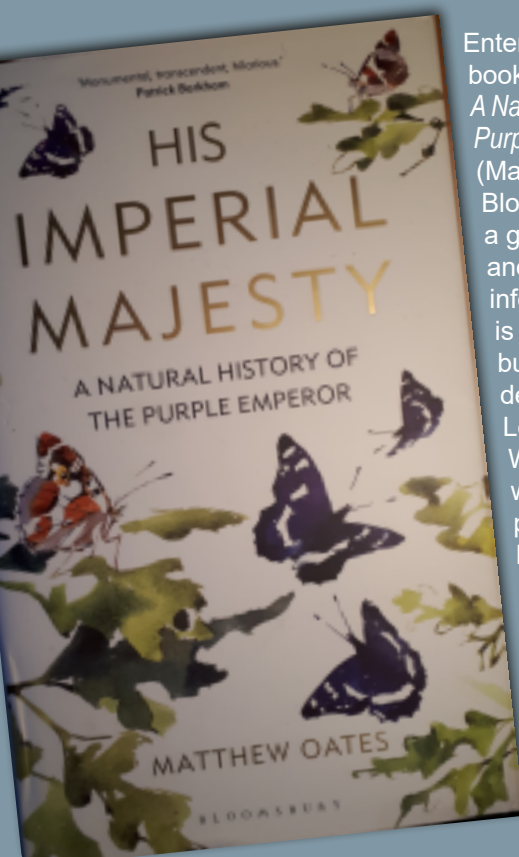
Sallow in Hazel Coppice

For years I've been waging low-key war on the willow that grows in one hazel plantation we look after. (Willow for simplicity, but I'm including 'goat willow', *Salix caprea* 'grey willow' *S. cinerea*, as well as hybrids of the two, under that umbrella).

Knowing willow is an important part of the woodland ecosystem, I've never pursued eradication. Rather I'm after suppression within hazel coupes. My reason: willow grows faster than hazel, can overstand it and when working a coupe, large willows take a long time to deal with and produce a mountain of material that I can't find a use for. I like some willow amongst the hazel because the deer eat it first, but as I cut hazel I also cut all the willow encountered. After two or three years, I'll go back and cut the regrowth. Under the hazel canopy, even willow struggles.

But in June 2019, one Saturday evening, we saw what we thought was a purple emperor butterfly. The weeks that followed brought several more definite sightings and much excitement. The arrival of emperors in this twenty year old plantation was somewhat revelatory, but it turns out they aren't as rare as I thought.

One of the benefits of membership of the East Anglian Coppice Network is access to lots of lovely and knowledgeable people. Two Cambridgeshire members, Louise Bacon and Vince Lea, are, amongst other things, Wildlife Trust volunteers and extremely well-up on wildlife matters. They reassured me that our management was probably not killing all the emperors in Bedfordshire and that in fact the species is spreading and is more common than previously thought – like some other species, it's really difficult to observe so tends to be under recorded.



Enter Matthew Oates' book *His Imperial Majesty: A Natural History of the Purple Emperor*. (Matthew Oates, Bloomsbury, 2020). It's a good read, amusing and packed with information. Matthew is clearly a little crazy but fabulously dedicated to the Lepidopteron cause. When thinking about writing this piece I planned a review, but this approach seemed more pertinent to the needs of *Cleft Stick* readers.

Mr Oates would prefer all willow to

be left untouched – I'll quote his advice to managers of open grown (non-ride-side) willows, for nature conservation - "first and foremost non-intervention; second, do nothing; third, leave the bloody things alone; fourth do something that actually needs doing instead." Those of us who try to make money from coppice might not be able to follow this advice to the letter, but compromise should play a part. There must be something we can do, or indeed not do, to keep our hazel coppice



Image Guy Lambourne

Male purple emperor butterfly

management efficient whilst maximising opportunities for purple emperor breeding success.

So, what's to be done? The purple emperor's life cycle is complex – there's no point in the year when they aren't stuck on willow, as larvae, eggs or pupae, and therefore at our mercy. The female is quite demanding of the type of willow and the type of leaves of those particular willows, on which she is prepared to lay (this is an area where Matthew Oates deserves special mention for his obsessive searching for invisible eggs, larvae and pupae). Crucially, it seems, emperor females lay eggs on willow that is older than five years. There's the opportunity I was hoping for, which conveniently works with my own particular approach. Cut willow in coupes along with the hazel at each rotation and again within five years.

As well as the willow within the hazel coupes we cut in rotation, our wood has a good number of twenty year old willows around its edges. These are either left alone or coppiced or pruned irregularly if they are obstructing rides.

Hopefully this regime will result in a large and constant supply of perfect leaves in ideal locations on which those emperors will lay eggs each July and we will continue to enjoy seeing the adults. Anyway, in early April, when those large willows are in full catkin bloomery and when the temperature's right, their bumble-hum is a joy that we definitely wouldn't be without, emperors or not.

Any thoughts or experience on this issue? Please let us know through news@ncfed.org.uk

Guy Lambourne is a member of the East Anglian Coppice Network

Coppice Work as Stroke Recovery Therapy

When Les returned home from hospital after his stroke in 2018 he was already walking and sort of talking. In the house he found that stitching pieces of leather together using two needles, a clamp and saddle stitch was possible and helped improve strength in his hands and fingers. Of course he was keen to get back into the workshop but couldn't use a saw or a hammer due to limited arm strength. However, perseverance and determination meant that soon he made some besom brooms for an order.



Les Brannon with newly complete wattle hurdle

The Stroke Association have been extremely supportive and helpful and Les currently takes part in speech therapy sessions online, arranged by them. We are very fortunate that another coppice group member offered us the opportunity to cut hazel coppice in his wood. This was partly as a form of mental and physical therapy for Les but also for useful knowledge and experience to be shared for mutual benefit. We had bought and used a middle range Stihl cordless chainsaw before Les's stroke but this now became even more useful.

The lack of arm strength means starting the petrol saw is not possible. Using the lighter cordless saw, Les can keep cutting for longer - the onset of fatigue is a common problem for stroke survivors. Some time ago Alan Waters recommended a modern Fiskars billhook to me. The long handle and blade, and its lightness have made it my favourite. That lack of arm strength has meant Les struggles to use his older, heavier billhook so I bought him the newest version of the Fiskars. Yesterday we were both trimming rods using those hooks and I was heartened to see how pleased Les was to regain the ability to do so.

Prior to his stroke Les made some split, woven, hazel hurdles but never in large numbers. He decided spring 2020 was time to have another try. He split the rods and I helped by shaving them down a bit with my small axe. Les is pictured with the result. We were both very pleased because of the sense of achievement and the determination it had taken to stick with it despite the problems encountered.

Toni Brannon, Hampshire Coppice Group

Coppice Association North West's 25th Year

This is the Coppice Association North West's 25th year. It was established at an inaugural meeting on 13 November 1996, before which, that area of the country was the North West region of the National Coppice Association (NCA). An early highlight was Bill Hogarth and Walter Lloyd's appearance in the television series Spirit of Trees. Bill was coppicing and Walter charcoal making in South Cumbria.

The North West regional group became most active under the brilliant management of relatively new coppicer and charcoal maker Mike Napton. Mike, together with Richard Edwards, the secretary and chief driver of the NCA, were coming to an arrangement that Mike would take over the role of national secretary when Mike met an untimely death in the middle of 1996. That was a huge loss and despite its successes, Richard decided that the National Coppice Association would be terminated. Thanks to Mike's hard work as regional coordinator there was a nucleus of interest in the region and the Coppice Association North West (CANW) was formed as an independent organisation. Long-time coppice worker Bill Hogarth was President. Some of the other regional groups also re-formed as local coppice groups and stayed in contact with each other by exchange of newsletters.

After Bill's sad death in 1999 the very successful Bill Hogarth MBE Memorial Apprenticeship Trust (BHMAT) was initiated by CANW in 2001 with its annual operation of the one-week Woodland Pioneers training courses. The BHMAT format was subsequently adopted for the National Coppice Apprenticeship project and a similar format is used for the British Horselogs' apprenticeship scheme.

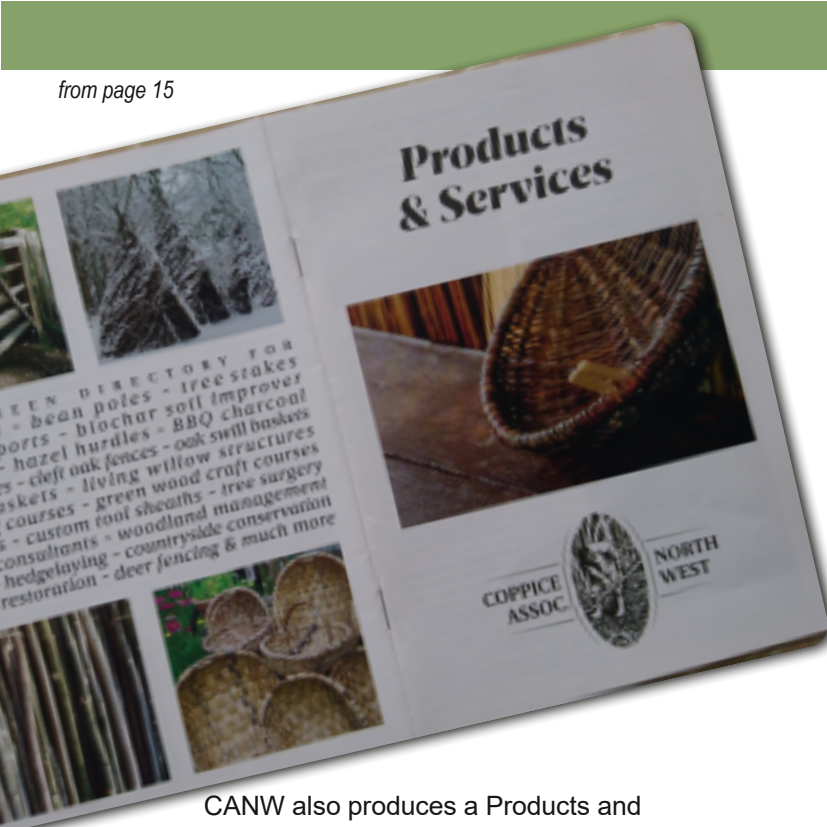


The end of a training week for selection of BHMAT apprentices

In April 2011 the Woodland Trust gave BHMAT the lease of Moss and Height Spring Wood in which Bill Hogarth had re-started coppicing in the early 1990s. The wood is now coppiced by BHMAT apprentices.

Early in its life CANW took over the very popular annual Weekend in the Woods training courses which have run from the late 1980s until postponed by Covid 19.

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CANW also produces a Products and Services Directory booklet which allows members to publish their contact details and the products and services they provide, for distribution around the area's visitor centres etc. The booklet is updated every few years.

Early in the 2000s, CANW were performing charcoal earthburns – clamps – at various locations, notably the Stott Park Bobbin Mill events, for people to witness the old process which had a huge significance to the area especially its old iron smelting industries. CANW also had a presence at many other shows and demonstrations in the area.

From its very beginning the CANW were keen and campaigning for the formation of an “umbrella” or “federation” of coppice and woodcraft groups. The proposal was aired at several meetings and conferences until finally in 2013 the official launch of the National Coppice Federation took place in London with CANW's Rebecca Oaks in the Chair.

Quite a memorable and useful 25 years; I think Richard Edwards will be pleased with what he started 29 years ago.

Brian Crawley, CANW President



Not Every Tree is Sacred

A tale of two woodland schemes on the Isle of Wight

Back in the early 2000s the Forestry Commission, with partners, rolled out the JIGSAW Planting scheme, providing funding for landowners to plant agricultural land with trees and connect existing ancient and semi-natural woodlands. The Island was the largest community to take up the project, with its unique isolated biosphere, a healthy population of red squirrels, lack of browsing deer, and limited workable agricultural land. Additional funding was directed here as the project uptake diminished across the rest of the country.

Some plantings were community led, others private, but all focused upon creating corridors of travel for isolated populations of red squirrels and dormice.

However, once the trees were planted and the woodsmen walked away, willows moved in and colonised the unmanaged ground. They proved hugely successful. As a pioneer species they did exactly what they evolved to do, to the detriment of the newly planted saplings. Many, perished as the canopy closed in and shadow descended.



Image Jon Jewitt

A sure sign of neglect

Martin's Wood, a community woodland and now part of a Wildlife Trust rewilding project, received continued management from the start. The grass was cut regularly until the saplings could get away, rides were hewn out to allow for ground flora to flourish, attracting insects, which in turn attracted birds and bats to rich hunting grounds. Scrapes were hand dug to accommodate the wide variety of solitary mining bees. Now, trees are thinned. Hazel is coppiced to provide denser stands for nesting birds and dormice, trees are felled to create variation in age, allowing for a greater uptake in carbon and resilience to pests and diseases. The material that is harvested can then be made into things, locking up that captured carbon until they're burnt or rot away. This in turn pays for the work hours and fuel required to replicate nature, although it's rarely enough.

As Britain plants more and more trees, their successful management can at times be controversial and disheartening, requiring axe and chainsaw. I really would like to leave nature alone and let it do its thing, but there's just not enough of it left for a successful speedy recovery to happen.

Jon Jewitt, Isle of Wight

This piece is an edited extract from a series published in OnTheWight

About the NCFed

The National Coppice Federation (NCFed) was formed in 2013 with the aim of uniting already existing regional coppice groups under one banner. Since then more local groups have formed and become affiliated to the NCFed, growing our membership and reach considerably.

Aims

The NCFed has three key aims:

1. to promote coppicing as a form of woodland management that provides economic, ecological and culturally significant benefits;
2. to bring together regional coppice groups and provide a unified voice for the industry; and
3. to encourage and promote best practice.

Regional Coppice Groups

Regional groups are the backbone of the NCFed. Some have been established for many years and are very active in their local areas, organising regular social meetings and training courses for members and running events for the public. Others are smaller scale and focus on encouraging networking, co-operation and support between coppice workers.

Coppicing across the country

The National Coppice Federation is the umbrella organisation for local coppice groups from across the UK. These groups in turn have individual members. The groups vary in size, both in terms of membership and geographical area, and also in scope, with some groups being extremely active and others less so.

Membership Benefits

- You'll be part of a national network that shares skills and ideas and better understands the bigger coppicing picture;
- You'll be part of a regional group that will connect you with local, like-minded individuals that you can co-operate, collaborate and socialise with;
- You'll be part of a movement that aims to improve the coppicing industry and to find solutions to problems and issues;
- You'll be eligible for discounted insurance through our Insurance Scheme; and
- You'll be able to attend our fantastic annual gathering at a reduced rate.

How to join

You will need to find and join your local coppice group; membership fees include a sum that is paid to the NCFed nationally. If there is no local group to join (coverage of the UK is not yet complete), why not consider setting up a new group?

Receive Cleft Stick and other important information from NCFed by signing up for our mailing list at:

<https://ncfed.org.uk/news/>



**National
Coppice
Federation**



Supporting the Coppice Industry