



Tree Watch

Issue 6

August 2010

As of 18-Aug-2010 we have **3925** trees in our database and **3440** photographs

In this issue there is a brief synopsis of the trees recorded in and around the Borough, but of course our members are interested in trees wherever they are. Patricia tells us about an old yew in West Berkshire, whilst Gill goes farther afield - to Lebanon and the remnants of the once mighty cedars.

I hope you have noticed and appreciate our improved web pages. They now include the latest newsletter and Tree Watch as well as our membership form and *ad hoc* publications - the history of the oriental plane in Wokingham Town and a tree walk around Bearwood Recreation Ground. These web pages are hosted by TVERC (Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre) and we are very grateful to Ellen Lee for the facilitating this. However we think we should have our own website, but we need a web master. If you think you'd like to be our web master - or know someone who might be interested - then please let us know.

We are all likely to become tree wardens if WDVTA becomes associated with the Tree Council. This is in the planning stage - more in the next newsletter. One of the main activities of the Tree Council is planting trees and they organise an annual "Tree Week" in December. If you are as old as me, you may well remember the first one - "*Plant a tree in '73*"; followed by "*and one more in '74*". WBC run a tree planting programme every year, between November and March. They plant a variety of trees, dependant on the site and space available; and are keen to plant some trees that will become future veterans. These need to be planted where there is space to grow and mature. If you know of anywhere suitable, then do let us know. The Trees and Landscape team want your suggestions. We haven't got a formal mission statement (yet), but if we had it would certainly include (as suggested by Fee), "*Planting trees to ensure multiple generations of trees in the hope that a few become the veteran trees of the future.*"

The next issue of Tree Watch will be November 2010 and the copy deadline is 31st October. All comments and contributions please to: Elaine Butler datamanager@wdvta.org.uk



We all know that trees provide good habitats for many animals, but this one is rather unusual.

An eagle-eyed Barbara was walking along Riverside Walk, and spotted this fox nestled in an old pollarded crack willow beside the Emm Brook.

She didn't have her camera with her, but ran back to the car for her mobile phone. This is the excellent result.



If you want to see a larger version of this photo - look on the Yahoo site - in the photos folder.

WOKINGHAM'S LARGEST TREES.

The largest tree in our database is an oak with a girth of 10.5m. It was dead when recorded in 2006 and has since been felled. There is no trace of it now and unfortunately we do not have any photos of it. Our next largest tree is a multi-stem alder with a girth of 9m (MRN 2352), for which we do have a photo. That is followed by a maiden oak. All are in Finchampstead.

Our 'top ten' maidens (alive, standing and measured at 1.5m above ground level) comprise five oaks, four Wellingtonias and a cedar:-

MRN 338	girth 8.9m	Oak	in Finchampstead
MRN 361	girth 8.2m	English Oak	in Hurst
MRN 1413	girth 7.9m	Cedar	in Remenham
MRN 1378	girth 7.7m	Oak	in Remenham *
MRN 1428	girth 7.6m	Cedar	in Remenham
MRN 2278	girth 7.5m	English Oak	in Ruscombe *
MRN 1888	girth 7.5m	Wellingtonia	in Barkham
MRN 2494	girth 7.3m	Wellingtonia	in Finchampstead **
MRN 2487	girth 7.3m	Wellingtonia	in Finchampstead **
MRN 1369	girth 7.2m	Oak	in Remenham **

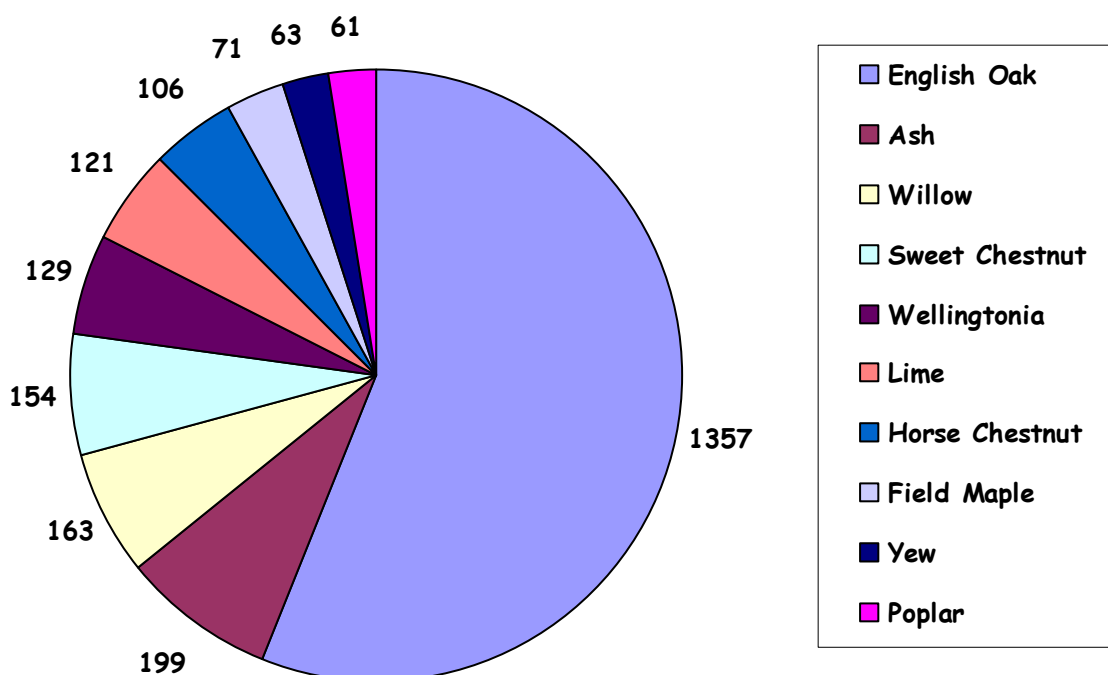
[MRN = master record number; ** = public access; * = visible to public]

We have photos for just one of these 'top ten', which is a great shame. Some of these large trees do have public access, so perhaps someone would like to take a photo of them. MRN 1888 is the largest Wellingtonia in our database so far. It's on private land and so you can't visit it, but there are plenty of other Wellingtonias in the Borough. Have you found a larger one?



If you look at the records for these trees, you'll see that they are incomplete to varying degrees and they will certainly be the first candidates for verification, when that process is extending beyond Wokingham Town. If you would like to verify any of these records, please contact me at datamanager@wdvta.org.uk

You will not be surprised to learn that we have recorded more oaks than any other species. There are 1357 English oaks (*Quercus robur*) in the database. That's 35% of all trees recorded. The chart below shows the top ten most commonly recorded trees. Together they account for 62% of recorded trees.



PROFILE – CORALIE RAMSEY

Coralie has been mentioned several times in Tree Watch. She is part of the Wokingham Town verifying team and helps other surveyors with identification.



I am a practising (I mean that in both contexts) arboricultural consultant. I've been training for 3 years and working for 6 months. I left Holt School, Wokingham, in the early 1980's into a recession and although careers advice pointed me in the direction of forestry, an office job came up first and, well, girls just didn't do trees back then! Fast forward 25 years of office work and I finally found all the pieces fell into place to follow my dream into arboriculture. Just being out and about with trees has to be considered a big part of the remuneration and tree people are so generous with their time and skills. Along the way, I've met some of the top tree folk in Europe and none of them say they are experts, I don't think anyone can be. Trees don't talk (I did say I was learning...) and they function on a far longer time scale than us. Reading them is akin to second guessing ineffability, but it's so worthwhile!

I was born near Cambridge, sugar beet grew in vast fields and trees were landmarks to my mind, because there were so few. Fewer still after Dutch Elm Disease took hold and I remember as a child feeling real loss that so many trees just went. The same could happen with oak (various Oak Declines) Beech (climate change) and Chestnut (disease). I feel the possible imminent changes in tree stock makes cataloguing our veteran trees important. So I was one of those who crammed into Wokingham Town Hall in October 2007 because I was so delighted to find WDVTA existed and now I am pleased to be able to use my developing arb. skills as a good excuse to survey trees in my spare time.

Coralie Ramsey

THE ALDWORTH YEW

In last August's issue of Tree Watch, Linda Ashwell described the magnificent Crowhurst yew. This August, Patricia Green is equally impressed by the Aldworth yew.

This ancient yew tree grows on a mound at the side of St Mary's church, and was certainly old when the church was built. Like all such yew trees, its large trunk is hollow so that it is impossible to date the tree, but it is estimated to be 1000 years old. Part of the tree collapsed in 1976. It has newer stems fused with the older ones, and one large branch is propped. Traditionally it may mark the site of a pre-Christian burial ground. This tree and the

church on the downs between Newbury and Streatley (SU 5540 7939) are well worth a visit.



Yews are symbols of age, also of renewal and simplicity. The yew, *Taxus baccata* is a native of chalk downlands and retains its lower branches so that nothing grows in the deep shade beneath the tree. The male flowers shed clouds of pollen like smoke in February, and the red fruits (arils) are a favourite food for thrushes. It would be interesting to record whether all the old churches in WDVTA area have, like Shinfield and Grazeley, at least one large old yew tree in their grounds.

Patricia Green, Shinfield Coordinator

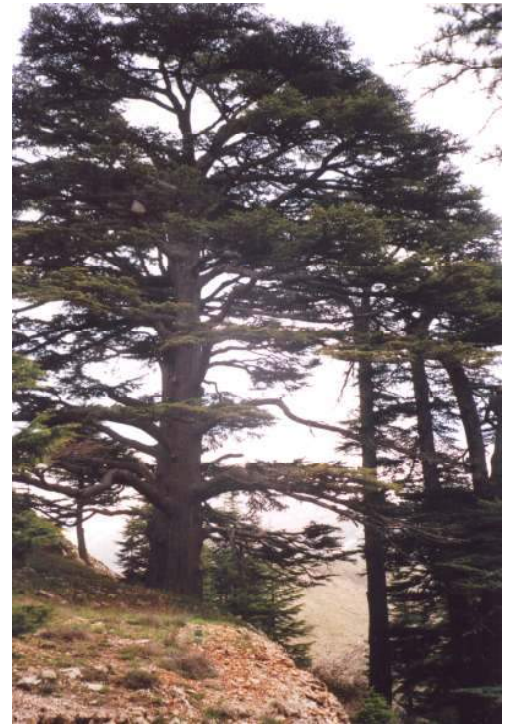
Note: This tree is recorded on the Woodland Trust site as a live, standing stump with a girth of 3.53m at ground level (tree number 10589). It is also on the yew register, where its girth is recorded as 3.96m. For more details see their website www.ancient-yew.org (search their Yew Gazetteer).

We have 63 yews in our database, 43 of which are in churchyards and 10 in domestic gardens. They have been recorded in 11 of the 17 parishes, with most (24) in Wokingham Town. Both Swallowfield and Arborfield have a yew over 5m in circumference.

'THE CEDARS OF LEBANON'

Earlier this year I was lucky enough to travel to the Lebanon for a week's touring holiday. I had been once before in 1981 at the height of the civil war and wanted to see how the country had survived. It was unrecognisable, with brand new public buildings in Beirut, a bank on every corner and far too many blocks of flats built up and down the coast. Maybe because of an incident in Israel, we were not allowed to travel to the far south to see Tyre but, as compensation, we were taken unexpectedly up into the mountains to see the Cedars.

'The Cedars of Lebanon', what an evocative phrase, reminding one of biblical references and ancient Middle Eastern civilizations! Our expectations were high as we were driven up and up into the Lebanese Maritime Range with deep gorges and well cultivated terraces full of apple, pear, plum, peach and apricot orchards; and roadsides dotted with deep red anemones. There were distant views of monasteries and snow topped mountains as the road twisted through busy small villages until we eventually reached the forest town of Becharre (birth place of Gibran Khalil who wrote 'The Prophet'). The Cedars are now on the edge of a ski-resort, sadly deserted because of no snow at the time of our visit.



Thousands of years of cutting the valuable timber has depleted what may once, centuries ago, have been



a thickly clad hillside. Now there is a modest and carefully protected series of groves of cedars. We were told that there were 3 in the whole country. As it was so quiet, the souvenir stallholders encouraged us to clamber through a well used gap in a wire fence and explore the pathways at the edge of the reserve. So it was possible to photograph the fine trees and the storm battered relics as well as a small nursery of new young trees. The grove is partly surrounded by a wall (shown in the photo), built at the instigation of Queen Victoria when she heard of the sad depletion of the trees, but we were assured that they are now carefully protected as part of the great heritage of The Lebanon.

Later, down on the coast, in the very ancient city of Byblos, we discussed the huge value of the trade in cedar wood over 5000 years during which the country had been, amongst other things, an Egyptian colony, a Greek state, a Roman colony and a thriving Phoenician trading area where timber was sold for buildings, palaces, ships and funerary furniture all over the known world. Cedars of Lebanon were brought to England around the 1630s to grace many estates and gardens throughout the country. Maybe we now have more healthy trees in this country than we saw in the Lebanon!

Gill Hopkins

DID YOU KNOW?

The **scalped oak moth** (*Crocallis elinguaris*) is not found on oak trees. Despite its name, the caterpillars feed on a variety of trees and bushes, including hazel, lime and willow, but not oak! So how did it get its common name?

With a wing-span of 32-41mm, it has a single generation each year and flies in July and August.

(Photo © Nick Greated-Davies; ukmoths.org.uk)



Other than coppiced stools, trees seldom grow old in woodland: if woodmen do not cut them down, competition from neighbouring trees forbids them to live through a long period of decline. Ancient upstanding trees are a strong indication that a site is not an ancient wood."

Oliver Rackham (2006) "Woodland"

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

When a tree is felled is it removed from the database?

No. We want to record any trees lost through natural or unnatural causes, as well as any other significant changes that happen to a tree since it was first recorded. We have a separate recording sheet to record such updates and a separate update field in the database. Currently we have only 24 trees with an updated status, 22 of which have been felled, 2 have died but are still standing and 2 have suffered a significant loss of branches. The latest known status of any tree is shown in the information box of each tree on our web map. We have a good photographic record of the demise of one English Oak (MRN 194) in Myrtles Field, Wokingham Town:



Measured with a girth of 3.25m in July 2006, it was dead by May 2008, and a rather sad pile of logs in January 2009.

We have a lot of information on the Yahoo site, and some people have difficulty finding what they want. It's well worth spending a few minutes looking in the various folders to see what's there - and remember that any member can upload files or put another link onto the site. If you have any recommendations that would improve the site, please let me know.

Once you have entered the Yahoo site, the left-hand pane gives access to

Home	Latest stats for the database; link to WDVTA web pages
Messages	Read the messages sent to the group; send messages to the group
Files	Lots of useful information (see examples in READING below)
Photos	Various photos - not the photos in the database - they are on our map website
Links	Links to various websites (see examples in WEBSITES below)
Database	Not the WDVTS database, but simple tables of information
Calendar	WDVTA and associated events - any member can add items

Some recommendations from the Yahoo site:

WEBSITES:

There are currently nine folders in the [Links](#) section as well as links to our website and to manuals for the eTrex H and Geko GPS units. [Copyright prevents us putting these manuals on the site as files.] Do let me know if a link doesn't work. They all worked when put on the Yahoo site, but of course pages are changed and removed and I don't check them all every day!!

- ① There is a separate folder for the [Woodland Trust](#) because their website can be difficult to navigate. There are six links in this folder. One takes you directly to their database search and another to their interactive map.
- ① In the [Websites of local history groups and other organisations](#) there are links to a variety of organisations, ranging from the Friends of Ruscombe Wood and the Berkshire Ornithological Club to BBOWT, TVERC and 'Nature Societies online'. Please add any local groups that have been missed.
- ① From the [Other useful links](#) folder you can access the website of various organisations including DEFRA, The Forestry Commission, The Ancient Yew, The Tree Register and the Tree Council.

READING:

There are currently nine folders in the [Files](#) section, many with subfolders: their names should be self-explanatory.

- ① The handbook, recording form, drop down lists and instructions for using GPS are all in [Files > Information and Files for Recorders > Recording Information](#)
- ① You will find our membership form and draft letters requesting permission to survey veteran trees in [Files > Information and Files for Recorders > Other Information for Recorders > Letters and Leaflets](#)
- ① There's a survey of all trees on WTC-owned land and the results of our verification trial in WT in [Files > Parishes > Wokingham Town \(WT\)](#)

Images may be subject to copyright, so please do not reproduce any without checking first.

Don't forget: The latest database and all the latest files relating to the survey are on the Yahoo site:

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/WDVTA>

The maps on our web page (hosted by TVERC) are updated monthly: www.wdvta.org.uk

Finally, and most importantly,
THANK YOU to everyone who is out there recording our trees.
We wouldn't have a database without you.