National Coppice Federation

Supporting the Coppice Industry

Winter 2025/26

Cleft Stick

News from the National Coppice Federation and the UK Coppice Industry



[Credit: Richard Lofthouse]

Weekend Gathering & AGM

All the highlights of an amazing event hosted by the Sussex and Surrey Coppice Group last October - Page 7

Training

A brief look at two existing training programmes involving coppice, based in Lancashire and Bedfordshire - Page 22

Developing Biochar

A vital product for our industry? Here are definitions, details and a call out to get involved in a Biochar Group and some research - Page 25

From our Affiliated Groups

What's happening in a group near you? Find out from - Page 28



[Credit: Kiri Roberts]

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The National Coppice Federation
Uniting regional coppice groups

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.

National Coppice Federation
Supporting the Coppice Industry

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

Editorial

Welcome to the winter 2025/26 edition of Cleft Stick. It's full of good stuff from biochar to WhatsApp groups, and I make no apologies for including a lot about October's Weekend Gathering and AGM, held at the wonderful Weald and Downland Living Museum in West Sussex. Whichever group takes on the task in 2026 you will have your work cut out to beat 2025's! I'll add my congratulations and thanks to Ashley and his fellow Sussex and Surrey Coppice Group members, and of course to Tim Roskell for providing year to year continuity.

I have a strong belief in young people's wisdom; on the whole they seem far more sensible than was my generation in our twenties. They are better informed and those I come across often care more about the world and its future. Having said that, a recent Grand Designs on Channel 4 introduced a couple, perhaps in their early thirties, who set out to build a castle on top of a hill in Warwickshire, on a scale that put the average 1970s designer of multistorey carparks to shame. Apart from the way it looked, the immense volume of concrete involved, and the eventual £7 million cost, caused my eyes to rollercoaster. Hopefully they are in the minority. This edition of Cleft Stick has some great stories about trainees and apprentices. Although it won't ever earn them enough to spend so much on a house, coppice work has the potential to make them content and healthy, which is more than can be said for the Warwickshire Two, who interestingly enough, put a lot of store in having planted a wood as part of their castle building adventure in money burning. Although we didn't get to see the wood, I wonder if it might be what they really value in future, if they don't have to sell the lot to pay off their debts.

I'd like to draw your attention to several calls for action in this edition. First, Steve Fowkes and Graham Morgan have produced a detailed look at the Coppice Restoration Grant. We need to use this grant to ensure it remains available in future. If you manage woodland that contains coppice in need of restoration, do give it a look. Second, Mark Clarke is looking for people to get involved in his Forest Schools Show scheduled for September 2026 in Nottinghamshire; it looks like it will be a big one. If you came to the Gathering, you'll have spent every mealtime sitting on Mark's amazing benches. Finally, Small Woods are after practitioners of all sorts to take part in their Coppice to Craft Weekend in late February/early March next year in Shropshire.



In 2002 we installed a wood burner in our house. It's still in use. We have raised and fledged two children, both of whom are, like their mother, asthmatic. A realisation, fuelled by recent media coverage of the air pollution caused by wood burning stoves, has disturbed me considerably - burning wood in the house may have contributed to eighteen years of wheezing and running noses in our family and who knows what else in the locality. What's the answer? Possibly replacing the stove with a much more efficient, modern model. Or maybe a heat pump. The broader implications are concerning for all of us in the firewood business in the smallest or largest of ways; is one of our core products on the same course as oil? Or can firewood logs be seen as the guilt-fee, carbon neutral solution I remember claiming only a short time ago? I am conflicted. What do you think?

I'll end with a quick reminder that we are always on the lookout for material to be published in future editions of Cleft Stick. It's written for members of coppice groups by members of coppice groups, and we depend completely on you to keep the interesting, thought provoking and action-packed articles coming in. Thanks to everyone who contributed to this edition and to the Cleft Stick Team - Kiri Roberts, who does the layout so beautifully and Tim Roskell and Glenn Hadley who assist with the editorial work. Please send contributions anytime, to newsdesk@ncfed.org.uk. Next copy deadline - Friday 24th April for publication 5th June 2026.

Guy Lambourne, Editor



Coppice Peer Awards

The 2025 Coppice Peer Awards were presented, as is the tradition, at the Weekend Gathering and AGM held in early October.

We received five nominations in the New Entrant category and two in the Nature Recovery category. All the nominees had much to recommend them and much to be proud of. However the final winners, decided by an enclave of some eight Group Reps, were Jon Hext (Surrey & Sussex CG) as New Entrant, and Brian Williamson (Avon & South Cotswolds CG) for Nature Recovery. The two trophies were beautifully turned goblets of very different design made by Graham Bowbrick of Surrey & Sussex CG.

Thanks to everyone who got involved in the whole process.

Martin Wise - NCFed Coppice Peer Awards Officer
Chilterns and Thames Valley CG

Below: Coppice Peer Awards 2025 (left to right); Martin Wise, Jon Hext (winner New Entrant), Tom Coxhead (NCFed Chair), Brian Williamson (winner Nature Recovery)



[Credit Guy Lambourne]

New Appointments

We are delighted that we have some new Officer appointment as follows:

New Director - Ashley Martin, current Group Rep of Sussex and Surrey, joined as a Director in June. He has also taken up the new role of Groups' Coordinator and will be the new listening ear for all the NCFed affiliated Coppice and Supporter Groups. He will liaise with NCFed's Membership Secretary and also with his fellow Directors.

Spars Officer - this role will be shared between Dave Faulker (Group Rep of Whittlewood Forest Group) and Kit Davis (NCFed Supporter Group - National Society of Master Thatchers) spars@ncfed.org.uk

Biochar Officer - Min Burdett (Group Rep of Rockingham Forest Group) biochar@ncfed.org.uk

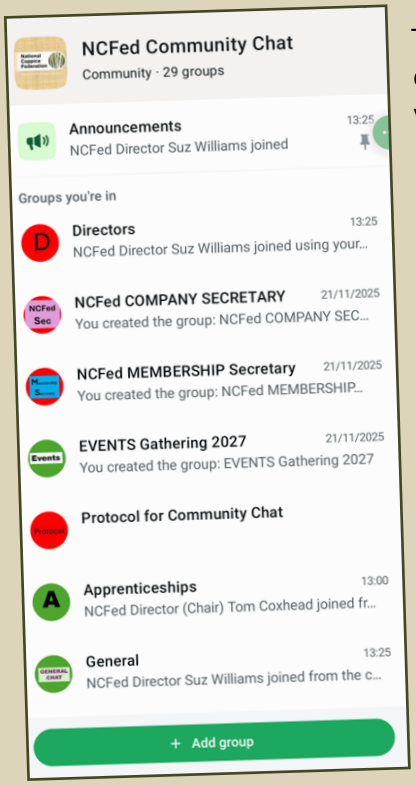
Sponsorship Officer - Bob Hewitt (Member of Sussex and Surrey Coppice Group) sponsorship@ncfed.org.uk

On The Move

Tim Roskell, has stepped down as Director after six years in that post. He will still be actively involved in his role as Coordinator for NCFed's Weekend Gathering & AGM as well as continuing work within the Media and Marketing Subcommittee. Tim first got involved with NCFed when he was invited to the Weekend Gathering in 2014, which was hosted by Dorset Coppice Group at the Ancient Technology Centre. That was it - he was hooked! He helped set up Avon and South Cotswolds Coppice Group that year, later taking over the Secretarial role and becoming Group Rep. Subsequently, he was asked to become a Director. He moved down to Dorset in 2021 and is, of course, a member of the thriving Dorset Coppice Group.

New NCFed WhatsApp Community Chat

The team at NCFed have set up a new Community Chat in WhatsApp, so that ALL NCFed related chat is now under one umbrella, rather than as previously with some chats on Messenger, some on WhatsApp and even some on SMS text!



There are now various chat groups for Directors, various subcommittees (Media & Marketing. Training & Standards, External Affairs), Biochar & Charcoal, Spars, Apprenticeships and Hedgelaying amongst others. Due to some members' roles within NCFed and/or their fields of interest, some people will be in more than one group. We have also set up several individual "Events" groups for 2026 (e.g., APF Exhibition/ Show). See the article on page 6 "2026-NCFed on the Road" for more details about these and how you can help.

General Coppice Chat

Members are added to this group and can then join other groups in which they wish to be involved with, other than certain "Closed Groups" (normally having a red background to the group name image). This is where ALL community members can chat to each other about all things coppice related, outside of their specific chat Groups. This General Coppice Chat group includes NCFed Directors, Officers (e.g., Hedgelaying Officer, Biochar Officer etc); Group Reps and also any individual members of NCFed affiliated Coppice and Supporter groups who wish to join one or more of the specific chats.

Social/Banter Chat

This is a dedicated space for off-topic matters, somewhere that folks can seek some solace from their fellow compatriots in the coppice industry.

Engagement of the NCFed membership (and beyond)

We want to encourage engagement of, and participation by, our membership. We will be inviting the members of NCFed affiliated Coppice and Supporter groups to join any of these chat groups if they want to participate. So, if you have a strong interest in a particular field and can constructively contribute to that chat group, please email WhatsAppCommunityChat@ncfed.org.uk. We will then send you a list of all the current groups and arrange to add you to those you are interested in. Perhaps you have an interest in something that is not covered currently by any of the chat groups listed and would like to see one set up. Providing that you are happy to be an admin of that group, and most importantly lead it, then we'd love to hear from you via the community chat email address.

Are you reading this and saying to yourself "But I'm not a member of any coppice or supporter group but feel I have a lot to offer and would like to be involved?" All you need to do is join an NCFed affiliated coppice group in your area or the NCFed holding Group and get in touch.

Tim Roskell,
Secretary - NCFed Media and Marketing Subcommittee



NCFed on the Road in 2026

The Federation will be attending certain events in 2026 along with their new NCFed emblazoned gazebo and display. This should increase awareness, amongst the general public and allied organisations about the coppicing industry and all that it encompasses.

The events we are looking to attend in 2026 are:
- Smalls Woods Association - Coppice to Crafts Weekend
- Bodgers Ball (Association of Pole Lathe Turners and Green Woodworkers)
- Groundswell Regenerative Agriculture Festival
- Forest Schools Show
- APF Exhibition/Show
- NCFed Weekend Gathering & AGM
- National Hedgelaying Competition

We need you!
This cannot be done without help from our membership. We will need volunteers to help on the stand at each venue, engage with visitors and promote coppicing and the work of NCFed. You don't need to be an in-depth expert on coppicing or coppice products. Anyone can help, so long as you can talk with some knowledge about these areas and share your passion and interest in our coppicing industry. If you feel you can help in any way, please contact us via Events@ncfed.org.uk

NCFed Media and Marketing Subcommittee

Directors (L-R): Dan Carne, Mike Taylor, Melanie Fryer, Graham Morgan, Ben Scarcliffe, Tim Roskell, Suz Williams, Tom Coxhead (Chair)



Report on Directors Face to Face Meeting July 2025

The directors like to get together face to face once a year, to get their heads around issues. This year we met at The Greenwood Centre near Ironbridge in Shropshire, the headquarters of Smallwoods. It was good to see everyone "in the flesh" as some of us had only ever met via the dreaded Zoom.

Lots of issues were discussed in the morning, the most important being finding a patron for NCFed. All were in agreement that adventurer and writer, Julian Evans would be an ideal candidate and the process regarding appointment was agreed.

Another important discussion was the appointment of a Chairperson for NCFed. The organisation has run for a year without an elected Chair with Tom Coxhead filling the role in an unofficial capacity. It was agreed unanimously that he should be appointed as Chair at the upcoming AGM for a period of two years. Reports from the various subcommittees were discussed and we had a long discussion about the upcoming Weekend Gathering and AGM.

In the afternoon we had a whistle stop tour of the site led by Simon James, CEO of Smallwoods; then back to business - how to develop a strategy for the future of NCFed. This was led with great skill and a lot of tact by Dan Carne who followed up with the documentation. We all agreed that further help would be required to develop some of the ideas we had come up with and that a "professional" facilitator would be used to focus our work. A meeting was arranged for the following month and a report given on this during the AGM in October.

The day finished around 5pm with us heading off to all parts of the country, I was the lucky one this year with only a 50 minute journey!

Mike Taylor, NCFed Director,
And Chair of the West Midlands Coppice Group

Weekend Gathering and AGM




















[Credit: Guy Lambourne, Tim Roskell, Ashley Martin and Steve Roberts]

A Brief Report From An Insider

Venue: Weald and Downland Museum: 5* Outstanding

Weather: Surprisingly good: and took some arranging I can assure you. I'll take that: 4*

Catering: Venison from the butchery courses and bacon plus sausages for the breakfasts from some of our sponsors, plus the amazing caterers, super soups and venison Bourguignon: 5*

Marquees: Up on Wednesday - x2 plus a German scout tent - loads of dry space for every eventuality: 5*

Toilets: I know they're not the showbiz item but quite important, quite comfortable in a way and clean at every step: 5*

Showers: Not used as much as expected but equally as vital in their own way: 5*

But none of this happens without some bloody hard effort and amazing commitment from a very impressive group of people. Okay, I was the chappy who dropped the ball into SSCG's lap. But what a Committee! And one has to mention every other SSCG member who stepped up at the event; volunteering, leading courses, giving demos etc, etc etc. A truly remarkable group to be involved with – let's hear it for the SSCG! Hurrah!



[credit: Steve Roberts]

And on top of all that just everyone who came to the Gathering, such a lot of great people – that's all of you guys 'n gals! So amazing to meet everybody at mealtimes, on courses, around the fire, listening to poetry and music, discussing products and crafts, your local woods, products and professional responsibilities. Possibly my favourite bit was half-listening to the late-night revelries from around the fire whilst I was perched in my rooftop tent in a sleeping bag. I was repeatedly tempted to climb down and wander over but the sleeping bag won out each time. Anyway, the chatter, music and laughter - thank you all very much.

It was also good to see NCFed Directors, discussion leaders (NCFed and otherwise) and a few external course providers – eg South of England hedgelayers and *Sustainable Meat Eater*. And I have to mention Julian Bell and his team at Weald and Downland Museum – great support for over a year.

Thank you to everybody for your extensive and completely positive feedback. I did feel that the 2025 Gathering and AGM was a pretty good event but the overwhelming response was much appreciated by the whole of the SSCG. Hopefully, this will help towards future Gatherings, which let's face it, are the jewel in the crown of the NCFed year. Here's looking forward to 2026! I'll be there!

I cannot finish this without mentioning a few very important sponsors for the event:

Firstly to our Primary Sponsor Darren Vickery of *Taylor Made Insurance.*

From the Sussex and Surrey Coppice Group: *'Taylor Made'* is our chosen Insurer. The service has been excellent and has accommodated our changing insurance needs as the profile of the Group has developed.

Also Mark Clarke (*Creativity Design and Production*) - not a sponsor - but the supplier of a German Scout hut, plus benches and tables - just absolutely came up trumps – amazing!



We all enjoyed Mark Clarke's amazing benches throughout the weekend

Other sponsors:
ATS Machinery, Horsham
DM Chainsaws ltd
John Murray Butchers (Loxwood), Midhurst
Billingshurst Butchers, Billingshurst
Simmonds Saws Garden Machinery, Petworth
Southern Counties Tea & Coffee Company, Billingshurst
Peter West of Wests Wood Fair, East Dean

Ashley Martin, SSCG Show Sec & NCFed Rep



[credit: Steve Roberts]

Auction Report 2025

Once again Pete Jameson took to the rostrum as auctioneer, looking resplendent, we all thought, in his Hampshire Coppice Group Tie. “It was a pleasure to wear my tie at an occasion other than a funeral”, he said.

Thirty six lots were up for sale which included a very large number of planes, billhooks in varying degrees of condition, axes, hand drills, froes and one or two unusual items such as wood ash glazed pottery and a spinning wheel.

Pete had to work hard to get the bids this year. The auction porters, Bob and Stuart did a grand job displaying the goods but despite their best efforts there just weren’t enough people in need of a wood plane or with enough cash in their pockets to push the bids to any great height. The highest bid made was £26 for a froe. A few items failed to reach their reserve price so went unsold. The lucky horseshoe went for an impressive £1.50 (let’s hope it brings its new owner plenty of luck). The lowest bid was £1 for a lot of 3 hand drills.

Another successful year of keeping tools in the hands of people who will use them and as always, the auction proved to be an entertaining part of the Gathering. Huge thanks to Pete. I wonder how many other coppice groups have ties for their members.

Jane Lambourne,
East Anglia Coppice Network







[Credit: Guy Lambourne and Steve Roberts]





[credit: Steve Roberts]

Reflections

Congratulations to the Sussex and Surrey team for a job well done at this year's Gathering. Hampshire and Dorset were both represented and did rather well competition wise, with Darren Hamerton coming first in the hazel hurdles and achieving second place in the thatching spars, closely followed by Dave Ewers in third. We do have the advantage of coming from hazel country! The participants hope to see a live hurdle and spar making competition at a future Gathering.

I felt the spirit of the late Alan Walters was with us throughout the weekend, particularly as it was on his home turf, and when Jim Bettle mentioned being hoisted by his own petard during his charcoal update, I could almost see Alan at his side laughing.

I have always found the Weald and Downland Museum inspirational. Roy Armstrong who founded it had previously led the Workers Education Association and considered that studying and understanding the past was critical to shaping the future. When it changed its name from the Open Air Museum to the Living Museum, it seemed particularly apt. Walking around you may have noticed the stacks of firewood generally 1½ to 3 inch diameter in 3 foot lengths to sit across fire dogs. These are axe cut by Jonathan who was one of the guided walk leaders. For snedding and cross cutting he finds this as quick as a chainsaw, he doesn't have to move the log to prevent the bar getting pinched and doesn't get flints jumping out of the leaf litter as they do towards a freshly sharpened chain. The faggots I saw being tied from a pile of brushwood by Whittaker's Cottages on Saturday travelled into the bread oven by Lurgashall Mill on Sunday, and I managed to get to the bakery before they sold out!

Returning home, I revisited the book '*Weald and Downland Open Air Museum, The First 40 Years*'. I was struck by the fact that Roy Armstrong started the museum with an offer from a benevolent land owner and £12 in the kitty. Just think where NCFed could be in 40 years time.

Pete Jameson
Group Rep for Hampshire and Dorset Coppice Groups



[Credit: Kiri Roberts]





[Credit: Guy Lambourne]

I'd never been to a 'Gathering' before last year, when I found myself part of the organising team for that year's event at Wakelyns Agroforestry. I was so inspired by this collective coupe of coppicers (the collective noun suggested by AI), with diverse skills and conversations rich and easy, that I signed up for the Sussex Gathering this year without hesitation. The South Downs was glorious in the early fall, leaves turning, hills gently rolling, the oaks far healthier than those left back in Suffolk – so many suffering die back with the years of drought.



Rachel creates in willow

One hundred and forty of us gathered from around the UK on this scoop of southern down: lone workers, coppicers, charcoal makers, bodgers, fire creators, hazel hurdlers.

First we had work to do, a skill to learn. For me (luckily as I had not booked) it was the creation of a willow obelisk with John Waller "The Underwoodsman". With eight firm dried willow stems secured into a jig, we used fresh willow to make a French weave one way and then the other, to form and secure the base. From here, we wound two strands of live willow up the structure, snake like, weaving in fresh willow as we ran out. Other courses included besom broom making, skinning and butchering a deer, stool making, blacksmithing, hedgelaying, trug making.

Fe, a fellow Suffolk forester, joined us later and that evening fed some of us a Suffolk squash; cut with a machette, seasoned with garlic and fresh herbs and coated in olive oil before all segments, double bound in foil were cooked in the fire. After a good long time, they were unwrapped, distributed freely and found to be delicious.

Rachel Kellett,
Secretary, East Anglian Coppice Network



[credit: Steve Roberts]

Something really positive about this year's NCFed Gathering was the sense of community and excitement for the future. Firstly, it was great that there were a few children at the event, which I don't think was the case last year. They had impressive outdoors skills - hurdle-making, broom-making, dry stone walling and staying up to watch an earth charcoal burn! I definitely learned something talking to them. It really shows that coppicing and traditional crafts are important skills for the future, and spending time interacting with the ecology around us is fun and needed. It fills me with hope.

As NCFed's Social Media Officer, it was nice to revive the NCFed Instagram and help people post some photos. We gained new followers over the weekend and more views. Between 6th Oct and 4th Nov, 363% more accounts saw our posts and we got over 50 new followers and 19,000 views of our posts in the last month!

Clive Cobie led a discussion group about getting local communities involved in coppicing. This really made me consider how something similar could be applied to an urban context. The work they do is really inspiring. Another fantastic conversation was led by Jo Callaghan as part of her research. We talked about what we've learned from actively coppicing out in the woods, and things that symbolise this knowledge. Although I first coppiced only a year ago, it made me realise how much I've already learned about tree species, woodland and crafts, and the appreciation I've gained for wood, trees and the shape of a well-coppiced stool.

Another highlight of the weekend was playing music by the fire - especially flamencoey improvisation, with Fe on guitar, Pema violin, me on percussion and Dylan dancing. I also really enjoyed the poetry evening. Here's the poem I read out. I tried to shape it like the notch you cut in a larger tree before felling.

Tree Scratches
I'll tell you a secret:
I like the scratches I got this week. You see
I love the trees so
I cut the trees so
The trees cut me back so
. . .
You see?
I hold wet bark
Saw dry sawdust out
And sting in scrapes all evening

Yeva Sands,
NCFed Social Media Officer



[Credit: Guy Lambourne and Steve Roberts]







[Credit Steve Fowkes]

Making a Bigger Difference and the Coppice Restoration Grant

Coppicing has often seemed like the poor relation to some of the more industrial/corporate interests in the wider forestry sector, and the large-scale timber production systems seen across the country are worlds apart from what most NCFed members are involved in.

Coppicing rarely features in discussions around forestry policy, and coppice workers are rarely represented when it is being formulated. For most coppice folk this is doubtless a good thing - not having to deal with regulating authorities day-to-day may seem like a blessing. I have frequently been buttonholed by those who've had a bad experience with the Forestry Commission (FC) and are keen to tell me about it, and that's fair enough – you have to expect that if you wear the FC badge.

However, as no reader of this esteemed publication will need reminding, whilst well-managed coppice may often 'score low' purely in terms of timber volume produced, it nonetheless provides a range of high-quality wood products, and scores highly in terms of valuable environmental and societal contributions.

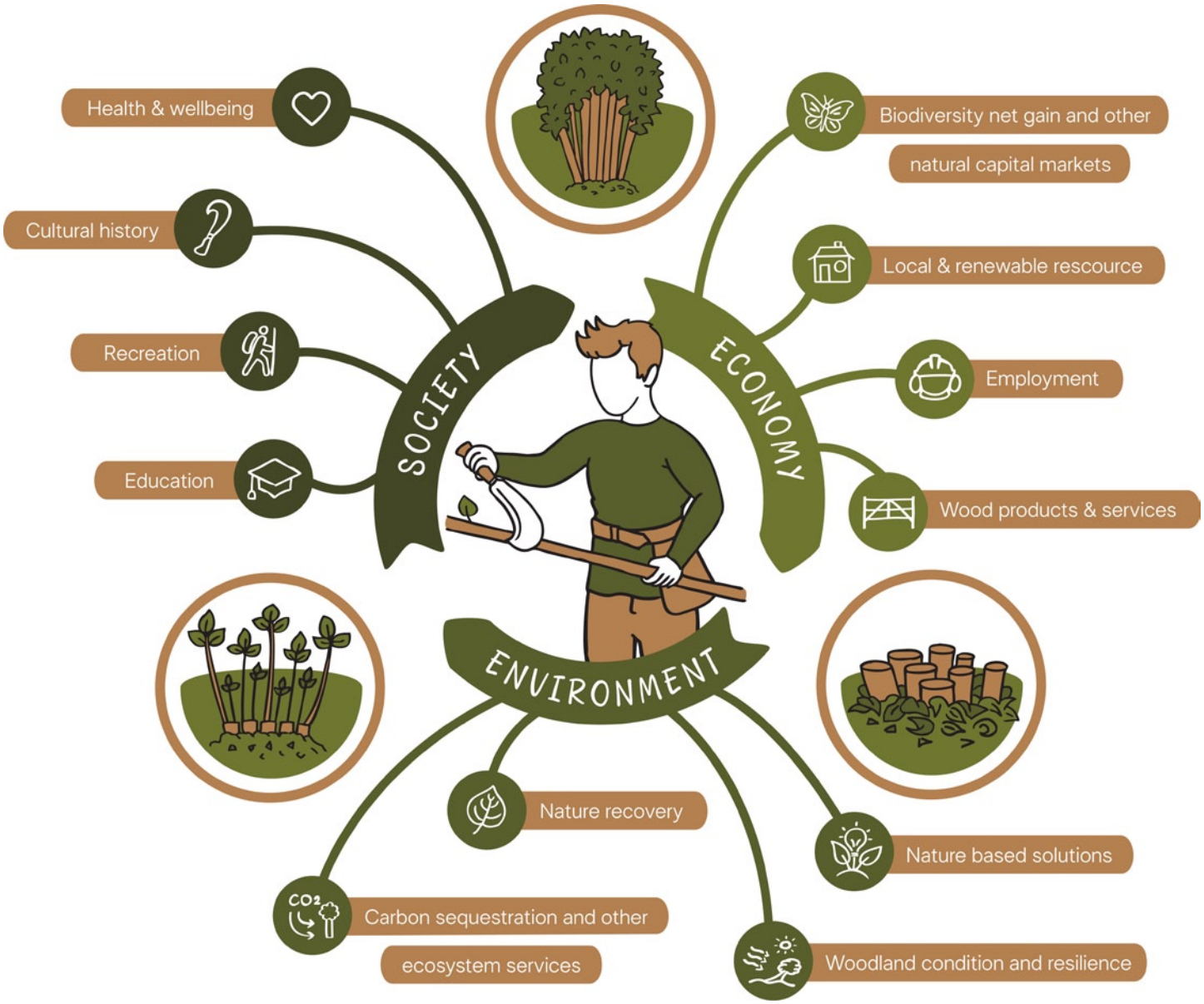
I'm pleased to say that at least in some quarters of forestry policy development, this is slowly but surely being recognised. While few coppice workers may want to engage with the more industrial/corporate forestry sector, hopefully most will see the merit of being recognised in more mainstream forestry arenas as being able to make a valuable contribution to the nation's forestry endeavours. Readers will be familiar with the fabulous work on the More Coppice Into Productive Management Project (aka Coppice Mapping Project) led by Graham Morgan, Tom Coxhead and others on our behalf, which has made an important contribution to the coppicing sector gaining more traction in this area.

In just three regions of England, the project identified more than twice the amount of coppice woodland than that mapped for the whole of Great Britain in the National Forest Inventory, the official database for woodlands. The project identified most coppice in England is unmanaged and therefore at risk of further decline through lack of management. The project also identified that most coppice in England occurs in Ancient Woodland.

There were a number of important outputs from the project; including an excellent Guide for Landowners and Managers; an online interactive coppice map; and a new network of Coppice Advisors. Most notably the project allowed NCFed folk to engage positively with Defra policy-makers which in December 2024 led to the inclusion of a new supplement in the Government's Countryside Stewardship woodland grant scheme specifically for coppice.

It has been eleven months since the grant was launched. It is now vital that the new coppice grant is accessed by as many coppice owners and managers as possible, otherwise it could be withdrawn and reallocated elsewhere due to lack of uptake, which would be real shame. An overview of the grant and how to access it are provided below.

Steve Fowkes,
Forestry Commission,
Member of Avon and South Cotswolds Coppice Group



[credit Kiri Roberts for and on behalf of NCFed]

About The Coppice Restoration Grant

The new 'FY6: Restore Coppicing in Woodland' allows for up to 80% of actual costs to be recovered for restoring unmanaged ('neglected') coppice.

To get it you need to:

1. Register with the online Rural Payments Service;

2. Register the woodland with the Rural Payments Agency;

3. Apply for a PA3 Woodland Management Plan grant (£1,500);

4. Once grant approval is received, write and submit a Woodland Management Plan (with mapping) along with the 'WMP submission proforma' to the Forestry Commission. To get a 10 year felling licence you also need to submit the 'Plan of Operations';

5. Receive Woodland Management Plan approval and felling licence;

6. If you have identified any species management required for deer, squirrel, or other invasive species, you will also need a Species Management Plan PA7 alongside the Woodland Management Plan;

7. Wait to be 'invited' by the Rural Payments Agency (pre-application) for 'Higher Tier' grant options;

8. Once approved, apply for the Higher Tier grant options you need to carry out the restoration work, including FY6;

9. Keep receipts and records of your restoration work;

10. Submit claims to get the grant payments.

Note that:
All grant claims are paid retrospectively.

The Woodland Management Plan grant is £1500 which could allow you to employ an agent to produce the Woodland Management Plan and complete grant applications for you.

If you intend for an agent to undertake the application process for you, they need to be registered with the Rural Payments Service and given permission to work on your behalf.

If you don't have access to mapping software, you can request printable paper maps from the Forestry Commission which you can then fill in by hand; The grant applications and payment claims are administered via the online Rural Payments Service portal.

The FY6 coppice grant is stackable with other woodland grant options such as CWD2: Woodland improvement; CWS8: Manage native woodland including ancient semi-natural woodlands (ASNW) supplement), deer fencing, grey squirrel control etc.

The FY6 coppice grant (and other Higher Tier woodland grant options) are all competitively assessed so it is vital that you make a good case within the woodland management plan for coppice restoration. Ideally, a 'coppice restoration plan' can be submitted as a technical supplementary appendix to the woodland management plan. Ensure that you have relevant 'hooks' in your woodland management plan objectives to allow access to the grants you want; e.g. "Restore and manage coppice" and "improve and maintain woodland access".

Three quotes are required for the FY6 grant when you apply, though fewer quotes may be acceptable if three cannot be obtained (subject to agreement). The preferred quote has to be agreed with the Forestry Commission.

Certain options ('Capital Items') within Countryside Stewardship (e.g. FG9 Deer Fencing) have to be completed within the first three years of the agreement. There is no definitive answer about how the grants available tie in with coppice restoration timescales and rotational cutting cycles – this can be discussed with (and other pre-application advice sought from) your relevant Forestry Commission Woodland Officer.

Coppice Advisors are also on hand to help you in three regions of England with the application process.

NCFed hopes to work with Defra and the Forestry Commission to improve the current description and requirements of the FY6 coppice grant, and intends to issue further updates about the process of accessing it in due course, once a few live examples have been worked through.

Graham Morgan, NCFed Director

Trico Deer Repellent – Examples In Use

Austrian agrochemical Company Kwizda Agro developed *Trico*, twenty years ago, based, they say, on a traditional forester's trick of using sheep fleece to keep herbivores at bay. Made from sheep fat, it is a scent and taste repellent protecting against deer, elk and moose which prevents browsing, rubbing and debarking without harming the deer population. Whilst elk and moose may not be major worries in UK woodland, deer most certainly are. Kwizda claim it to be harmless to humans, animals and plants.


[Credit: Guy Lambourne]

Bedfordshire hazel in July following cutting, safely behind a 1.6m plastic mesh deer fence

Trico is formulated as an oil in water emulsion for use, undiluted, in knapsack sprayers with a flat fan or cone nozzle. Alternatively it is available as a paste for application to terminal buds with a brush or glove.

Here are two examples of *Trico* in use. Whilst neither was designed as a scientific trial, the results are certainly promising and make the use of *Trico* worth considering, amongst other possible actions for anyone with a deer browsing problem, which is pretty much all of us.

Trico use on restored Bedfordshire hazel coppice

Reynolds and Holcot Wood is a 98-hectare site in Central Bedfordshire, owned by the Woodland Trust and managed by the Forest of Marston Vale, one of England's



[credit Guy La bourne]

Hazel regrowth from stools and layers. The white staining is Trico

Community Forests. The site compromises around 24.5 hectares of Holcot Wood, mainly ancient W8 type (field maple, hazel, ash) woodland, 12 hectares of wood pasture and 61 hectares of younger mixed broadleaf woodland. Reynolds Wood was planted from 1991 to 1995.

The site had received little active, programmed management for many years prior to us taking over, and subsequently was known as a real hot spot for deer, both Chinese water deer (CWD) and muntjac. BH Wildlife Consultancy conducted a drone survey for us in March 2025, so we had a baseline to go with the deer impact assessment, and to enable us to make informed management choices and plans. The results confirmed our worst fears, 115 deer spotted over a 1km2 area, an almost even split of CWD and muntjac.

One of the first jobs we had to do in the wood was to reintroduce the coppicing regime in the hazel compartments. We believe they were last cut around the year 2000, so were very much overstood and although the density was good (for Bedfordshire) the condition was poor. We have opted for a seven-year rotation, so are cutting 1.2 acres (0.5ha) per year. One of the biggest concerns was regeneration; although the deer were being culled, there was no way we could get on top of them quickly enough to ensure we would be successful in our regen efforts.

The first compartment cut, at the entrance to the wood, is bisected by a central ride. We decided to fence one half and use *Trico* on the other, so we had in effect a real time trial going on that would be very easy to monitor.

We were recommended *Trico* by another coppice worker, a forester and a Wildlife Trust. We thought it would be worth trying given all we had heard and read. It particularly appealed with its non-toxic/natural ingredients and being a good use of a by-product. The only way to find out in our deer-heavy semi-natural ancient woodland was to give it a go!

For the fence, we used 2.4m chestnut posts, recycled high tensile plastic mesh, a top and bottom wire with battens on the posts, so it was very much a temporary fence and would be easy to take down or move around the wood if needed. The finished height is 1.6 metres, and the mesh is 30mm x 30mm. This was funded (in part) through a Countryside Stewardship grant (FG10) which paid £8.09 per metre.

Cost wise *Trico* is between £150 and £180 per 10 litres. The rate of application varies, as when spraying at bud burst far less is needed than at mid-summer, when everything is in full leaf. On the 0.25 hectare area we have been spraying, we used between 3 and 7 litres per spray. It's very easy to apply, and being a white emulsion, it's very easy to see where you have been. It is important to wash the sprayer out and run some clean water through the nozzle after spraying as if left it can congeal and gunk up the sprayer.

We sprayed three times through the summer, maybe a bit of overkill but we were very conscious of the deer pressure and how easily our hard work could be undone. Once at bud burst (April), once in late May when things were really flying and once in late July to take us through

to the end of the summer.

Results wise, so far so good. There is no noticeable difference between the two compartments. Both sides of the trial plot have equal regrowth after one (very hot and dry) growing season, with the tops of the stems of hazel hitting between 6 and 7 feet, which is very impressive. Interestingly the deer had hammered the bluebells, but where *Trico* had drifted, there was an excellent display. A video shot by the deer stalker shows three CWD walking through the plot, grazing ground vegetation and sniffing at but ignoring the hazel. They really don't like it!

In the future we will just use an increased culling effort and *Trico*, now we know how good it is. I've never been a fan of fences in woods, so am really pleased with the results. I'd recommend giving it a go. Cheap, easy to apply, non-toxic and highly effective.

Luke Quenby,
Community Forester, the Marston Vale Trust, Bedfordshire
07375 805501
Luke.Quenby@marstonvale.org



[credit: Brian Williamson]

Double fence at Westonbirt, topped by hazard tape used last year

A Second Season Using Trico At Westonbirt Arboretum

This season we've repeated our use of *Trico* to help keep the deer off our coppice regrowth. Last year we protected four coups, two with our old system of double fencing and two with a single run of netting with a *Trico*-soaked tape above it. The results were very positive, with the single run of netting plus *Trico* being as effective as the double run of netting (with an orange and white hazard tape above it).

This year we've fenced three big coups with the netting (0.9m plastic deer netting) and *Trico*-soaked tape (1" white electric horse tape). Two have come through completely untouched by deer but the third has had some persistent (but thankfully localised) incursions by roe.

One of the necessities with temporary deer fencing (ours is only up from July to December) is that it is inspected frequently early on and any problems dealt with as quickly as possible. The third coup was the least policed and the slowest to be dealt with and it may well have been the case that had we been quicker off the mark, it too could have come through unscathed.

Brian Williamson,
Avon and South Cotswolds Coppice Group
brian.hurdles@btinternet.com



[credit: Brian Williamson]

0.9m deer netting at Westonbirt, with Trico-soaked horse tape used through this summer



An invitation to a celebration and promotion of quality Forest School for all

- Saturday 26th and Sunday 27th September 2026
- Walesby Forest Activity Centre, Brake Road, Walesby, Newark, Notts, NG22 9NG

We would like to invite members of NCFed as well as family and friends who have an interest in Forest School to be part of the first in a series of Forest School Shows. We are particularly interested to speak with those who are familiar with delivering practical craft workshops, offering demonstrations of traditional skills, giving talks about traditional crafts, coppicing and woodland management or who might like to have a trade stand at the show.

Currently we are anticipating around 1500 visitors to the show each day. There will also be around 400 Forest School practitioners on site from Friday 24th Sept as delegates attending the Forest Schools Association's (FSA) *Annual Conference and The Forest School Show.*

We know those working the woods have a vast knowledge and skill set and we are hoping you would be willing to share some of this with the rapidly growing community of Forest School folk.

We hope this opportunity can benefit both groups and that the Forest School community will be able to help recruit new younger members into the wonderful world of the woodsman and woman, coppice worker and heritage crafter. In addition, we expect it to offer a different perspective on how woodland can be used if managed correctly, particularly for health and wellbeing benefits, for a nation in desperate need of reconnection with nature and the natural world.

Set up day is Thursday 24th Sept in preparation for The FSA Forest School Conference taking place at the same venue, starting on Friday 25th Sept, prior to the show. Opportunities to be involved in the conference will be available. More information to follow.

An online application will be available soon. In the meantime, please contact Mark Clarke, The Forest School Show Director to express your interest and to ask any questions.

Mark Clarke, Forest School Show Director
markgclarke@hotmail.com
07342 784351

the forest school SHOW

sponsored by CREATIVITY DESIGN & PRODUCTION

The Details:

- Workshops, once agreed, are offered in advance of the event to ticket holders, much like at the NCFed Annual Gathering. Workshops ideally are no longer than one and a half hours duration and pitched to your chosen audience, eg, adults only, children over a specific age, or families. Workshop leaders set the price, and we add a percentage to help cover the pitch fee, administration and event costs. Your pitch, parking and camping are all included. You will need to provide a shelter, any furniture* required, all tools, equipment and materials. A risk assessment and proof of public liability insurance will be required in advance.
- Trading pitches offering products and/or services suitable for family Forest School visitors are available at a specially reduced rate for NCFed Members. The full price is £150 per meter stand frontage. NCFed Member price is just £75 per meter. You will need to supply your own shelter, furniture* etc.
- Demonstrators are offered a further reduced-price pitch fee at £50 per meter frontage in return for regular demonstrations taking place on both days between the hours of 10am and 5pm. The fee includes camping and parking for one vehicle, and the ability to sell products related to the demonstrations.
- Speakers – should offer two talks, (one each day), of between ten and twenty minutes each. These should be informative, with content of interest to and appropriate for a family Forest School audience and agreed in advance. Speakers will be offered free visitor tickets to the event, free parking, free camping, refreshments and a goodie bag. A one-off travel expenses payment may be available to speakers travelling over 50 miles directly to the event on presentation of an invoice or receipt.

*Furniture is available to hire at an additional charge.

Going for Gold at Moreton Wood



[credit: Royal Forestry Society]

We have been managing Moreton Wood in Herefordshire for 22 years, and to mark our 20th anniversary we decided to enter the Royal Forestry Society's (RFS) Excellence in Forestry Awards. We are managing the plantation on ancient woodland site (PAWS) through thinning and felling the conifer, and reinstating short rotation coppice in order to create resilience and diversity. It is just two of us that have worked on this project for most of those 22 years, making our entire living from selling the products, while living off-grid in the wood. So naturally there has been very little time to reflect on or acknowledge our achievements - there is always the next job crying out to be completed. Similarly, entering ourselves for an award was not a priority and so it ended up taking us another two years to get round to putting in our application. Then it was back to the grindstone. We found out we had been shortlisted in May this year and two judges came out to the woods to spend a day with



[credit: Jo Callaghan]

Loading a charcoal kiln at Moreton Wood

us, looking at the work we had done and the state of the woodland. It was great to show them what we had been doing and answer questions from two very experienced and knowledgeable forestry professionals. Then it was back to the grindstone once more.

We found out we had won gold in the Small and Farm Woodlands category in June, which gave us an absolutely and unexpectedly wonderful feeling of pride and accomplishment. The award ceremony took place on a sunny day in October at Westonbirt Arboretum in Gloucestershire. It was an inspiring day meeting interesting people and we had the chance to experience the treetop walkway and be shown around the coppice at Westonbirt.

Although our work at Moreton Wood still involves managing the remaining conifer, most of the woodland is now short rotation coppice. The judges were impressed by our 'full circle' approach ensuring the integration of biodiversity, marketing, productivity and educational aims in our woodland management. We are very proud of the fact that we won this award for our coppice work and hope that it will go some way to helping the wider forestry sector to recognise coppicing as an important and valuable silvicultural system.

Jo Callaghan, Herefordshire Coppice Club



[Credit: Royal Forestry Society]

Jo and Paul receiving their award.

Many congratulations to Jo and Paul on their well-deserved award from all at NCFed! You can read about all the winners of this year's RFS Excellence in Forestry Awards here.

Coppice to Craft Weekend Call



[credit: Ed Bagnall]

Calling all woodland workers and heritage craftspeople. The Small Woods Association is seeking enthusiasts to share skills, stories and inspiration at its Coppice to Craft Weekend in 2026.

The weekend aims to shine a light on woodland heritage and will take place at the national charity's training base, the Green Wood Centre, in Ironbridge, Shropshire, on February 28th and March 1st.

Whether you are a hedge layer, pole lathe turner, greenwood worker, or simply passionate about woodland crafts, Small Woods wants to hear from you to help make the event a success. Artisans, being sought to share skills, offer demonstrations and sell their products, include green woodworkers, traditional craftspeople, herbalists and foragers, mead and natural remedy makers, folk musicians and story tellers, bakers, brewers and heritage food creators.

The weekend builds upon the charity's efforts to support and promote greenwood and heritage crafts to ensure that skills vital to the future of our woodlands are not at risk of dying out. To that end, the national organisation offers a full calendar of courses at its base in the Ironbridge Gorge for people to learn coppicing, sweet chestnut gate making, foraging, paddle making, and other crafts from centuries of woodland tradition.

With a focus on sustainable woodland management and wellbeing through woodlands, the charity's members care for more than 31,000 hectares of woods, each parcel adding to a bigger picture of biodiversity, sustainability, and rural heritage. In 2025, Small Woods directly managed 53 hectares and trained 297 people in woodland skills and traditional crafts - from sustainable woodland management to greenwood chair making.



[Credit: Ed Bagnall]

Small Woods tutor Tom Dillon offers guidance to participants on a Green Wood Centre spoon carving course.

If you would like to get involved in the Coppice to Craft Weekend, contact the organiser Rebecca Vincent-Evans as soon as possible by emailing office@smallwoods.org.uk or calling 01952 432769. To find out more about Small Woods, visit smallwoods.org.uk


[credit: Kath Orton]

The world of coppice could be seen as one that's dominated by older, white-skinned people, particularly slightly rustic blokes (with or without beards), doing twee things that aren't particularly relevant to today's world. Whilst there's always a kernel of truth in a cliché, one only had to observe the crowd at this year's Gathering to see that if ever it were true, it isn't now. There seem to be more women across the age range and more younger people involved in the industry now compared to even five years ago. This has to be good and it must be a change that is in part due to training opportunities, available now, that are bringing new people into the woods. The adjectives I've used above - twee, white, rustic are concerns in different ways. The old guard might need to look to younger people for help.

Here's an update on some trainees working on a couple of schemes now. Are you a trainee? Is your business supporting trainees? If so, let us know, we'd like to cover their progress in future editions.

BHMAT
Training for coppice woodland futures

The Bill Hogarth MBE Memorial Apprenticeship Trust (BHMAT)

Bill Hogarth worked as a coppice merchant in the Furness Fells of Cumbria for fifty-six years. He learned his trade from his father from the age of fourteen and was still hard at work in the woods when he died in 1999. BHMAT was set up in February 2000 to ensure that his coppicing skills are recognised and their continuity secured. We run a three year apprenticeship that leads to the Bill Hogarth Coppice Diploma and aims to take on two new apprentices each year. We always welcome those interested in the scheme and any coppice businesses that would like to act as sponsors.

Apprentices are based with a coppice business and receive specialist training in all aspects of the coppice industry (coppicing, first aid, health and safety, chainsaw, various woodland crafts and business skills). Assessment is based on practical skills and a percentage of written coursework.

Successful apprentices are awarded the Bill Hogarth Coppice Diploma and are fully supported throughout the scheme as they set up their own coppice business. To be eligible to apply, applicants must have attended a Woodland Pioneers Introduction to Coppicing week. The next Woodland Pioneers event will be during August 2026 in Silverdale, Lancashire – check our website for details.

In the first year of my apprenticeship I've had the opportunity to develop skills in various crafts from green woodwork, to besom broom making, and running courses. I've also gained confidence in my working which allows me to be independent and grasp new opportunities as they arrive, at the start of my second year.



Dylan, BHMAT Apprentice



[credit: Kath Orton]

Participants at Woodland Pioneers

Forest of Marston Vale Trust

We reported on training opportunities in the Forest of Marston Vale, Bedfordshire in the last edition. The vacancies mentioned were filled in September and now three trainees are working throughout the Forest Team's broad areas of operation as well as spending regular, two-week placements with a local contractor, another environmental charity, a large estate and a coppice business. Luke Quenby, the Forest's Community Forester reports that the trainees are making great progress, are very enthusiastic and enjoying their very varied work. "We received over 100 applications for the three, twelve-month roles" he said, adding "So there's clearly a good level of interest amongst young people, in working in forestry".

The placements have been made possible through funding from the Nature Recovery Project. The Forest Team has been working with NRP for several years, carrying out woodland creation and planting schemes for them. They are also one of the contributing partners in the Holcot Wood restoration project (see elsewhere for details) as well as funding the trainees scheme.

From two trainees...

Anna Lynch

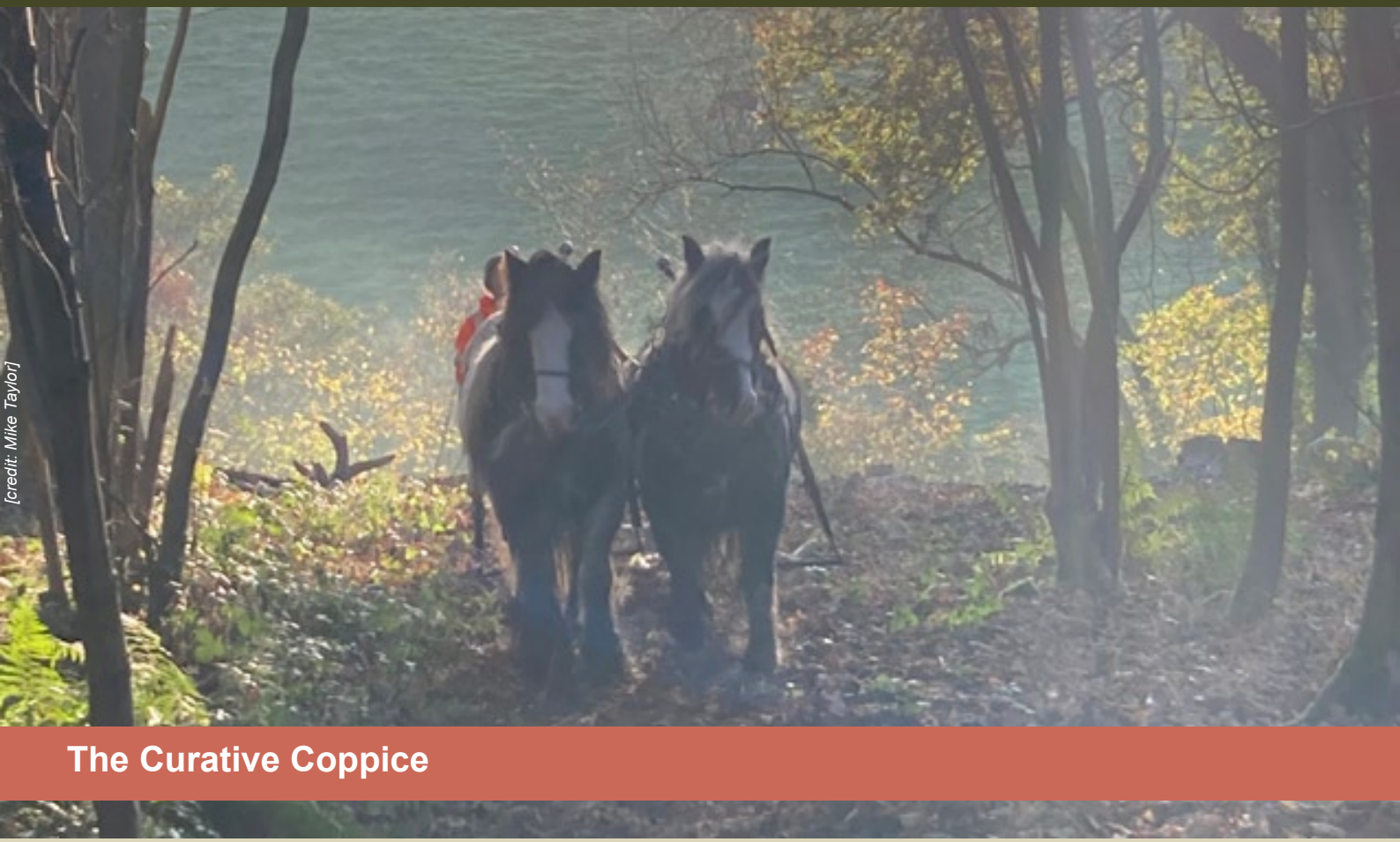
Growing up in the South Lakes gave me a lifelong love for the outdoors and a passion for nature which eventually inspired me to pursue a career in forestry and conservation. As my university degree course in woodland ecology offers me the opportunity to undertake a placement year to expand and apply my knowledge, the traineeship at Marston Vale came along at the perfect time and is already proving invaluable for not only learning new skills in woodland management but also for making contacts within the industry. The various placements we get involved in offer a fantastic way to gain exposure and to really see the wood for the trees! Once this placement year is finished I will complete my degree course and then use the experience gained here to decide on my next steps. I do feel my future lies in small scale woodland management so this is a very exciting time to be entering the industry.



Alex Arbenz



Before starting this job I was an oak frame carpenter, with a curiosity for conservation and a fascination for how and where the timber I used came from. Those questions led me to pursue a career in forestry where I could play a role in reducing imported timber, improving neglected woodlands and benefiting biodiversity through methods like continuous cover forestry. Since starting in September, I have learnt a huge amount, and have benefited from working with a very knowledgeable team. I am currently working on a woodland management plan which is a great opportunity to demonstrate what I have learnt so far. The mix of practical and theory work has been a great way to understand what goes into each project, whether it's restoring an Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland or creating new woodland. Looking ahead, I am excited to keep expanding my knowledge and to have a career in woodland management.



[credit: Mike Taylor]

The Curative Coppice

All of you who know me are probably aware that I was diagnosed with prostate cancer just over two years ago and underwent surgery almost exactly two years to the day before this edition of Cleft Stick was published. You are thinking – "what has this got to do with coppicing and woodlands?" The answer is simple - everything!

After the diagnosis and especially in the first few months following surgery, I was not good either physically or mentally. Once I got my strength back a little, Julie (The Boss), drove me to the woods and almost instantaneously I felt better. It was a cold February morning but I was back in the place that bought me joy. The trees were bare and stark, the wind whistled, cold and biting from the east; I was once again in my happy place.

Unfortunately this feeling didn't last and on subsequent visits, frustration and sometimes anger surfaced as I physically couldn't do what I thought was needed. At one point I seriously considered stopping altogether and perhaps selling the woodland.

Over the next couple of months these feelings of frustration lessened as through necessity I spent more time looking and listening and less time working. I began to fall back in love with my woodland. To those who don't understand this feeling, these words will appear odd. I hope they resonate to many of you though.

So, here I am at the start of another coppice season, another winter of hard work, scratches, whacks in the face, aching backs and lots of mud. I wouldn't change it for the world.

The big change in me is the desire to ensure the next generation get the chance to do what I have done - to work the woods, to protect a way of life that benefits not only us as individuals but also the very woodlands we work.

If I ever bore people by going on about the need to train apprentices, to support the next generation, I offer no apology; it is something that has now become ingrained in me.

To the many people who helped me and Julie, especially over the last two and a half years, I thank you from the bottom of my heart.

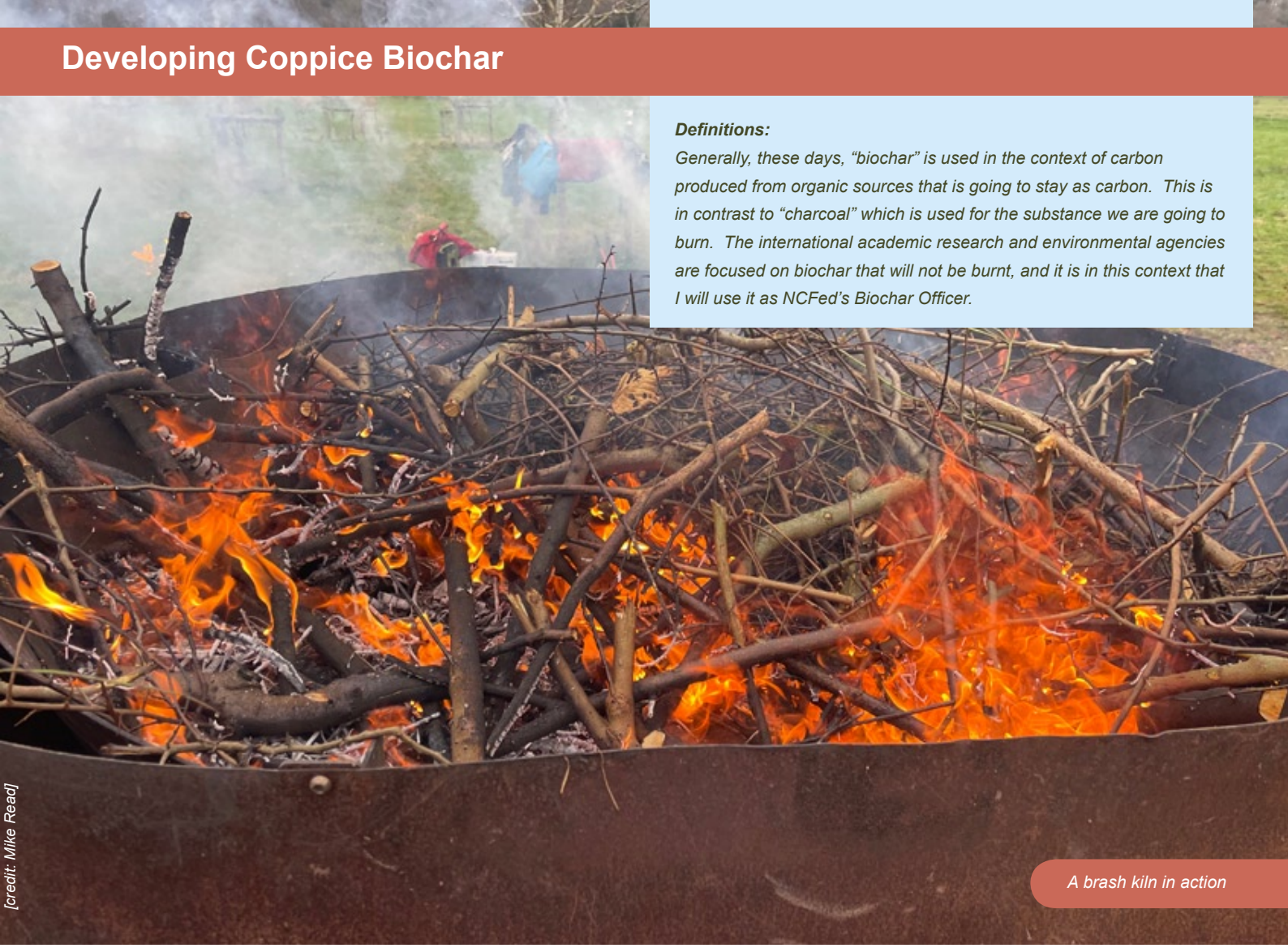
To those guys of a certain age - get your PSA tests done. It saved my life, it could save yours.

Mike Taylor,
Chair of West Midlands Coppice Group
mjtay66@yahoo.com

Developing Coppice Biochar

Definitions:

Generally, these days, "biochar" is used in the context of carbon produced from organic sources that is going to stay as carbon. This is in contrast to "charcoal" which is used for the substance we are going to burn. The international academic research and environmental agencies are focused on biochar that will not be burnt, and it is in this context that I will use it as NCFed's Biochar Officer.



[credit: Mike Read]

A brash kiln in action

At this year's NCFed Weekend Gathering a well-attended biochar breakout session demonstrated significant interest in, and knowledge of, biochar. Biochar is made from any organic material (biomass) by a heat process called pyrolysis (Greek for separation by fire). Pyrolysis separates the organic material into carbon (if you stop the process before it turns to ash) and volatile gases. Biochar has many uses. Traditionally the resulting carbon was used in iron smelting and latterly for barbecues. The ancient indigenous Amazonians knew the value of adding biochar to their poor soils but it was not until the early 21st century that scientists' interest in its carbon sequestering and soil enhancing properties took off.

There seems no doubt that adding biochar to farming and horticultural processes can be beneficial. In their 2021 study, Biochar in agriculture – A systematic review of 26 global meta-analyses, Schmidt *et al* concluded: "Agronomic biochar research is a rapidly evolving field of research moving from less than 100 publications in 2010 to more than 15,000 by the end of 2020." They summarised 26 rigorously selected meta-analyses published since 2016 that investigated a multitude of soil properties and agronomic performance parameters impacted by biochar application, for example, effects on yield, root biomass, water use efficiency, microbial activity, soil organic carbon and greenhouse gas emissions. All 26 meta-analyses show compelling evidence of the overall beneficial effect of biochar for all investigated agronomic parameters.



[Credit Mark Shipperlee]

Plant roots embedded in biochar as they seek out the nutrients and water within.

Biochar is a highly porous, sponge-like structure that attracts and retains moisture and many other things it may come into contact with. This can be beneficial to plant health and crop yield, and can minimise fertiliser losses. Overall, adding biochar may facilitate improvement in soil fertility, water retention and structure, while also sequestering carbon



[credit: Clive Cobley]

Using an upside down ring kiln as a cap flame system set on a metal ring

and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. So why does the Environment Agency still classify biochar as a low-risk waste product and restrict its use to one tonne per hectare in any twelve-month period? There are potential environmental hazards of producing and using biochar. The feedstock could be contaminated; the production process may produce hazardous chemicals (polyaromatic hydrocarbons etc.) and post-production contaminants may be introduced. Also, the desired soil benefits may not initially be achieved if you do not "charge" the biochar before use, i.e. mix it with organic products such as compost or manure. Uncharged biochar will adsorb water and nutrients from the soil (by holding them in a very thin layer at it's surface), depleting the growing environment temporarily.

In September 2025, the Environment Agency's Chief Scientist's Group concluded that "In general, clean wood residues or waste is a favourable biochar feedstock for preventing the worst contaminant load in the produced biochar". As coppicers we have an advantage and could, as some already do, make biochar from a quality source. We have a great opportunity to share our experiences and find out how best this can be done to produce a quality product.

During the biochar breakout session at the Federation's recent Gathering four themes emerged which, with your help, we will address in the coming year:

Getting Started

A number of people wanted to make biochar, and requested a steer on how to get going. There is lots of information on the internet. Try this link. Let me know if you have your own favourite.

Standards and measurement of biochar

At the Gathering there was a strong desire to make sure we are producing quality biochar so that we can be confident we are selling a quality product. The quality will depend on source material and production method. So how do we measure quality? There are voluntary European standards which are used for carbon trading in the UK. With expert advice from an analysis laboratory at Nottingham University (who lead the Biochar Demonstrator funded by UK Research and Innovation we are starting to look at what standards should apply to small scale production and how we can test our biochar. We are looking to trial the testing approach. If you are selling biochar as a soil amendment and want to be part of this trial, please let me know. One issue that keeps emerging in discussion is whether charcoal finings can be applied to soils. My hope is that we will soon be able to address this.



[credit: Mike Read]

Hedgelayers converting waste brash into biochar

Production equipment

Participants in the discussion are using different kilns and processors. What is the best way of producing biochar from different feedstocks and circumstances? Do they produce an equally good product. Researchers have concluded that biochar for soil enhancement and carbon sequestration should be produced at high temperatures (above 400°C). A flame cap design seems to be commonly used, but there are some coppicers using retort kilns to produce biochar.

Who buys biochar

Who is buying coppice-produced biochar and what is the potential market? The market for biochar is not well established. Horticulturalists seem to be leading the way, with biochar-based compost being a possible replacement for peat composts. Adding to compost and manure reduces methane emissions (adding to chicken manure is gaining momentum). There is evidence coming from UKRI that incorporating biochar during tree planting increases the success rate. Many more possible applications are being discussed.

There was agreement at the session that we should have a series of webinars to share our knowledge about biochar and address these themes. As a start, I suggest existing biochar producers tell us how they are making biochar, and who they are selling it to. Please contact me if you are a current producer so I can include you in the webinar.

I hope everyone who is interested in biochar will participate. Do you want to participate in the trial to measure the quality of your biochar? Will you share your biochar experience on a webinar? What is your experience of marketing biochar? How did you get started and was there anything on the internet that helped? Please email me at biochar@ncfed.org.uk if you want to join in. We have now set up a biochar Whats App chat group for any members of NCFed Affiliated Coppice and Supporter Groups (a note about this is included elsewhere in this edition of Cleft Stick). So, include your full name, mobile number and name of your coppice or supporter group, if you want to join the biochar WhatsApp chat to share your experience or are wanting to get started.

Min Burdett,
Biochar Officer and Group Rep
For Rockingham Forest Coppice Group
biochar@ncfed.org.uk



[credit: Kiri Roberts]



[credit: Dave Ewers]

Dorset: Participants on the build a shave horse course held at Dorset Coppice Group's Living Classroom in Bonsley Wood

Dorset Coppice Group

At Dorset Coppice Group the cutting season has commenced in Bonsley Wood. We get together on the 2nd Saturday of the month and sometimes the 4th Saturday too (see website / Facebook page for details). Spoon Club takes place on the 3rd Saturday of the month, subject to Mark Codling not jet-setting out of the country! Craig Holloway ran an Association of Pole Lathe Turners and Green Woodworkers local group meeting on the 15th November.

The premier show for Dorset Coppice Group this summer was Stock Gaylard Oak Fair in August where we had a horseshoe of members' gazebos and a few other members elsewhere on the showground too. Other events included Burley Steam Show, Burley Cider Festival, Turnworth Village Fair, and more. I also attended Last of the Summer Cider Festival at Myncen Farm, where I momentarily thought I had sampled too much apple juice but then realised the craft marquee was rotating through 90 degrees and collapsing due to strong winds! No serious injuries, praise be.

On the subject of strong winds, Dorset Coppice Craft Taster Day was postponed on 4th October due to a yellow wind warning, and they were right. Leaving aside the FISA guidance to not work under tree canopy in 40 mph winds, it would not have been a conducive day for tutoring wet, cold students with a voice disappearing in the wind. The decision to postpone meant a lot of work for our chair David Ewers, but it was a good call. The event was re-scheduled for Sat 22nd November.

A member's Christmas social is scheduled for Sunday 7th Dec 2025.

Peter Jameson,
Dorset Coppice Group Rep

Hampshire Coppice Group

During the summer, Hampshire members attended numerous shows including the Stock Gaylard Oak Fair, along with the Dorset Coppice Group. Despite being friends and neighbours, the organisers clearly feared some sort of coppice showdown and placed the two groups at opposite ends of the site!

Hampshire's AGM was held at Butser Ancient Farm,



[credit: Rachel Kellett]

East Anglia: Members of the East Anglian Coppice Network at Shadwell Wood in July 2025

roughly in the centre of the county. The post of Chair for the group was contested, resulting in a cliff-hanger vote. I consider the result - Kester as Chair and Darren as Vice-Chair will lead to revitalisation of the group whilst retaining a level of continuity.



[Credit: Pete Jameson]

Hampshire CG Vice-chair explaining the joints used in the replica Saxon Hall at Butser Ancient Farm. Note the thatching spars showing through the base coat of wattle.

An evening member's meeting is scheduled for Thursday 11th December at a pub on the edge of the New Forest. The plan is to network, review the year just gone and to look to the year ahead.

Peter Jameson,
Hampshire Coppice Group Rep

East Anglian Coppice Network

A visit to Shadwell and Hales Woods

As I write this, I realise that our group, the East Anglian Coppice Network, was birthed 10 years ago this very year and at Hales Wood, Essex.

Both Shadwell and Hales, under half a mile apart, are ancient coppice on chalky boulder clay. Shadwell is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) for ancient woodland, oxlip, coppice etc, Hales is a National Nature Reserve (NNR). Shadwell, at 7.1 hectares, is managed by Essex Wildlife Trust, Hales is managed by our own Andy Basham with a team of volunteers (under guidance of Natural England). We visited both woods as a group, on one day in July 2025.

We started at Shadwell. Here, through a dedicated bench, some of us learned about Ray Tabor; how have I survived these ten years without knowing this national treasure? His book Traditional Woodland Crafts, I now know, is a standard text. Ray worked for much of his life in this reserve, buying and selling traditional products. He chaired the conservation activities of the largest Wildlife Trust in the UK and led courses in woodland crafts and management.



[credit: Brian Williamson]

Avon and South Cotswolds: Kiri Roberts makes a hurdle ahead of the coppice market at Westonbirt

The seven hectares are fenced to exclude fallow deer, supporting the coppicing organised by Essex Wildlife Trust. We observed so many butterflies, including silver-washed fritillary, (with similarities to the golden retriever as it loves attention), gatekeeper, meadow brown, purple hairstreak, and brown argus. Although effective, the disadvantage of covering hazel coppice stools with brash to protect from deer, became obvious, especially using large rounds of hazel. These have to be removed at the next coppice cycle to effectively cut near to the base. It also suggests that the wood's deer fence is out of repair!

At Hales Wood we lunched and shared our stories, welcoming three new members. Andy showed us coppice outside (well browsed) and inside the fence (part of Andy's arrangement with Natural England is for him to maintain the deer fence), and talked of his management:

- Layering the hazel – in particular the work done by Jacob about ten years ago. Andy layers, leaves for all the next eight year cycle, and at the next cut, coppices the parent, and lightly trims new shoots from the layer, then maybe severing the layered stem at nine or ten years.
- Working with volunteers, the joys (couldn't do it without them) and challenges (like insurance).
- Biochar burner on wheels. The burn is slightly different to a charcoal burn and the product used as a soil improver (see Min Burdett's piece about biochar elsewhere in this edition – Ed)

Rachel Kellet,
Secretary of EACN

Avon and South Cotswolds Coppice Group

As part of the coppice restoration team at Westonbirt Arboretum, I've been keen to connect with coppice folk and have recently become the Rep for the Avon and South Cotswolds Coppice Group (ASCCG). I aim to give new energy to what has been a somewhat dormant group over the last few years. I received the baton from Brian Williamson, with gratitude for his service to the group these last years and for being a stalwart supporter of coppice and a founding member of NCFed no less. Gracious thanks also to Louis O'Sullivan (former secretary) and others who have been involved in starting up the group and keeping things going.

My aim is to put new energy into strengthening our local network by arranging more group activities, getting



[credit: Min Burdett]

Rockingham Forest: Erik and team coppicing overstood hazel, 6 to 8 planted in each group 12 to 15 years ago

outdoors and connecting with those who may not yet be aware of the group or the Federation. Having been involved in many woody and environmental initiatives over the years around Stroud and Bristol, I believe that there are many folk out there who would be keen to know the group exists. I intend to herd them up!



[Credit: Brian Williamson]

Westonbirt coppicers advertise the annual coppice market at the arboretum's entrance.

As an initial offering, I invited group members to visit the coppice I work in at Westonbirt Arboretum, during the coppice team's autumn, bi-annual Coppice Market event. The jaw-dropping autumn colours in the Arboretum (the collection of Acers in particular is wildly stunning) provided us with a flush of visitors to the market. They enjoyed the showcase of coppice products and related greenwood crafts for sale as well as demonstrations including split-hazel hurdle making, charcoal making in a retort kiln, blacksmithing, pyrography, bowl turning and oak cleaving. Some ASCCG group members popped in and helped out with sausages on the barbecue and revived me from the overwhelm of talking to many, many members of the public! The market, which had a sense of community and fun, felt like a real success. In future it will be offered as a regular forum for ASCCG group members or as a platform for selling locally produced craft. Our next one will be in March 2026.

As I now embark on my new cutting season, I will be arranging social meet ups across the region to bring members together and discuss what we might like to do over the coming months. I encourage anyone in the region who is working in or interested in coppicing and connecting, to get in touch with me to join in.

Naomi Cantor,
Rep for Avon and South Cotswolds Coppice Group
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Rockingham Forest Coppice Group

Rockingham Forest Coppice Group has met several times this year. A couple of times this spring and summer

we visited Easton Hornstocks, a lime coppice. In a previous article for Cleft Stick we explained how the fibrous inner bark from lime trees - lime bast - was an important source of material for rope making and other uses. We were invited to try our hand at making our own cordage. Starting in June (with the necessary Natural England permission) a few of us joined the Easton Hornstocks coppicers and helped them coppice some lime. We were told that in a wet year the lime bark almost slips off the harvested wood. However, with the dry spring and early summer there was very little sap, and the bark was hard to peel. Enough bark was stripped for us to take away and produce some bast over the summer. A larger group met in September to share our experiences and turn our hand to rope making.

Erik Ansell is a young coppicer and hedge layer whose work is bringing more of our woodland into production. This year we also had a Rockingham Forest Group gathering, hosted by the owner, at one of the woods where Erik works. The wood is a SSSI managed for shooting and conservation. There were great discussions including how well shooting and coppicing can thrive together and the perennial debate about what to do with brash.

Here's what Erik has to say about another serendipitous encounter with a woodland owner:

"Over the last 10 years I've been hedge laying and coppicing. I started off hedge laying but found myself falling in love with hazel coppicing. Now I am fortunate to manage several coppice sites on a regular basis.

In the middle of the summer I visited a machinery shop and while parking I was approached by a local land owner who said he had an area of overstood hazel and asked if I would be interested in taking on the project. A few days passed and we visited the site and were amazed at the planting scheme. The hazel was planted twelve to fifteen years ago in groups 6 metres apart, each group in a circular formation (apparently an approach recommended by professional gardeners). Each circle contained about 7 or 8 individually planted hazel. We were very happy with what we saw and agreed to start coppicing in early September so that we could be out of the way of the farmer's planned autumn activity nearby.


[Credit: Min Burdett]

Erik Ansell's team getting to grips with the overstood coppice.

After about two weeks, with a decent sized team (but not full time), we coppiced the whole area. In total the 0.3 acres produced 2952 stakes and 1190 binders, proving how valuable even small areas of coppice are for producing hedge laying materials. The total value of materials cut was just over £6,500 showing coppicing overshoot hazel makes total financial sense."

Min Burdett, Group Rep of the Rockingham Forest Coppice Group
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[credit: Kiri Roberts]



[Credit: Richard Lofthouse]

Hawthorn haws

Happiness is a Sussex Gathering

The annual Weekend Gathering was brilliant (THANKS to all who organised it), partly because I grew up in West Sussex as a child and the South Downs exert a strange, profound attraction that I feel as much as I observe. I can only summarise this by noting how, having walked back to my car in the great darkness of the Friday night, I just stood there and absorbed everything. Looking east the strange glow of the lights over Portsmouth, that I remember as a kid. Looking up, a clear sky and no light pollution. Behind me the tinkle of music and human voices, conviviality over the hot coals and some venison alongside that very fine beer from local Langham Brewery. How else to put it: happiness?



On the subject of venison, I can offer a clear way to beat inflation having taken Russ' butchery course (sustainablemeateater.co.uk). Buy a haunch and dissect it yourself, and the price effectively halves from £25 to £12 per kg. You would otherwise have spent the time on your phone.

Pricing stakes

On a selfish note, I've been laying hedges, for the very first time with stakes and binders from the coppice I am restoring near Watlington, Oxfordshire. That sounds grand but in practice it's been gruelling. The amount of standing deadwood and bendy material mean that I am discarding 4:1 what I can actually use. This cannot be carried over into pricing but I'd welcome any market intelligence about where we are with pricing. A contract hedge layer at the NHLS Nationals said he had recently charged £32 per metre for an admittedly overstood hedge, but that was a figure I had never heard of until now. I'm charging £1 per stake, delivered free if local, and

£1.20 for binders. It feels too low but mostly because the coppice is poor (richardlofthouse@gmail.com).

Seeding a hedgerow

Onto the main story. I took a hedgerow seed harvesting workshop at Harcourt Arboretum, owned by the University of Oxford. I have to say it was pretty good. The Arboretum has a 350-metre boundary wanting a hedge, so they need at least 2,000 plants at six per metre. Instead of going to a nursery they have decided to seed it all from an existing hedge, and in a mast year too. You collect the seeds and pulp them in a big bucket, getting the flesh off. Repeated rinsing and draining removes the pulp while the heavier seeds fall to the bottom. You collect and dry them. Then stratification, warm then cold, the recommended website for this is nativetreesfromseed.com; but there are others such as agroforestry.co.uk. They offer sometimes quite different timings so the upshot is: pay attention and plant them when they germinate! Have I acted on any of this? Incredibly, I have. I've now got a little stratification diary and in damp bags of vermiculite I've got at the least, several hundred hawthorns; blackthorns; dog rose; guelder rose and spindle. These will feed into a hedge I'm growing on a farm near Wheatley, also Oxfordshire, the boundary to a struggling orchard. The central requirement for all this is the one in least supply: patience. But I'm happy to wait in this instance.



[Credit: Richard Lofthouse]

Rose hips

Finally, and back to money worries, why are chainsaw boots £250-£300, chainsaw trousers £250-£300 and telescopic (non-powered) pole saws £200-400? To cut that many stakes at £1 each! We're in a wildly inflationary era so somehow we have to carry it across to the economics of coppicing and increase our pricing. Difficult but imperative. For the time being, tuck into self-butchered venison instead of steak and know that you helped to reduce out of control browsing of hazel regrowth.

Richard Lofthouse, NCFed Press Officer
richardlofthouse@gmail.com



[Credit: Richard Lofthouse]

Pulped haws ready for drying and stratification

How I recognise a tree

In a crowded street
I will see you.
The way you walk
the colour of your hair.
Your outline carved in my mind.

I've seen the tones
you like to wear in autumn,
you are rooted in style.
And when you catch my eye
that bud of a smile blossoms
into a summer grin.

As you raise supple limbs
for an embrace,
the fruit of your scent
seeds a little laugh in me
that crackles like dry leaves.

Abby Gibbs



About Abby:

I am a member of Dorset Coppice Group. I've had a 30-year career in nature conservation and am also a poet. This poem is one of five that were chosen for an exhibition at Poole Lighthouse in October / November this year. The picture shows me performing during the summer.



[Credit: Kirt Roberts]

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, 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, cooperation 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. They 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, likeminded individuals that you can cooperate, 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;
• 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? Alternatively, there is now an option to join a holding group designed for anyone not in an existing group's area. Full details on the website.



[Credit: Kirt Roberts]

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

ncfed.org.uk/news

National Coppice Federation

Supporting the Coppice Industry