



Tree Watch

Issue 12

February 2012

On 6th February 2012 we had **5650** trees in our database and **6082** photographs

Welcome to the February issue of Tree Watch. When I started writing this there was a covering of snow on the ground, but although spring now seems imminent, the trees are still bare. Even if you don't think it's warm enough to go out measuring trees, you might like to photograph them. Those of you who were at our Tree Warden launch on 29th November will have heard Jon Stokes suggest photographing trees from unusual angles. Winter is an especially good time for this, as the bare branches form interesting silhouettes. So why not take your camera out and see what you can do? Send them to datamanager. [The photos here are from the database and are both, coincidentally, by Liz Wild.]



The successful Tree Warden launch will be followed by a training day with Jon Stokes and Jon Matthews. A date for this has not been set yet, but we'll circulate all members with the details as soon as the arrangements have been made. The Hedge Tree Project was initiated at that launch and is well under way - see page 2.

We again have a full programme of events planned for 2012. When details have been confirmed they will be posted on the events page of the website. Many thanks to Julie Kerans (TVERC) for an excellent identification course this month. Our next event is the AGM in March - see page 2.



The next issue of Tree Watch will be May 2012 and the copy deadline is 30th April. All comments and contributions please to: Elaine Butler datamanager@wdvta.org.uk

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Events planned for March - May

- ① AGM and report on the completion of the Wokingham Town survey.
19:30 Loddon Room, Dinton Pastures
- ① April / May - Visit to Valley Gardens; Local Tree Walk; Tree Warden Training Day
details to be announced later.

For details and updates see the events page on our website - wdvta.org.uk/events.php

WDVTA AGM

Although we've had no chairman (or vice chairman) this year, the association has continued with all its activities and has had another very successful year as will be ably demonstrated by the four presentations that follow the official business of the AGM. For this success we are particular grateful to our secretary, Kerry Clissold, and treasurer, Ian Potts. We'd very much like to have a chairman as well as some new blood on the committee. All society members are eligible to stand for the committee. It offers a real chance to make a difference to the society and to make things happen, to bring fresh ideas and innovation to the table and to provide support for existing ventures. There is no prescribed requirement other than enthusiasm and a willingness to help. Committee members in essence forge their own roles in accordance with their inclinations, availability and capabilities. If you are interested please contact Kerry - honsec@wdvta.org.uk

The presentations mentioned are an update on the Tree Warden Group and Hedge Tree Project; a report on the Wokingham Town Survey that has now been completed; the general survey report and an overview of events. Do come along and hear about our activities, past and future. It promises to be an entertaining and informative evening.

JUBILEE HEDGE TREE PROJECT

At the Tree Warden launch last November, Stephen Loyd announced our initial Tree Warden project. It's also our Jubilee project. The aim is to plant or identify 60 Hedge Trees across the Borough. As a Tree Warden project it is supported by The Tree Council. The following description is taken from their



website: *"Britain's hedge trees are in decline. Without concerted effort they will continue to be under threat. Hedges and hedge trees have always played a variety of important roles in British history: as vital habitats for a multitude of wildlife; as sources of food, fuel and timber; as boundary makers [sic]; as shelter for livestock [sic]; and not least of course, as beautiful and enjoyable features of the countryside. Since the late 18th century, however, the abundance of hedge trees has dramatically declined. Periodic changes in farming techniques and agricultural needs, increased use of machinery, hedge removal, Dutch elm disease, neglect and lack of replacement have all taken their toll on the hedge tree population."*

Fortunately there are some responsible landowners around and I've seen recently cut hedges in Arborfield, Swallowfield and Shinfield where young hedge trees have been left to grow into mature ones. There's a photo on the website and the one here shows two such trees in Hyde End Road, Shinfield.

In Earley, ten native English oak saplings were planted last month in a new hedge by Paddick Drive and the BMX track. They are only 2'6" high now and we won't be around when they become veterans, but let's hope they survive for future generations to enjoy. The photo shows the Earley Hedge Tree work group. With planned plantings in Ruscombe and Charvil Meadows, we are well on our way to achieving our target of 60 new hedge trees in this jubilee year. If you'd like to get involved then see the Tree Wardens page of our website. Stephen has a source of oak saplings and you could get funding from BTCV (see page 6). If you don't want to plant or tag trees, then why not photograph existing ones? We do have a lot of mature hedge trees and it would be nice to collect a series of photos showing these for each parish.



A FAVOURITE TREE - and our largest so far



MRN 5845

This superb sweet chestnut (*Castanea sativa*) is the largest tree so far recorded in our survey. It has a girth of 10.4m measured at a height of 1.5m. That makes it an ancient tree according to the Woodland Trust criteria, which isn't surprising since this burred pollard could be anything from 750 to 1250 years old. It's in Wargrave, but unfortunately in a private garden, so we can't visit it.

The photo shows the recorder, Penny Miller (coordinator for Wargrave) and the proud owner standing in front of it - showing just how big it is.

Survey snapshot

10.4m

girth of the largest tree
in the database

189-3.3%

of trees recorded are
sweet chestnuts

6.3%

of these sweet chestnuts
are in gardens

7

parishes have NO recorded
sweet chestnuts

GARDEN TREES

The presence of this wonderful tree in a private garden reminds us how important gardens trees are. It's horrific to think that such a tree could be cut down (see the TPO article in the last issue) and so I was particularly pleased to find a document from West Berkshire Council giving "advice for new home owners and their solicitors". Its title is "***Buying a tree with a house in the garden***". It concludes by saying that trees "*are our legacy to future generations and deserve our respect and care. If you feel you are not able to offer them the basic care, please do not take on this responsibility.*" I hope this good advice is heeded.

This is just one of a number of documents on the subject of trees available for download from their website.



PROFILE - MICHAEL REA

Michael is a recorder and verifier for Wokingham Town as well as being a committee member.

I am not a country boy, growing up in the western outskirts of suburban London, spending later school years in Hammersmith, before penetrating the smoke to read Metallurgy at the CAT College in Battersea.

Becoming a member of the then Boy Scouts, the 15th Ealing, enabled me during camping trips to Stoke Poges and far flung Mid Wales, to appreciate that there was much more countryside out there to be enjoyed than the radius around the hollow oak tree on the margins of Perivale Park.

Since getting married to Susan in the early sixties we have lived in Wokingham and so have seen many changes. Both of us finding that we were lovers of the countryside, exploring our surroundings was for me the necessary relaxation away from the noisy atmosphere of manufacturing industry in Slough.

I became very interested in the survival of our wildlife, particularly birds and their dependency on their particular habitats and joined as an early member, the Friends of Lavell's Lake, a volunteer group which manages a small nature reserve situated near Dinton Pastures, primarily to improve the fortunes of birds. This group has taken part in several tree and hedge planting initiatives over the years.

Having by then retired, it was early in 2007 that a near neighbour, Barbara Stagles, made me aware of her activities in recording the mature trees in Wokingham.

We did share the same opinion and some sorrow concerning the felling of a particular large and beautiful oak tree on the margin of a small children's play area close to where we live. There had been no protection afforded to this tree, which enabled the land owner to follow this up with a successful planning application for an in-fill development of houses. One could only be saddened by the loss of this tree, its visual beauty and wonderful habitat, food source and nest site for birds and refuge for other wildlife.

Needless to say, I was hooked and soon afterwards joined the band of recorders of the WDVTA to help with the surveying of our veteran trees. As a consequence I have also met another enthusiastic group of people with an array of interests and skills.

This was a wonderful activity: apart from giving one a further excuse to 'get out there' and of course keep an eye on the birds, I found myself having to talk to all sorts of people that I didn't know and to discover that there was a great well of interest in trees at large in our town.

It is quite odd that after a time, one does become a little 'tree-minded', something which perhaps we all share. With a liking for photography, I find I cannot now resist taking pictures of trees wherever I go. Maybe it fulfils some of the desire to be able to take the object home with me. After all such trees don't take up much space in the house.

Michael Rea

I know what Michael means about photographing trees. Since joining WDVTA, my problem is that I now want to measure them as well. On a recent holiday in Madeira, I was told in no uncertain terms that I could photograph the trees, but must not measure them. [Yes I did take my tape measure & GPS with me!] - Ed.



OAK PROCESSIONARY MOTH UPDATE

With the discovery of Oak Processionary Moth (OPM) in Pangbourne, the dangers of contact with the hairs of the OPM were described in the November 2010 issue of Tree Watch (page4-5). Since I expect many of our recorders will start surveying again soon, this is a good time to remind you about this potential hazard. All contact with the caterpillar hairs must be avoided. One caterpillar has about 60,000 hairs and after shedding, they can remain toxic on the ground for up to five years. These irritant hairs can cause skin rashes, conjunctivitis and respiratory problems. Any signs of OPM must be reported to the Forestry Commission.



The source of the Pangbourne outbreak was a single mature oak planted in 2008. This tree was probably imported from Europe for a landscape project. The moth was discovered in 2010 and a Forestry Commission survey that year found 6 trees infected from the one original source. Last year 26 trees were infected, including 2 oaks on the edge of woodland 1km from the original source. West Berkshire Council has announced plans to eradicate OPM from Pangbourne. The Forestry Commission will survey an extended area around the original infested site in March and tree spraying will begin in April. Property owners are responsible for treating infected trees on their property and the cost is about £500 per tree, although the council hope to negotiate reduced costs for residents.

You can see a South Today video clip about the Pangbourne outbreak on:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-berkshire-16754778>

and for more details and the latest information about OPM see the Forestry Commission webpage:

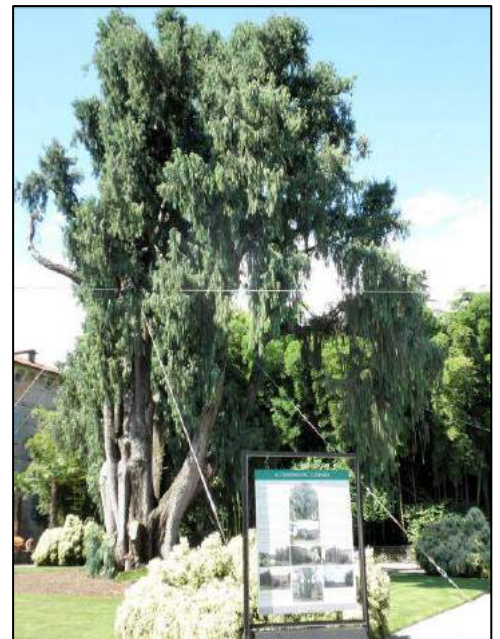
<http://www.forestry.gov.uk/fr/INFD-6URJCF>

THE CASHMIR CYPRESS REVISITED



It's always gratifying to get feed back from Tree Watch readers, but I was surprised to hear from someone in Merseyside!

Derek Belton read the article Patricia Green wrote about the Cashmir Cypress in the last issue. He had seen the tree in 2006 before the tornado and again in 2008 when it was in "a terrible condition". Here is his photograph taken in 2008, alongside Patricia's taken in 2011.



Derek has sent me a video of the tree before and after the tornado and I'll show it at our next meeting.

A DIFFICULT ONE TO RECORD!



In December, whilst surveying in Grazeley, Patricia Green recorded this tree. It's a Horse Chestnut and Scots Pine fused together - with a combined girth of 3.5m! The pine is on the left in the photo. Unfortunately it is on private land with no access.

Such examples of natural grafting are well known and it's not just superficial. An article in PNAS¹ this month describes the results of experiments with natural grafting, in which the movement of complete chloroplast genomes across a graft junction from one species into another was observed. The alien genome completely replaced the resident one. The results of these experiments demonstrate a plausible mechanism for organelle capture in plants and suggest that natural grafting is a path for horizontal gene transfer between sexually incompatible species.

¹*Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* **109** 2434-2438

NEW TREE PLANTINGS IN WOKINGHAM

There are a lot of tree planting initiatives around at the moment. Last November 250 new fruit trees were planted across the Borough, in Swallowfield, Twyford, Wargrave and in Dinton Pastures, with a further 50 planned for later this year. This is funded by the Big Lottery's Local Foods Programme, administered by CCB (Community Council for Berkshire).

BTCV has received funding from the Forestry Commission funded 'Big Tree Plant' to plant 6,250 trees in and around Reading (and that includes us) over the next couple of years. This is being dubbed 'The Forest of Reading' and includes Hedge Trees planting.

Tree planting is a major part of the Jubilee celebrations and I'm sure you've seen some of the publicity surrounding the Woodland Trust's Jubilee Woods Project. They are compiling a "Royal Record" of Jubilee plantings. It's very easy to register any such plantings on-line and their Jubilee Woods map show where they are. This map shows 4 schools in Wokingham and 2 in Crowthorne each planting 61 trees: Coombes CofE Primary, Arborfield; St Peters Primary, Earley; Dolphin School, Hurst; Robert Piggott CofE Infant, Wargrave; and Wellington College and Edgbarrow School, Crowthorne. Rivermead Primary in Woodley is planting 105. The only community planting is by Wokingham Without Parish Council with their 420 new plantings. More may well be registered and there are of course others in Reading, Bracknell and surrounding areas.

.... AND OLD ONES

As part of this project they have published (on their website) details of plantings made in 1937 to commemorate the coronation of George VI. In this "Royal Record" plantings are listed by county (although of course the boundaries were different then). There's an entry for Shinfield, with a copper beech on the village green; six *Prunus* sp on the recreation ground at Twyford and the planting of two oaks on the Langborough Recreation Ground in Wokingham, as well as records for Sonning and Swallowfield. [The web links are on our Yahoo site: [Links > Woodland Trust](#).]

Bluebells are ancient wood indicators and the Woodland Trust is also inviting people to submit details (and star rating) of any bluebell woods open to the public. So far there are only two listed in Wokingham Borough: Aldermoor (3 stars) and Keeptatch (not rated); although Stephen Loyd submitted Ruscombe Wood last year and so there may be more in the pipeline. You can search their "Visit Woods" webpage for the location of woods matching a variety of criteria (use advanced search for bluebells).

THE BRISTLECONE PINES OF CALIFORNIA

California's magnificent Coastal Redwood (*Sequoia sempervirens*) and Giant Sequoia (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*) trees are well known to us but we are perhaps less familiar with the even more remarkable and splendid Bristlecone pines (*Pinus longaeva*) that grow in the mountains of California and only a few other localised areas in the Great Basin. How extraordinary these trees are was not fully appreciated until 1953 when scientists were using dendrochronological techniques to investigate historical weather patterns and cycles. Wanting to look further back in time, they discovered the age of these trees. They found that the oldest Bristlecone pines stood in the White-Inyo mountains of California. In 1957 they dated various specimens and found that oldest living tree (*Methusaleh*) was 4,723 years old - a tree that was a seedling when the Great Pyramids of Egypt were being built!



The White-Inyo mountain range lies to the east of the Owens Valley, in the rain shadow of the Sierra Nevada that forms the massive western wall of the valley. Rainfall is less than 12 inches per year and it is this relative aridity together with the sparse mountain soil and an altitude of 10,000-11,000 feet that combine to produce the harsh environment which peculiarly suits the hardy, slow growing pines.



Bishop, the main town in the Owens

valley is the obvious base from which to explore these mountains. It is an easy and exhilarating drive from there into the pine groves and to the Bristlecone Pine Forest visitors centre. To walk in the cool mountain air amongst these gnarled, sculptural, rugged trees, some of which were veterans when Caesar stepped ashore in Britain, is as good a reason to visit the USA as I can imagine.

Martin Haslam

Whilst on the subject of dating - excavations off the Isle of Wight have revealed a Mesolithic landscape, including "a tree-riddled land surface", dated using the root of an oak tree to 8,500BC.

[Current Archaeology 262 p34]

GRID REFERENCE ERRORS

Sometimes mistakes are made when entering grid reference on the spreadsheet and trees end up in the wrong place on the map. You might notice that the location description disagrees with the map location. A tree may be shown in the middle of a field, but the setting is roadside; or you can see that the tree is not in the road given as its location. Please use the contact form below the full record on our web map page to point it out and it can be corrected.

I received an e-mail about one such tree that I found particularly entertaining:

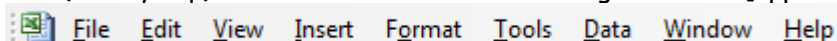
Change of address:

RU 121 wishes it to be known that, after a brief sojourn in deepest Hurst, it has returned to Ruscombe and is residing at **SU 80453 75233**, where it hopes to remain and put down roots.

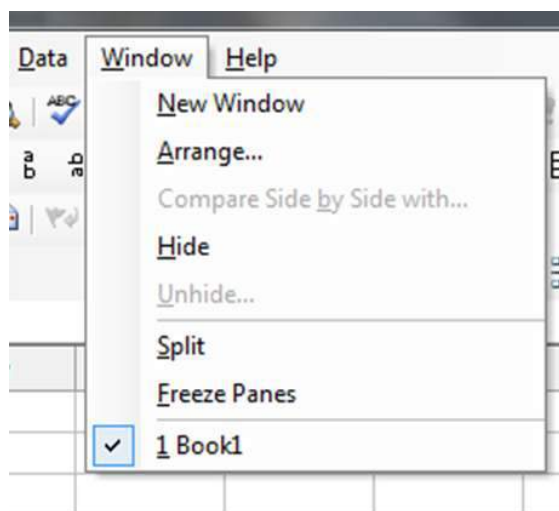
EXCEL TIP FOR RECORDERS - viewing sheets side-by-side

You quite often want to look at 2 (or more) worksheets side-by-side, and on wide screens this is very useful.

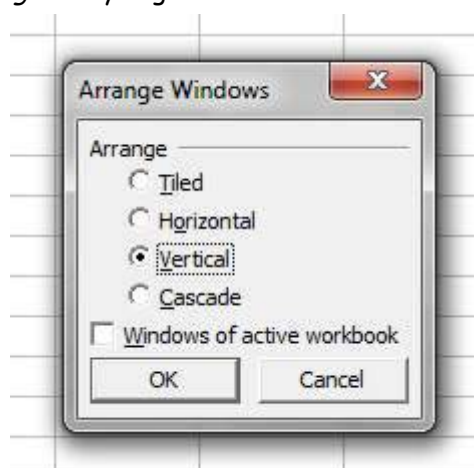
The (usually top) menu bar should look something like this: [applies to versions 1997-2003]



Clicking on *Window* gives you:



click on *Arrange* and you get



If you want to view worksheets from 2 files side-by-side, then open both files, and choose *Arrange* from the menu above. You can then choose how you want the sheets displayed: tiled, horizontal, vertical or cascaded.

If you want to see worksheets from the SAME file side-by-side, then first open a *New Window* and then choose *Arrange*.

[v2007 is slightly different - go to the *View* ribbon and use *New Window* and *View Side-by-Side* options]

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS - WHAT IS MASTING?

Last year was a very good year for acorns and berries (although when I went out to identify one particular tree that was just recorded in the database as an oak, it had no acorns at all). The Wokingham Times ran a story last October about a horse dying after eating too many acorns, although it wasn't the acorns that interested it, but the fact that the horse lay dead in its field for some days whilst school children walked past.



Acorn production in Britain can vary from none to over 50,000 and occasionally 90,000 per tree per year. Years with such good crops are often known as mast years, but you might like to read the various definitions of 'mast year' and 'mast seeding' in Wikipedia. So was last year a mast year? Well perhaps not. The good crop of acorns around here came from English oaks (*Quercus robur*). "Unlike *Q. petraea*, which is a mast-fruiting species producing large acorn crops once only every 4 to 10 years and a few if any acorns in the intervening years, *Q. robur* produces big acorn crops every other year (this is known as alternate bearing..."¹.

Favourable environmental conditions result in greater seed production, but that is not masting. Some trees, such as birches, aspens, willows and elms produce a large and fairly constant number of seeds each year. Others, especially those with relatively large seeds, such as oaks, beech and ash, as well as many conifers, show great variation from year to year. When such variation is rhythmical and synchronous it is masting. All trees of the same species over a large area mast at the same time. It is a population

phenomenon and does not refer to individual trees. Masting is generally defined as the synchronous production of seed at intervals by a population of plants.

Although mast years are synchronous across large areas, local conditions can intervene. A late spring frost or attack of herbivores in one area can prevent trees masting with others around it. Masting only happens when there are sufficient food reserves in the tree, so poor growing conditions can prevent masting. Large-seeded trees invest an enormous amount of energy into growing seeds and in mast years a tree puts everything into producing a large quantity of seed, so much so that growth of the tree may be reduced that year. Strict masting is found in bamboos, which all flower at the same time (and then die). Normal masting (as described here) is more variable. Both involve synchronous behaviour across large areas. The alternate bearing behaviour of *Q. robur* is also synchronous, so perhaps we could be justified in classifying it as a special case of normal masting.



photos: Frank Vincentz

Why does masting or alternate bearing occur? Why don't oaks and beeches produce a fairly constant amount of seeds as other trees do? What evolutionary advantage is there in masting? Several theories have been put forward, but the consensus of opinion seems to favour predator satiation. Masting swamps the seed-eaters with more seed than they can consume (predator satiation) leaving, hopefully, some to germinate. Low acorn and beech nut crops suffer a higher percentage mortality than large ones. Oak and beech often only produce seedlings following mast years.

So why don't all trees have mast years? Masting occurs in those trees with largish seeds (wind or animal dispersed). Masting is not common in trees with animal-eaten fruits (uneaten fruits are wasteful) or in trees with small seeds which do not attract such herbivory. Predator satiation is not an effective evolutionary force in such circumstances.

¹ Crawley, Michael J (2005) "The Flora of Berkshire"

"We are witnessing a new phase of mature tree loss around the UK from disease and decline, affecting an increasing number of species and posing a real threat to our natural environment and human wellbeing."

Neville Fay (2011) "The ARB Magazine" Issue 154 Autumn 2011

DID YOU KNOW? *There's a Guinness Book of Records entry for the air-speed of trees.*

It's held by a specimen of *Albizia falcata* (*falcata*) planted in Malaysia, which grew 10.74 m (35 ft 3 in) in 13 months - that's nearly 3' per month or one inch per day.

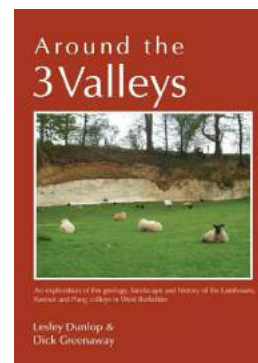
This leguminous tree belongs to the Mimosa subfamily and has many common names, including Peacocksplume. It's known as batai in the wood trade.

This species is also used by Wikipedia to illustrate the complexities of correct nomenclature in botany! It can be placed in four different genera. Hence these four names are all correct (at present): *Falcata* *moluccana*; *Albizia falcata*; *Falcata* *moluccana* and *Paraserianthes falcata*. The International Plant Name Index lists all four, as well as the older name *Adenanthera falcata*. Kew uses *Albizia falcata*



Book Recommendation

You might be interested in this book, the latest offering from Dick Greenaway and Lesley Dunlop. It is a joint production of the Friends of the Pang, Kennet and Lambourn Valleys and the Berkshire Geoconservation Group (BGG). [The Friends of the Pang, Kennet and Lambourn Valleys have recently joined with 2 other organisations to become the West Berkshire Countryside Society.] It describes 16 walks, with detailed information about wildlife, archaeology, history and geology. Graham Hawker wrote a glowing review of it in the latest TVERC newsletter (available on their website) saying that he particularly likes the pictures of veteran trees.



It costs £10 (plus £1.50 p&p) and can be ordered from the BGG - see their website for details. We should have some to sell at our AGM.

If you have a book you'd like to recommend to other WDVTA members, please write a short piece about it and send it in. I've set up a database on the Yahoo site so that anyone wanting details of books mentioned can get them easily. Again if you have any recommendations, you can add them to that list.

Whilst the walks in "Around the 3 Valleys" only mention veteran trees in passing, the National Trust has 10 ancient tree walks on their website. In the spring edition of their magazine, Ashridge Estate (mentioned in the last edition of Tree Watch) is described as "the most important Trust site for ancient and notable trees, with its total of 3,600 specimens. This figure represents 4 per cent of all recorded trees in Britain on the Ancient Tree Hunt's website and almost 20 per cent of the Trust's significant trees." It includes the 600 year-old Frithsden beech. Despite this, Ashridge does not feature in their ancient tree walks, at least not yet. Let's hope they add it to their list soon.

Some recommendations from the Yahoo Group:

WEBSITES: - *referred to above*

- ① www.berksgeoconservation.org.uk - Berkshire Geoconservation Group (BGG) - "Around the 3 Valleys"
- ① www.westberks.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=2572 - various downloads from West Berkshire
- ① www.tverc.org - TVERC - Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre

READING: - *more information on some of the items above*

- ① Oak Processionary Moth advisory note in *Files > Useful Files > Forestry Commission documents*
- ① Trees planted for George VI's coronation - in *Files > Commemorative plantings*
- ① The Forest of Reading - in *Files > Tree Wardens - Hedge Trees*

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:

groups.yahoo.com/group/WDVTA

Details of all trees in our database are available via the web map pages: wdvta.org.uk/WDVTS

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