



On 14th May, we had **8,445** trees in our database and **13,074** photographs

Welcome to the latest issue of Tree Watch.

Why have I featured these lovely carvings here? See page 7. As well as carvings, in this issue we feature native crayfish and (briefly) blue tits.

As Alison mentions on page four there are many references to trees in the media these days. As there isn't space to summarise all of these, I've extended the list of recommended reading and viewing on pages 13 & 14. If you missed the Tree Council's 'Plant Health Week: Spring Health Check Webinar' on 13th May, it was recorded and will hopefully be available soon.

We had a very successful "Favourite Tree" evening this month and you'll see references to some of the presentations in this and future issues; but you can also watch a **recording** of the whole session.

The next issue of Tree Watch will be August 2021 and the copy deadline is 31st July. If you have any comments or responses to anything in this issue or contributions for future issues please send them to: Elaine Butler - datamanager@wdvta.org.uk



Main items in this issue:- (click on title)

p2	AGM; WDVTA committee; Events	p9	FAQ-Plastic tree guards
p3	Tree Watching from my chair	p9	The Native Crayfish in Berkshire
p5	Remarkable Trees; Acronyms	p11	Can we resurrect the English Elm?
p6	Winnersh Bridge Trees	p12	Species in Focus - Banyan trees
p6	The Veteran Tree Survey	p13	Sadly departed - MRN 4418
p7	Steve Radford does it again	p13	Recommended reading and viewing
p8	Trees, Hedgerows, Climate Emergency	p15	Did you know?

Events - June-August 2021

❖ No WDVTA events planned until September.

Non-WDVTA events:

❖ National Hedgerow Week - 29th May - 6th June - see Tree Council [website](https://www.tree-council.org/) for details.

❖ 'Wild about Reading' 29th May - 2nd June: a variety of activities; see their [leaflet](#) for a summary and their [website](#) for details

❖ 31st May 14:00-15:00 Old Tilehurst Tree Trail - part of 'Wild about Reading' programme.

For up-to-date information - see the events page on our website - wdvta.org.uk/events.php

AGM

We had a very successful AGM meeting via Zoom, with a good attendance. Many thanks to everyone who attended. The official business was followed by very interesting presentation by Samantha Hughes and Nick Hale from the **South East Rivers Trust**, talking about their work in general, the **Loddon Catchment Partnership** and the **Emm Brook Project** in particular. They also mentioned the Charvil Backwater Project (see Tree Watch #47 p14) and showed us a photo of a large tree trunk extracted from the river. We would love to know how old it is. There's a link to their **presentation** on our website.

WDVTA COMMITTEE

At the AGM, all committee members from last year were re-elected and we had no new nominations.

Officials:

Chairman: Alison Griffin
Secretary: Kerry Clissold
Treasurer: Derek Oxbrough

Committee members:

Barry Anderson, Elaine Butler, Sarah Hanson, Martin Haslam,
Stephen Loyd, Linda Martin, Stephanie McKay, Steve Radford,
Coralie Ramsey, Michael Rea, Maggie Sanderson, Jane Sellwood,
Barbara Stagles and Liz Wild.

EVENTS - A RAMBLE IN COVID TIMES

The Events Team

Little did we know how our events calendar would change so radically over this last year. Fifteen months ago, we walked Fox Hill led by Stephanie McKay who is now working hard with others to safeguard this **wood**. We hope that all of our events increase awareness for members, although the social aspect is equally important as new friendships are often forged whilst we amble through woodlands. Fox Hill is barely three miles across Wokingham from my house, yet I had never walked there before. Our local walks inspire us to get to know our area so much better, opening our eyes to see how lucky we are to live in such a beautiful area. In past years we have had walks much further afield and been lucky enough to be invited to visit places such as Savernake Forest to admire the 'Big Bellied Oak' and Blenheim Palace to walk through High Park and take in their most ancient trees, usually protected from public view.

How do we adapt to a new, locked-down world and still inform and entertain our members? We hope we've met the challenge in ways previously unexplored. Take a bow Zoom! Our events have been delivered this way for over a year now as they have been for so many other groups. We're even getting quite familiar with it (now). Those words so often heard: "Jeremy, you're on mute, we can't hear you Jeremy, unmute", are accompanied less now by frantic hand waving and gesticulations from our little portals on screen and now honed to feature our consummate miming skills. Old friends and new have delivered fascinating talks for us in this way and to large, if virtual, audiences.

Dr Glynn Percival has kept us updated with reports on diseases threatening our treescapes. He always combines this with positive news of ways to deal with these and the progress being made. He is sure to make us laugh with his anecdotes and we finish the evening better informed, a great combination.

Cllr Gregor Murray, Executive Member for Climate Emergency, took time out to accept our invitation to outline the work being done within WBC, and nationally. The presentation outlined the plans, ranging from a solar farm for Barkham to planting 250,000 trees on a variety of sites across our Borough including in residential gardens and orchards. Members were shown a very clear pathway towards plantings for biodiversity net gain, natural flood management, carbon capture and more.

We can't forget the walk around Charvil, prepared so thoughtfully by Barry, Claire and Sarah. Back on a dark winter's evening we were treated to an amble around a part of our locality many of us were unfamiliar with and what a treat it was, we didn't even get wet or muddy!

Both AGMs in 2020 and 2021 were successfully held on Zoom with SERT bringing an added dimension with their plans for the Emm Brook this year.

Also via Zoom, we met on 19th May for a 'Favourite Tree Evening' at which members and some of our past speakers shared their favourites.

You can see the slides from these events on our website, by visiting publications and going to '**Event presentations**'. Listed below are the presentations currently available, with thanks to the contributors, but also thanks to our webmaster Malcolm Inglis, and to Elaine and Malcolm Butler.

- Dr Glynn Percival's talk "What Lurks Within? The importance of Endophytes for Tree Disease Management." National Tree Week - Nov 2020
- "A Virtual Walk Around Charvil" led by Barry and Claire Andersen with Sarah Swatridge - January 2021
- Cllr Gregor Murray "The Climate Emergency" - March 2021
- "The Restoration of the Emm Brook" by Sam Hughes and Nick Hale of the South East Rivers Trust - March 2021
- "Our Favourite Tree" evening - May 2021

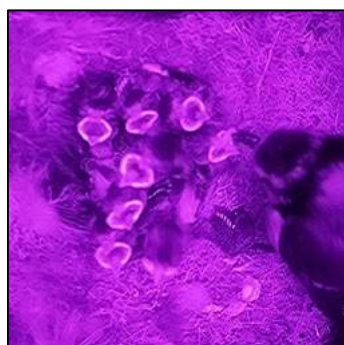
On the 8th of September Jamie Hartzell and other guests will present their work mapping trees across Oxfordshire with a view to considering the same for Berkshire. Some members may have heard Jamie talk at the TVERC conference recently. For more on this event refer to our website and Tree Watch.

Hopefully, a real summer walk will be announced shortly. We await direction from the government on what will be possible in a still changing world. Dick Greenaway has offered to take us around the trees of Ashampstead Common featured in his presentation at the 'Favourite Tree Evening'. An arboretum awaits us, and we will be going out walking together again. There are so many beautiful and fascinating trees still to visit. We look forward to you joining us.

TREE WATCHING FROM MY CHAIR

Alison Griffin

Writing at the beginning of May, it should feel sunny and warm with summer just around the corner, but this last week has been more March winds and April storms rather than showers. The spring blossom was as lovely as always, but due to the cold weather it didn't last long. 'Blossom Day' was gloriously sunny though. The cold April has made the tree bud burst slower this year. Oak trees have a green-brown haze as their buds burst and rather than the few days of this once-a-year scene, I've enjoyed it for nearly a month.



However, the slow leaf development may have a big impact on birds. Derek Oxbrough has cameras on his bird box and usually has a family of blue tits that rear about seven chicks. The main food for the first brood is usually caterpillars from newly emerging oak leaves. This year 11 chicks hatched but with the oak leaves delayed, the caterpillars aren't there and the parents are having to find other insects as alternative food. This infra-red photograph (hence the colour) shows eight chicks, but the brood is now down to just six. Clearly the birds are struggling to get enough insects to replace the usual caterpillars. *[In my garden, the blue tits are incubating their nine eggs, but five of the seven great tits have already fledged- Ed.]*

For those of you who did not attend the AGM, I was pleased that all the committee members from last year have stayed and I did and do thank them for their continuing work and support. Unfortunately, my request in the last 'Tree Watch' that we would welcome some help with the growing workload did not elicit any responses. If you can volunteer to help in any capacity please get in touch.

The talk by Cllr Murray in February, our AGM in March and our May meeting, all using Zoom, were very well attended. Do look at the details Kerry has included in this Tree Watch about future events. The website is kept up to date as arrangements are confirmed. Whilst Zoom has been so helpful during the pandemic for keeping groups connected and hearing talks, I do hope it is not too long before we can enjoy face-to-face meetings and events again.

Elaine is including details of the latest additions to the survey. Thank you to everyone who has been out completing survey work where they can. As you know we are now closing the survey and committee discussions in our meetings in May and September will focus on the priorities for the association for the future. I am sure these will be based around tree warden projects and utilising the value of our database of local tree records.

I attended the TVERC conference in March. The agenda included Barry Andersen giving a shortened version of his January walk around the trees of Charvil. The conference was a series of shorter talks

over two half days using Zoom and the format worked very well. One talk that I found particularly interesting was by Jamie Hartzell, who is leading a project in Oxfordshire mapping the whole county for areas where tree planting would be feasible and would deliver ecological as well as carbon capture and climate change benefits. We are planning a talk from Jamie on this project in September.

Multi-leadered trees.

One task that I have recently completed was transcribing tree information from a planning application and taking photographs of the trees that meet our criteria. The tree surveyor was very fond of the expression 'multi-leadered' so I looked at my photographs again. What a useful adjective, particularly for oak trees. Here are three trees from this survey area, all maiden English oaks. The trunk of the first (MRN 9164) can be seen extending for more than half the height of the tree, a single 'leader'. In the second (MRN 9163), the trunk ceases to be dominant after about a third of the tree height, its 'leader' role replaced by multiple branches, hence the 'multi-leadered' description. In the third (MRN 9170) the trunk is dominant for an even smaller proportion of the height. Now as I drive around, I keep noticing oaks that are single-leadered and ones that are multi-leadered. Whether a genetic or an environmental difference, we have plenty of both types in the borough.



Is tree felling ever good news?

I expect you have answered 'No' to this question, possibly with the exception for trees that are unsafe, but here are three examples.

Some Elms Field trees were lost for the redevelopment of the park, but four have been turned into wonderful sculptures by Steve Radford that we will enjoy for many years (see page 7). I expect you would still give me the answer 'No' to my question as we would prefer to have the original trees in the park, but if we had to lose the trees, these sculptures are an excellent use of the wood.

About 1000 oak trees have been felled in French forests this spring and are being left to dry out for 18 months after which they will be used to rebuild the spire of Notre Dame cathedral in Paris that was lost in the fire two years ago. The rebuilding will be to the original design. I haven't seen reports that the trees are being replaced, but hope only a few have been felled in each of multiple forests and that sufficient replanting has been or will be made to ensure the forests are repopulated and regenerate fully over the next couple of centuries. If that is the case, then does the rebuilding of the nationally important and iconic cathedral spire make you answer 'Yes' to the question?

Finally, did you hear about the felling of thousands of trees in Northumberland earlier this year? The felled trees are being mulched and the process is the latest stage in a 50-year project to restore the Border Mires, a network of bogs in and around the Kielder Forest. By felling the trees and blocking artificial drainage channels, the mires should revert to their early twentieth century condition where the stored carbon will exceed the carbon in the felled trees and the restored habitat will support rare species like the bog cranberry and even the dwarf birch tree, one of England's rarest trees. So, is this tree-felling good news?

Trees in the media.

In the last few years there has been a lot written about the role of fungal networks in the soil around tree roots. A new book called 'Finding the Mother Tree: Uncovering the wisdom and intelligence of the

forest' by Suzanne Simard, Professor of Forest Ecology at the University of British Columbia has recently been published with reviews in national papers and the New Scientist. Her work has influenced the film 'Avatar' and inspired 'The Overstory' by Richard Powers. The book integrates her life with her research work and in reviews I've seen there are a couple of research results that sparked my curiosity. One was experiments to look at whether the fungal networks around mature trees would differentiate between seedlings from local trees and seedlings brought in from other locations. She discovered that local (i.e. genetically related) conifer seedlings were favoured by the networks. The other snippet that intrigued me was research on forest regeneration after different logging regimes. When more of the older, larger trees (or 'Mother' trees) are deliberately not felled, the regeneration is more diverse and abundant.

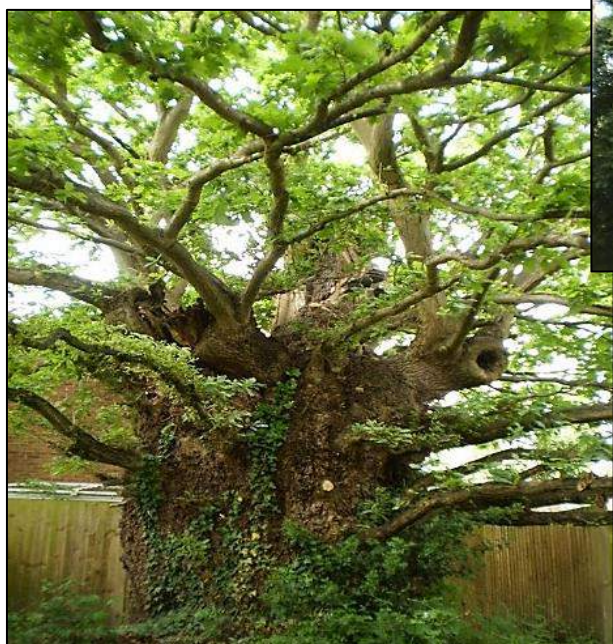
These two research results support our work to champion the retention of our old and large trees, to promote succession planning for trees that are declining and to stress the importance of new local trees being UK sourced (or even better, sourced within the Borough).

If you get hold of a copy of the book and read it, could you write a review for a future 'Tree Watch'?

Thank you to the many people who send me cuttings and links to very interesting articles about trees. As you will know, this part of my 'Tree Watch' piece has grown in size over the last couple of years. If you enjoy reading about recent articles, could you take on writing about them for each 'Tree Watch'? As I need to focus on other tree priorities, my future 'Tree Watching from my Chair' articles will be shorter.

REMARKABLE TREES

For our 'Favourite Tree' evening earlier this month, Sarah Hanson described an oak in Caversham Park Village. Originally in an open field, it somehow survived the extensive 1960s housing development, and is now in a small urban garden.



It was measured in 2018 and had a girth of just over 8m. Being a pollard, it's probably 850 years old, meaning it germinated around 1170; when Thomas Becket was murdered; Saladin captured the Crusader outpost of Aila at the head of the Gulf of Akaba; Fes in modern Morocco became the largest city of the world (replacing Constantinople); and we have the earliest record of Cheddar Cheese being made in Somerset, when Henry II purchased 10,240 lbs at a farthing per pound!

Sarah says "This is my favourite veteran oak in Reading Borough just because it's unbelievable that it's still there! But what others were lost?".

This month's A C R O N Y M S / I N I T I A L I S M S

SERT - South East Rivers Trust **ARK** - Action for the River Kennet - a local charity helping to protect and restore rivers in the Kennet and Pang catchment. Although mainly outside Wokingham, it does include the Foudry Brook which runs through Shinfield Parish.

WINNERSH BRIDGE TREES

In the **last issue** (page 12) there was an article from Sarah Swatridge about Winnersh Bridge and its missing trees. Linda Martin has provided some more information. The trees died and were replaced several times; never surviving for very long. The photo below left shows them in February 2019, when they were the best she'd seen. By June 2019 they had died and been removed (photo below right). They have not been replaced.



THE VETERAN TREE SURVEY

This survey started in Wokingham Town in 2006. In the following year, WDVTA was formed and the survey was extended across the Borough. It was envisaged as a snapshot survey and now, 15 years later, we are bringing it to a close. We haven't achieved our goal of recording all the veteran trees across the Borough, but we have done rather well to record over 8,000 trees and our survey has received praise from a number of sources, including WBC, the Woodland Trust's Ancient Tree Inventory (ATI) and TVERC (Thames Valley Environmental Centre) and our records are shared with them. The Association's 10th Anniversary **Report** in 2017 describes the survey and how far it had progressed in each town and parish. One of the aims in that report was to get photos for at least 90% of the trees in the database. We haven't quite reached that. 88% of our trees have at least one photo. Two trees have 12 photos each - mrn **5211**, a lovely, though declining, black poplar hybrid near the bridge in Swallowfield Park; and mrn **8508**, a lapsed coppiced ash in Wargrave. Some of our volunteers have recorded trees without taking photos of them, but the main reason for the lack of photos is data obtained from arboricultural surveys attached to planning applications. It is time-consuming and tedious extracting that data because there are no grid references, just maps. When the building is complete, many of these trees are accessible or visible to the public and then photos can be taken and added to our database. For instance, 164 of the trees recorded in Shinfield have no photos, but 121 of those are from surveys. Barkham is the only parish with photos for all their trees.

Although the survey is over, there will be additions to the database, because some data has yet to be submitted and we may have some more photos taken over the summer months. I've also got to go through the data and do some "tidying". If you have a few spare minutes, please have a look at our **webmap**, check the details of a few trees, and if you see any errors (including spelling mistakes) or information you want clarified, use the contact form below the record to let me know about them.

Veteran Tree Survey snapshot

SETTINGS

35

different settings

Top Five

Woodland 22%
Roadside 16%
Field Boundary 14%
Garden 13%
Hedgerow 11%

109

churchyard

8

village green

76

car park

509

parkland

STEVE RADFORD DOES IT AGAIN!

Many of you will have seen the lovely wooden carvings by Steve Radford, one of our committee members. He's now used some of the wood from trees felled in 2018, during the Elms Field development in Wokingham Town, to produce some wonderful carvings that have been placed in the re-designed green area of Elms Field.

Please bee seated on this lovely seat created from a large, 200-year-old English oak tree with a forked trunk (MRN **185** with a girth of 3.7m in 2008).



Another English oak, MRN **7848**, smaller and not quite straight, is now a delightful caterpillar.



Two London Planes provided the wood for another two carvings. A cheeky chrysalis was carved from the largest plane, which was about 180 years old when felled (MRN **184**, with a girth of 4.3m in 2008).



This stag beetle was carved from a smaller plane, too small for our database.

We know of three other carvings from our felled or fallen veteran trees: -

- The '**Story-telling Seat**' (MRN **151**) at the Hawthorns School, Woosehill also by Steve Radford.
- The '**Duck and the World**' (MRN **1188**) in Maiden Erlegh Park by Andy Noyes.
- The **Stag Bench**, carved by Nick Speakman from MRN **1966** and now in Old Forest Meadows.

*Do you know of any more?
Please let us know if you do.*

TREES, HEDGROWS AND CLIMATE EMERGENCY.

Alison has described Gregor Murray's presentation and the plan to plant 250,000 across the Borough in the next five years. In March it was announced that Wokingham had been awarded a grant of £300,000 from the Woodland Trust to facilitate this. These plans are part of Wokingham's climate emergency plans. I wonder whether bee-friendly bus shelters will be included in those plans. Since 2019, Utrecht Council in the Netherlands has transformed 316 bus stops into '*Bee Bus Stops*'. In April 2020, Cardiff Council followed suit and introduced over ten Bee Bus Stops. As well as increasing biodiversity by providing food for bees and other insects, these 'living roofs' capture fine dust, improve air quality, absorb carbon, store rainwater and improve the visual environment, helping to reduce stress. **Brighton** also has one, where a variety of sedum plants are each planted in an upcycled plastic bottle, with the additional benefit of reducing plastic waste.

Reading Tree Wardens have had a fantastic year for tree planting. Under Covid restrictions, Dave Kenny and a small team supporting him have had to work in twos, going out repeatedly on cold winter days, to plant a total of 100 Sakura Cherry trees across Reading and 25 other street trees of various species.

Some councils have gone further. South Cambridgeshire Council has produced their "**Doubling Nature Strategy**", as part of which they are undertaking a tree audit. Every tree on communal land will be mapped to show its location, size, species and condition. This will be the basis of a pro-active programme of tree maintenance and will identify areas suitable for their ambitious tree-planting programme. They have '**Nature and climate change**' and '**Trees & hedgerows**' web pages, the latter features sections on TPOs, 'building near existing trees', 'trees in and around my property' and tree wardens. I hope Wokingham Council is looking at such examples.

Highlighting the importance of hedges, the March issue of the Tree Council newsletter announced the first 'National Hedgerow Week' launching on 29th May, with a range of activities, including a webinar series, a photo competition and a 'microsite' with tips and growing information. Although Hedgerow Week starts on 29th May, as I check this on 25th May, the **website** has no details about these activities. They say they will also launch "the UK's first All Natural Hedgefunds. The Farming Hedgefund, in partnership with FWAG, will distribute £500,000 in grants to landowners in England to help them fill hedgerow gaps and plant 50km of new hedges next planting season. A smaller Community Hedgefund will be available for volunteer Tree Wardens and local groups to plant new community hedges.". There are several funding partners including the University of Reading.

FAQ: WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT PLASTIC TREE GUARDS?

Planting trees is a central part of our efforts to capture carbon and slow climate change. But millions of trees also mean millions of plastic tree guards, and hence plastic waste. Gary Hurlstone, whose father invented one of the biggest selling plastic tree shelters, has now created **NexGen Tree Shelters**, bio-degradable guards made from wool. This invention was a joint winner of the 2020 **Wool Innovation Prize** and the prize money will help launch the first large scale production run. That should also provide some reprieve for the collapsed British wool market.

THE NATIVE CRAYFISH REAPPEARS IN BERKSHIRE!

Ellen Lee, TVERC

I have a very soft spot for the native crayfish (*Austropotamobius pallipes*). Even its name is fun to pronounce, and when you delve a little deeper, it's a truly alien creature! I got to know all about it because, for a number of years, TVERC was commissioned by the Environment Agency to carry out surveys in Oxfordshire to identify water courses supporting them. I was lucky enough to be the person who was trained up to carry out the surveys which (if it wasn't for having to write a report at the end) were very much like returning to my childhood, paddling along streams!



Crayfish are basically freshwater lobsters. They come with one set of large claws for grabbing and four more pairs of legs sporting small claws, for hanging onto things. These are attached to the main body section and further down they have a number of smaller segments which bear small appendages called swimmerettes. The body ends in a tail which is used to propel them backwards quickly when danger threatens, and is really confusing

when you are a novice crayfish surveyor as they disappear backwards rather than forwards when you try and pick them up! Their "mouth" is underneath their head and has a strange external jaw in front of it, which helps to feed pretty much everything and anything into the mouth. They have three bone-like structures attached to the lining of their stomach which clash together under muscular control to crush food up, a kind of inbuilt grinding mill. They aren't fussy eaters and will have a go at eating anything that fits in their mouth. For this reason, they are a vital part of the ecosystem of calcareous streams, helping

to keep the stream clear of detritus in addition to eating small shrimps, molluscs, fish fry and even, sorry to say, their own young.

In days gone by, the native crayfish did very well out of us humans. We created all sorts of places for them to hide from their predators during the day; stone bridges, walls, mill leats etc; perfect for a crepuscular edge-feeding generalist! However, recently the relationship has been a much less happy one. In the first half of the 20th century, degradation of stream habitat and increasing use of insecticides meant that populations of native crayfish started to struggle and so did the traditional small-scale native fisheries. The response was to introduce and start farming the American or signal crayfish. These are bigger, more aggressive, and most importantly are excellent escape artists that can even



This photo shows the very strange external jaw which has evolved from a leg and is sometimes called a "walking jaw".

walk long distances over land, as long as their gills are kept wet. So before long they had escaped and were getting into our rivers and streams. If this wasn't bad enough, they also carry an endemic fungal plague. This has co-evolved with them and causes them no health issues. Unfortunately, it's fatal to our native crayfish for whom it's a new disease. As soon as signal crayfish get upstream of a native population, the spores of the fungal plague wash downstream and will wipe out the natives completely. This is why you need a Natural England licence in order to search for native crayfish, because it's vital to understand and practise good biosecurity to survey for them safely.

Native crayfish populations have plummeted over both Oxfordshire and Berkshire since the mid 1980s. Oxfordshire still has a few decent populations left, at the top of some of the smaller Thames tributaries. However, in Berkshire they were assumed extinct. That is until ecologists surveyed around the Barkham Road bridge last summer. It was the first time since 1999 that a native crayfish had been found on the brook or anywhere else in Berkshire, a real red-letter day!

I thought I'd end by making a connection between crayfish and trees. Hiding places are vital to crayfish. During the warmer weather, when they are fully active, they hide from predators during the day. In the winter they more or less hibernate in burrows that they dig themselves in the stream banks, and in holes in man-made stone structure like old bridges. However, they also use tree roots, repurposing holes in the bank created by them and lurking under root plates of alder and willow (for example) which project into the river. All this means that the streamside trees are vital to their existence providing both food and shelter.

Only a single animal was found at Barkham Bridge. However, long days of searching streams and finding very little has taught me that they don't give themselves away easily. So I'm confident that there are more there, hiding among the stones and tree roots in the Barkham Brook, and who knows where else.

"I would not expect any foreseeable increase temperature to have a radical effect on trees. No tree species has its southern limit in Britain. Beech has been affected by recent extreme summers, which is surprising for a tree whose natural southern limit is far to the south; but most of the effect is in planted beech, put on chalklands and other soils to which it is not suited."

Oliver Rackham (2006) "Woodlands"

CAN WE RESURRECT THE ENGLISH ELM?

That's the heading of a **press cutting** sent to me by Derek Oxbrough.

In the last issue (pp 9-10) both Barbara Stagles and Duncan Fisher wrote about their memories of elm trees and we'd still like you to send us your memories and especially any photos you have (which would of course be returned to you).

I'm sure you don't need reminding that Dutch Elm Disease (DED) destroyed an estimated 25 million trees in the 1970s. From the early C18th the English elm was a popular avenue tree in large estate including Blenheim, Kensington Palace, Hampton Court and Windsor Great Park. When DED struck, they disappeared from these notable gardens as well as from our fields and hedgerows.

The search for disease-resistant varieties to replace *Ulmus procera* continues. We have had a few planted in Wokingham, but the first one (**WOOL**) wasn't that resistant. A Field elm (*Ulmus minor* 'minor'), it was planted as a 1.5m high tree in 2013, but succumbed to DED and died in 2020.

Varieties developed in several countries (France, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain and the US as well as the UK) have been planted experimentally across Britain. Encouragingly, some planted 20 years ago still survive; but of some 30 varieties trialled most have failed. One variety referred to as 'PRINCETON FIASCO' was a promising variety from the US, but when planted in Britain it proved fatally vulnerable to the European elm bark beetle (*Scolytus scolytus*).

Another promising variety, 'SAN ZANOBI', developed in Tuscany, was found to be susceptible to strong winds. Several planted in Christ Church Meadow, Oxford, had their trunks snapped during last year's storms.

'SAPPORO GOLD', another possible candidate, looks more like an ornamental tree when mature, and is hence not a suitable replacement.

The European white elm (*Ulmus laevis*) looks similar to the English elm, and was favoured by Lancelot "Capability" Brown, but has been found to be drought intolerant.

At Christ Church Meadow an avenue of different elm varieties has been planted. The surviving trees are all now at least 30' tall. The head gardener cites 'WINGHAM' as his favourite variety, mainly because of its form. 'ADEMUZ' (from Spain) comes in second, but he doesn't rate 'LUTECE' or 'VADA'.



However, 'LUTECE' has proved popular and successful elsewhere. In Paris, there's a 40-year-old plantation of them in the Bois de Vincennes. This inspired English Heritage to plant two lines of ten 'LUTECE' at Wrest Park in Bedfordshire, flanking the French parterre in front of the mansion. They are now 21' tall; (the photo above was taken in 2016). They are difficult to manage because they are structurally weak and often fork dramatically, leading to splitting. Also in Paris, 300 'VADA' are thriving in a park at Sceaux, with another 100 in the Tuileries Gardens. It is a Dutch clone and has been the most successful (so far) in a trial planting at Lees Court in Kent, where the trees are now seven years old.



Both the European white elm and the 'ADEMUZ' variety have been planted in our Borough as part of **Project Hairstreak**. The photo left, taken in 2020, is of the 143rd elm planted for this project, a white elm planted in Charvil in 2018. You may also remember Alison and Sarah's article in last **November's issue** (page 4), about another DED resistant variety *Ulmus* 'New Horizon'. You might like to watch the **video** again.

More varieties are being developed and trialled. Hopefully some of them will become part of our landscape in the years to come. Alec Gunner, an elm specialist, says "The positive message is that while there may not be a lot of choice at the moment, things are rapidly moving forward - well, rapidly for trees, anyway..."

SPECIES IN FOCUS – BANYAN TREES (*Ficus spp.*)

10 miscellaneous facts about Banyan trees...

1. Several species of *Ficus* are known as Banyan trees. All are figs, each pollinated by their own species of tiny wasp.
2. About half the *Ficus* species simply take root in the soil like most other trees; but the others, the Banyans, are hemi-epiphytic. They grow from seeds that land and germinate on other trees. Aerial roots grow down into the soil and can become very thick. They can also spread laterally for long distances.
3. The aerial roots may envelop the host tree and the Banyans are then known as strangler figs. The host tree may initially be provided with extra support to help it survive storms; but it will eventually be killed and decompose, leaving a hollow central core. The Banyan is then called a 'columnar tree' and provides shelter for many animals. Not all Banyans are stranglers.
4. The Giant or Indian Banyan (*Ficus benghalensis*), native to India and Pakistan, is the national tree of India. It puts down so many roots that one tree can look like a forest. The one shown above is in a botanical garden near Kolkata (Calcutta). All the "trunks" are aerial roots. It covers about 14,500m² (3.5 acres), with over 3,600 "trunks" and is thought to be over 250 years old.
5. Another, more familiar, Banyan species, *Ficus macrocarpa* (known as the Curtain Fig, Chinese Banyan, Australian Banyan or Indian Laurel) is native across SE Asia and Australia. The one shown right is a large one in Icod de Los Vinos in Tenerife.
6. It's not surprising that Banyans can colonize walls and urban buildings, as long as there is soil beneath them.
7. For our "Favourite Tree" evening earlier this month, Glynn Percival chose a particular Banyan tree in Hong Kong, known as 'The Lam Tsuen Wishing Tree'. According to local custom, you write your wishes on paper, tie them to an orange and throw it into the crown. If the orange successfully hangs onto one of the tree branches, then your wishes come true. However, oranges rot, creating unpleasant smells, so they were banned. The tree is now full of plastic oranges.
8. The oldest living bonsai in Taiwan is a 240-year-old Banyan.
9. In western literature, the Banyan tree is first mentioned by Theophrastus (considered by some the founder of modern botany). He learnt about it after Alexander the Great and his army came across it in 326BC.
10. In John Milton's "Paradise Lost", Adam and Eve made their first clothes out of Banyan leaves.



SADLY DEPARTED - MRN 4418



This Ash tree was surveyed by Janet Firth in Barkham in 2010, when it has a girth of 4.6m at ground level. She has subsequently recorded its demise. In 2012 the right-hand trunk was felled, followed in 2015 by the left-hand one, leaving just the middle one. In March this year it was felled.

RECOMMENDED READING AND VIEWING

TVERC CONFERENCE MARCH 2021

You can choose which presentations to watch. There's an extended version of **Barry Anderson's presentation** on our [website](#). Listen to the first talk (TVERC in action) to hear about the **Oxford Tree Opportunity Mapping Project** mentioned by Kerry and Alison (starts about 7min 20sec into the presentation). You can watch a video and sign up for their newsletter on their [website](#).

WOODLAND TRUST WOODLAND OPPORTUNITY MAP

Type in a post code to see what possibilities for woodland planting are in that area - check out the opportunities in Wokingham.

FRIENDS OF THE EARTH have pointed out the limitations of this data. It does not exclude all potentially sensitive sites, such as species-rich grassland. It is essential to carry out ecological surveys on suggested sites before deciding to plant trees there.

OLIVE TREE DISEASE

Barbara Stagles sent me this link about another serious threat to our trees. It affects trees other than olives.

10 GOLDEN RULES FOR PLANTING TREES

Another recommendation from Barbara.

ENGLAND'S TEMPERATE RAINFORESTS

Did you realise that we had important temperate rainforests? There's a [website](#) that catalogues and [maps](#) them.

TREE PLANTING IN WALES [2 min video]

NHS intensive care staff have planted more than 1,000 trees near Crickhowell in Wales to offset the carbon emissions and waste that came from the machines needed to treat patients with Covid-19.

WHY CUTTING DOWN TREES CAN BE GOOD FOR THE CLIMATE

A 3 min video about the Kielder Forest in Northumberland.

SECRETS OF THE DEAD WOOD: ANCIENT OAKS HOLD KEY TO NEW LIFE

Brain Hunt sent me this link. I was particularly interested to read it since my father worked in Richmond Park. I love the "[Mission Invertebrate](#)" project!

ASH DIEBACK

'Experimental' drones to be used to plant trees in Derbyshire.

PREVENTING SQUIRREL DESTRUCTION OF TREES

This '[Costing the Earth](#)' episode from Radio 4 discusses the use of gene editing for squirrel control.

BROCKWELL PARK TREE TRAIL

At our AGM, Nick Hale, senior project officer for the South East Rivers Trust, mentioned that his favourite tree was in Brockwell Park, Lambeth.

ROB MCBRIDE COMPLETES HIS VETERAN TREE SURVEY OF OFFA'S DYKE

Another contribution from Barbara Stagles.

"SYLVA" OR "A DISCOURSE OF FOREST-TREES AND THE PROPAGATION OF TIMBER"

This book by John Evelyn is generally recognised as one of the most influential texts on forestry ever published. Its theme of sustainability still has resonance today. It was first presented in 1662 as a paper to the Royal Society and published as a book two years later in 1664. You can read it on-line or download it as an e-book. Patricia Green reminds us that 2020 was the 400th anniversary of John Evelyn's birth. His legacy is discussed in an RHS [podcast](#) (13½ mins into this edition of their Garden podcast).

DINOSAUR-KILLING ASTEROID STRIKE GAVE RISE TO AMAZON RAINFOREST

Conifers and ferns were common in South American forests before the asteroid strike, 66 million years ago. The asteroid destroyed large areas of these forests. As the forests recovered over the next six million years, it was the flowering plants, the angiosperms that flourished.

THE GROWTH STRATEGIES OF PLANTS

This excellent hour-long presentation discusses the difference between animal and plant growth; reflecting the fact that plants have evolved developmental rather than behavioural strategies to cope with predators. It also discusses environmental triggers for plant growth and the regeneration of a 32,000-year-old plant. Aimed at the layman, you don't need any specialist knowledge to appreciate it.

DID YOU KNOW?...Burnham Beeches are asking for donations to help protect their ancient trees.

Many of the trees there are over 500 years old. We saw quite a few of them on our visit some years ago. Each ancient tree has its own management plan, specially tailored for its specific needs. Caring for these trees is a complex, highly skilled and expensive task. Now, a scheme has been set up to raise £12,000 for this management programme. They are asking for **donations**. Every donation, whatever its value, is vital to help them maintain these trees.

.... *And to make you smile:*



Spotted in Shinfield North (above) and some more lovely carvings.

If you take a tree down, use the rest! Angus Ross sent this photo of carvings done near Hartley Wintney this March



Some sources used in this issue: all web pages accessed 22-05-2021. Links embedded in the text are not repeated here. -Email me if you want a list of them.

p12-Species in Focus: "The Secret Life of Trees" by Colin Tudge (2005) ISBN978-0-14-101293-3

<https://underthebanyan.blog/2016/09/04/10-things-you-need-to-know-about-banyan-trees/> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Banyan>

<https://science.howstuffworks.com/life/botany/understanding-roots-banyan-tree.htm> https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Great_Banyan

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lam_Tsuen_wishing_trees https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Strangler_fig

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The views and opinions expressed in Tree Watch are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the editor or the official policy or position of the Wokingham District Veteran Tree Association.

Don't forget: You can download a pdf version of our 10th anniversary report from our website - but you can also access an extended version of it, with links to the trees mentioned:

wdvta.org.uk/report10.php

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

The inventory of commemorative and special trees can also be accessed via our website:

wdvta.org.uk/commem.php

Finally, and most importantly,
THANK YOU to everyone who has recorded trees for us.
We wouldn't have a database without you.