



On 23rd November, we had **8,651** trees in our database and **13,882** photographs

Welcome to the latest issue of Tree Watch.

Since this is the last issue before Christmas, I'd like to wish you all a very enjoyable Christmas and a peaceful, healthy and happy 2024. 'Species in Focus' this month features that well-known Christmas tree, the Norway Spruce (page 12) and on page 13 there are some simple Christmas quizzes from the Woodland Trust.

It's just been announced that this year is the warmest on record and probably the warmest in the last 125,000 years. Perhaps these two photos exemplify this. They were both taken in November - the top one in 2014 (on 18th) and the other one this year (on 3rd). These oaks are MRN 443 with 444 behind. When both these veteran oaks germinated, they were in Windsor Forest. Now they are in an attractive open space within the Shinfield Park housing estate.

Unfortunately, much of this issue concerns iconic trees that have been lost or are threatened; but there is some good news too. We were all delighted to hear that Martin Woolner has been presented with the BBC Berkshire 'Make a Difference' Award (see page 2). There is not enough space here for a piece about the 'State of Nature' report. That will be in the February issue; but the link to the full report is in the recommendations list on page 14.

The next issue of Tree Watch will be February 2024 and the copy deadline is 31st January. If you have any comments or responses to anything in this issue, or contributions for future issues, please send them to: **Elaine Butler - TreeWatch @ wdvta.org.uk**



Don't forget words underlined in dark green are links to further details (obviously not when printed).

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

- | | | |
|-------------------------------------|----------------|---|
| p2 Events | Martin Woolner | p8 Threatened Trees |
| p2 National Tree Week | | p10 Veteran Tree Survey |
| p3 Did you know? - ANOBs | | Oak leaf on coin |
| p3 Tree of the Year | | p11 National (Tree) Treasures - Coate Water |
| p4 Some Local News | | p12 Species in Focus-Norway Spruce |
| p5 Protecting Ancients and Veterans | | p13 Hazel Spruce |
| p6 Sadly Departed | | p13 Christmas Quizzes |
| | | p14 Recommendations |

Events - Dec 2023 - Feb 2024

❖ Saturday 6 January 2024 - 10:15 - Annual Winter Walk and/or pub lunch. Meet at the Bearwood Road end of Coombes Lane, Barkham. (See below.) Book via our [website](#).

Non-WDVTa events:

❖ Friday 1st 13:00 - Tree Council on-line talk: Garden Trees. Free. Book via their [website](#). This is the third talk for National Tree Week. Along with the other two talks (Wednesday 29th and Thursday 30th November) on Mistletoe and Veterans in Art, it should be available on The Tree Council [YouTube](#) site.

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

EVENTS

Events Team

Barkham walk in January

Start the new year with a lovely, local walk led by local resident and WDVTa treasurer Derek Oxbrough. It will roughly follow the Coombes Circular [Walk](#). The main aim will be to see the larger trees on the route, but in particular, a couple of very large oaks, one very old and one not so old. We want to set a challenge for the participants at the beginning of the walk but this will remain a mystery until we set out. Suffice to say it is nothing strenuous. There are views across the Bearwood Golf Course and College as far as Oxfordshire, if the weather is good. We'll also pass Ellis's Hill Farm and Barkham Manor with its pond. The route we walk will be around 2 to 3 miles depending on weather and ground conditions on the day. It's largely flat with some easy slopes. The Coombes Lane section has been recently resurfaced and will be nice to walk on, but some of the sections, which are also bridleways, will be muddy and require decent wellingtons rather than walking shoes/boots.

We'll meet at 10:15 at the Bearwood Road end of Coombes Lane. It's not a car park, but there is quite a lot of parking space on the RH side of the Lane. Please carshare where possible. Satnav information will be sent to those booking.

The walk will be followed, at 12:30, by lunch at the [Poachers](#) Pub in Mill Lane, for those who'd like to warm up by a roaring log fire and enjoy time to chat and eat with friends old and new. Poachers presence not guaranteed! Menus will be sent to everyone expressing an interest so we can advise the pub of numbers and selected choices in good time. Non-walking members most welcome.

We do hope you can join us - for the walk or lunch or both. Please book using the form on our [website](#), and add a mobile phone number when booking so we can call you on the day or just before in case of any problem, hopefully no blizzard forecast.

Trees in the Arts Evening

This was scheduled for National Tree Week, but had to be postponed until the spring. Professor Christiana Payne from Oxford will talk on how selected artists portray trees in their work. We hope the evening will include contributions from members and guests from the Wokingham Arts and Literary Societies.

As usual details of these and other WDVTa events will be sent to all members by email and posted on our website. The website is kept up-to-date with any new events and changes to published events, so always check the website if you want to confirm details. Although both WDVTa and non-WDVTa events are listed in Tree Watch, events may be arranged after circulation of an issue and it's always worth checking the website for new non-WDVTa events. The Tree Council and some other organisations often give short notice of their on-line events, which means they aren't announced in Tree Watch. A good example of this is the Arboricultural Association's Winter Webinars, announced after the August issue of Tree Watch, and including Ted Green's talk on November 22nd. Thanks to Coralie Ramsey for highlighting WDVTa in the chat. The Arboriculture Association have some free general interest webinars as well as those designed for professionals. You can register for future webinars and view their webinar archive on their [website](#). There's one on 'Trees and Storms' from February this year and I assume Ted's talk will be there too.

CONGRATULATIONS TO MARTIN WOOLNER

Alison Griffin

Many of you will have met Martin Woolner, the Lead Tree Warden in Maidenhead. He has run training courses for us, given us talks and demonstrations and brought along his display of stamps depicting trees to our AGM earlier this year.

His work across environmental issues including trees has been recognised with a BBC Berkshire 'Make a Difference' Award. Over 10,000 nominations were received this year across the 8 different categories and Martin was the winner for the Green Award which recognises an individual or group of people who help to make where we live more environmentally friendly and better for nature.

As well as write ups in the [local paper](#) and various [newsletters](#), the award ceremony was mentioned on the local BBC news on television.

NATIONAL TREE WEEK

This year National Tree Week is 25 November - 3 December. I don't know of any local events celebrating it, but the Tree Council [website](#) will have details of their events and others nationally.

They have three free on-line talks on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday that week. All between 13:00 and 14:00. The titles are: 'Mistle-Go! Help us find Britain's mistletoe'; 'Oak and Ash - Veterans in Art' and 'Trees in your Garden - The benefits they provide'. They'll be recorded and made available on their [YouTube](#) site.

Next year is The Tree Council's 50th anniversary, and to kick start it their theme for this year's National Tree Week is 'Grow a Tree in 23'. Older members may remember that 1973 was declared 'National Tree Planting Year', with the slogan 'Plant a tree in 73'; followed by 'and one more in '74'. The Tree Council was founded in 1974, with government backing, as the umbrella body for UK organisations involved in tree planting, care and conservation. The idea was to keep up the momentum of National Tree Planting Year 1973. One of The Tree Council's first actions (in 1975) was to organise National Tree Week.



DID YOU KNOW?...AONBs are now 'National Landscapes'.

'Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty' in England, Wales and Northern Ireland are to be [renamed](#) 'National Landscapes'.

The name change is designed to emphasise their national importance and be more obviously understandable than AONB. The legal protection they have remains the same for now, but the [report](#) that recommended the name change, also recommends it should be "strengthened with new purposes, powers and resources".

TREE OF THE YEAR

In the last issue of Tree Watch (page10), I mentioned the Crouch Oak in Addlestone as one of this year's candidates for 'Tree of the Year'. It didn't win, but it did come second, with 14% of the votes. The [winner](#) is a sweet chestnut in Wrexham, with 17% of the votes.

It's gratifying that this competition still attracts [publicity](#) in news outlets, radio and TV. It even has its own [Wikipedia](#) page. The UK Tree of the Year competition was not established until late 2014, but in 2013 individual trees in Scotland and Wales were entered into the 2014 European competition. Entries into the European competition were only granted to the individual national winners between 2014 and 2017. From 2018, entry has been for the overall British winner.

In UK, each national winner receives a £1,000 grant from the People's Postcode Lottery to be used for any purpose in relation to the tree. This could be a survey or health check, remedial works, plaques and signs or a celebratory event. A selection of the shortlisted trees also receive grants of £500.

The [European Tree of the Year](#) competition has been running since 2011. The winning tree is selected by public vote from the participating countries (currently 13). Britain's tree of the year is nominated for the following year's European Tree of the Year. It has never won. Romania, Bulgaria, Estonia, Portugal, Czech Republic and Spain have all won once. Poland has won three times and Hungary four times.

As mentioned later, the Sycamore Gap tree was Tree of the Year in 2016. It was 5th in the [2017](#) European vote. The previous year's England winner was the Cubbington Pear, a wild pear (*Pyrus pyraster*), which came 8th in the [2016](#) European contest. The photo here was taken in 2015. In spite of much protest, it was chopped down in 2020 to make way for HS2. Cuttings were taken before it was felled and these were grafted onto new rootstock. Having been raised successfully, they've been planted in local primary schools, nature reserves and a churchyard. The stump and root ball were moved by the contractors and replanted in a field 200m from its original location. It wasn't expected to survive; but last month it was [reported](#) to be sprouting new shoots and leaves. Unlike many fruit trees, this pear was not grafted onto a different root stock, and so will eventually produce the same pears as the original one. The HS2 contractors, Balfour Beatty Vinci, [said](#) the firm is thrilled that the tree is living in "a thriving new habitat for wildlife which has been created by HS2".



Mike Garratt, CC BY-SA 2.0

SOME LOCAL NEWS

Living Roofs - As part of [WBC's](#) effort to improve air quality around schools, funded by DEFRA, new green roofed bike shelters have been installed in six schools: St Crispin's School, Emmbrook School, The Holt School and St Paul's C of E Junior School (all in Wokingham Town) as well as Forest School (Winnersh) and Piggott Senior School (Twyford). The succulent plants used for these roofs absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, helping in some small way to reduce Wokingham's carbon footprint.

Another award for Freely Fruity - Matt Knight, James Whittingham and Ryan Simpson set up [Freely Fruity](#) in 2020, during the pandemic. In August they received the 'Prime Minister's Point of Light Award' in recognition of their work to address sustainability and food poverty. The charity aims to make fresh, healthy produce freely available to all. It has a two-acre site in Sindlesham, from where 1.5 tonnes of produce was distributed in its first year. Along with a dedicated group of volunteers, it has established several orchards across Wokingham and Reading and has just taken over the maintenance of the Deardon Community Orchard in Shinfield. As reported in Tree Watch [#57](#) (p8), they are now establishing a tree nursery in association with WBC at High Barn Farm, where trees will be grown to create new community orchards across the Borough.

They have received other awards, including the BBC Berkshire award last year. Matt Knight is Head of Ecology and Sustainability at St Mary's Junior School in Shinfield and was responsible for planting the miyawaki forest at the school, as described in Tree Watch [#57](#) (p8). Earlier this year, his work at the school was recognised with the 'Outstanding Beacon School' by the Tree Council (see Tree Watch [#58](#) (p5-6)).

The Coombes Woodland - A large part of this woodland previously in private ownership has just been acquired by Barkham and Arborfield & Newland Parish Councils. A small patch ($\frac{3}{4}$ acre) located on Sandy Lane off Barkham Road, in Barkham was auctioned on 1st November. The guide price was £5,000, but what was described as a '[bidding war](#)', resulted in a final bid of £21,506 plus fees.



© Wokingham Today

St Paul's Oak – MRN [177](#) – This much-loved veteran oak in St Paul's churchyard on the Reading Road in Wokingham, lost a large limb on 19th August. As the photo shows, some of its branches overhang the road. Fortunately, the severed branch fell into the churchyard. Nobody was hurt and no grave stones were damaged. Fungal infection has been detected, leading to concern that other branches may fail too. The church authorities are debating the future of the tree, mindful of its location and the danger falling limbs pose to the public. There is a very real risk that it will be felled.



'Wokingham Today' published articles on this tree on the [9th](#) and on the [25th](#) September, reflecting its significance to the Wokingham treescape.

MORE PROTECTION FOR ANCIENT AND VETERAN TREES

New legislation intended to strengthen the protection of irreplaceable habitats should come into force in the next year or two.

Currently, the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) defines and protects both replaceable and irreplaceable habitats. They can only be negatively impacted during development if a 10% biodiversity net gain (BNG) will result from compensation measures. Impacts on irreplaceable habitats requires a stronger justification, but are subject to the same 10% net gain requirement. Developers have to submit an audit of habitats within any development site and include plans showing how they will mitigate habitat loss in such a way as to achieve the 10% overall net gain.

Under the new mandatory BNG legislation, these requirements will remain, but be strengthened. Irreplaceable habitats are considered those with a high biodiversity value which is difficult to recreate and hence impossible to replace with anything that would yield a 10% increase in BNG and so the 10% net gain requirement is not applied. Any adverse impact on them would only be allowed under very special circumstances, considered on an individual basis. However, enhancement to irreplaceable habitats can contribute to towards a development's overall BNG requirement.

The proposed list of irreplaceable habitats is: Ancient woodland; Ancient and veteran trees; Blanket bog; Limestone pavement; Coastal sand dunes; Spartina saltmarsh swards; Mediterranean saltmarsh scrub and Lowland fens. A public consultation on the list will be held in the second half of 2024.

In a blog entitled '[BNG: what's happened and what's coming next](#)', the Defra Biodiversity Net Gain team says, " *we've likened BNG to a baby elephant! It's big, complex and needs a herd to nurture it to adulthood.*"

SADLY DEPARTED



MRN **4286** - This English oak in Wargrave was surveyed in 2010, when its girth was 4.2m.

It blew down this month and fell



across Milley Lane, which is the other side of the hedge in the 2010 photo.

Three other English oaks in our database have been lost, two this month and one last year.

MRN **1829** (*below*) had a TPO and was felled, with permission, when loss of limbs led to a loss of structural integrity and revealed fungal infection and rotting. It's in the middle of a proposed development site.



MRN **1900** in Barkham lost a large limb this month in Storm Ciarán, exposing a rotten core. It was felled by WBC, leaving a low stump (*below right*).



MRN **4810** was felled nearly a year ago, in December 2022 (*above left*). It was in a back garden in Earley. We don't know why it was felled.

ALSO SADLY DEPARTED

Several significant trees outside Wokingham have unfortunately been lost recently.

The Sycamore Gap Tree

Since it was widely reported in the media, I'm sure you've all heard and read about the shocking felling of the Sycamore Gap tree. There's an overview and some nice photos in "[Sycamore Gap tree: The story so far:](#)" and a lovely photo of the tree silhouetted against the northern lights in The '[Northern Echo](#)'. You

can also [watch](#) the remains being cut up and removed. The National Trust is considering what to do with the wood. They've had many suggestions to choose from. They also have a 3D LiDAR scan of the tree and are going to create a complete [replica](#) of it.

The photo below left was taken in August 2010 and the one on the right in May 2007, looking along the wall to the east.



The press coverage was extensive in both the number of articles and their scope. An American news [website](#) ran with 'Incredible! A teenager cuts down the most famous tree in England'. The Tree Council considered '[What it tells us about the connection between humans and trees](#)'; and it even inspired three articles in the December issue of Current Archaeology (also available [on-line](#)). The tree was famous, not for its own sake, but for its dramatic setting. The central section of the wall was built on the natural cliffs of the Whin Sill, an igneous intrusion of (mainly) dolerite. The escarpment was pierced by glacial overflow channel during the ice age, and it is one of these that forms the Sycamore Gap, between Peel Crags and Highshield Crags. It was especially popular with photographers and became a symbol of the wall itself. The first article in Current Archaeology '[Alternative views: Exploring 'icons' of the Hadrian's Wall landscape](#)', discusses how artistic interest in different sections of Hadrian's Wall has changed over the centuries. In '[Rooted in the future: A cultural ecology of the Sycamore Gap tree](#)', the author hopes "this unfortunate event can encourage us to embrace change and transformation in nature and culture" and goes even further by saying "While the Wall is often perceived as a monument of conflict and military defence, the purpose of the UNESCO World Heritage list is to advance global peace and security - which sounds like something of a paradox. The Sycamore Gap tree may be able to resolve that paradox." Finally, the age of the tree is discussed in '[The tale of a tree: An archaeological history of Sycamore Gap](#)'.

Most of the press coverage failed to mention that it was [Tree of the Year](#) in 2016, but its age was frequently mentioned. How old was the tree? Did you notice that the age of the tree as reported in the news, started at 200, became 300 and then 150? The National Trust, which, together with the Northumberland National Park Authority, looks after the site (and the tree), said it was [planted](#) in the late 1800s by a previous landowner John Clayton as a landscape feature. He was certainly right about that! That makes it about 150 years old. John Clayton purchased Steel Rigg farm (including Castle Nick and Sycamore Gap) in 1834.

Some newspaper reports referred to it as Georgian, claiming it was planted during the reign of George I (1714-27). The first representation of the tree is in a notebook of John Hodgson dated 18th October 1832. It's a drawing of the gap with a stone enclosure surrounding a relatively immature tree and he refers to the enclosure protecting the tree from grazing cattle or sheep. The enclosure appears on the first six-inch Ordnance Survey map (1860). This land was included in the Henshaw Township enclosure act of 1787 and an immature tree in 1832, possibly suggests it was planted as a boundary tree between Lowes' fields south of the Wall and the open ground on the north side that runs along to Steel Rigg farm (now the site of the National Trust Park car park). Of-course, since it's been felled, the rings can be counted to determine its actual age, but I haven't seen the ring-count age reported anywhere yet.

A media claim that the tree is a relic of an ancient woodland, cleared for hunting purposes, is definitely false. Archaeological and environmental data show that this landscape has been a pastoral and farmed one, largely cleared of trees, for the last 4,000 years, since the late Neolithic.

The Lichen Tree

One of the most important ancient pollarded beech trees in [Burnham Beeches](#) has had to be felled, because of extensive decay in its trunk. It was known as '[The Lichen Tree](#)' because it hosted a rare epiphytic crustose lichen, *Pyrenula nitida*. The tree was braced to stabilise it in 2016, allowing time for the lichen to spread to nearby trees. Once felled, it was evident that numerous beetle larvae were living in the spongy decaying wood. That wood, left on the forest floor, will continue to provide habitat for these beetles and many other species.

Incidentally, although there is not a 3D LiDAR scan of 'The Lichen Tree', there is one of the '[Druids Oak](#)', the oldest tree in Burnham Beeches (photo right). It's part of the SCATTER project, reported previously in Tree Watch (#57 p2), which involves scanning several ancient trees to help identify structural features and predict how much carbon is stored in ancient trees.



The Komfo Anokye Kola Tree

Just as the Sycamore Gap tree was reported in foreign media, the British media features reports on foreign tree issues. In Ghana, there was outrage when a 300-year-old kola tree was [felled](#). As with the Sycamore Gap tree, a man has been charged, but the motive is unknown. This tree stood in the middle of a major road, having been spared during the construction of the road. It was culturally important to the Ashanti, as it stood where the Ashanti gained independence from the kingdom of Denkyira in the Battle of Feyiase (1701). According to local legend, it had special healing powers because it grew on the spot where the renowned priest, Komfo Anokye, spat a kola nut on the ground in the early 1700s. Both the Sycamore Gap and the Komfo Anokye trees were tourist attractions, and for different reasons attracted many visitors each year.

A week after the Sycamore Gap tree was cut down, a 40' high yew in a privately owned field near Uckham Lane in Battle, was uprooted; but [rumours](#) related its demise to the felling of the Sycamore Gap tree, referring to it as being "mysteriously uprooted in a 'suspected felling'".

THREATENED TREES

Other trees have been in the news because of their proposed felling.

Darwin's Oak

A tree known as 'Darwin's oak' is scheduled to be felled to make way for the Shrewsbury north-west relief road. In spite of considerable [opposition](#) that's been campaigning for the preservation of the tree for over two years, the proposed road was [approved](#) at the end of October. The oak is 550 years old, with a girth of 7m. Darwin was born and raised in Shrewsbury and the oak is close to 'The Mount,' Darwin's childhood home. Perhaps the young Darwin sat beneath the tree or climbed into it.

A recent national [petition](#) to save the tree was started by Rob McBride on 30th October. Over 55,000 signatures were added on one day, November 17th, bringing the total to over 75,000 signatures. By 22nd November it had 90,003 signatures. More will have been added by the time you read this.

Jack Taylor, the lead campaigner at the Woodland Trust, is quoted as saying, "Just weeks after the iconic Sycamore Gap tree was lost, we are now faced with the loss of another iconic tree."

Coton Orchard

Around 500 trees will be felled from an orchard in Cambridge if an approved new busway goes ahead. It's recognised as rich in biodiversity, with some veteran Brambley apples trees and much more; but there is controversy over its importance because it doesn't tick all the boxes to qualify as a traditional orchard and hence isn't classified as a priority habitat. The value of the veteran apples is also questioned. '[The fight is on to save Coton Orchard](#)' is worth reading as it explores various aspects of the debate.

The Witham Elm

This mature [English elm](#) is on a roundabout in the Braintree district of Essex. It has avoided Dutch elm disease, but is now threatened on two fronts. Developers wanted it removed as part of the proposed Woodend Farm development. This prompted an examination of the tree, revealing decay at the bottom of the trunk. So, if it poses a danger to traffic, it might have to be felled anyway. A great shame to lose another mature elm.

Reprieved

Some threatened trees do get a [reprieve](#). Sixteen 25-year-old trees on road verges in a new housing development in Crick, near Daventry in Northamptonshire, were due to be felled, not because the site was destined for buildings or a road, but because West Northamptonshire Council initially refused to be responsible for them when the estate was adopted. It cited the expense of their maintenance; but when the developer, David Wilson Homes, said they will finance some of the maintenance, the council relented. These trees make the area so much more attractive, as well as providing all the other advantages that semi-mature trees provide. They will have been a significant factor when people chose to buy the adjacent houses.

As well as the sad loss of significant old individual trees, many areas of woodland and forest are still being lost to development, farming, logging and desertification. In an effort to compensate for this loss, there are many tree planting schemes across the world. This month, Kenyans were given a day's [holiday](#) to plant 100 million trees. With a population of 55 million, the government reckoned if 50 million people planted 2 trees each, they would reach their target. It's part of a plan to plant 15 billion trees in 10 years. An app has been produced which suggests suitable species for the different locations. Fruit trees were frequently [chosen](#) and children were encouraged to plant fruit trees at school. School children have been fostering trees at school for many years now. However, at the same time, some restrictions on logging have just been [removed](#) by the Kenyan government.



MRN [265](#), a crack willow (*Salix fragilis*) growing on the east bank of the Emm Brook behind Woosehill Lane (Wokingham Town), was re-pollarded in the winter of 2010/2011. It had a girth of 4m (at 1.5m) when recorded in April 2009. It was one of eleven willows along the Emm Brook pollarded as part of the Emm Brook restoration scheme.

Barbara Stagles and Mirium Laurent recorded these trees between 2009 and 2011. Barbara wrote about them as some of her favourite trees in the third issue of [Tree Watch](#) (page 2). [Tree Watch had just four or five pages back then!]

The re-pollarding was just a small part of the Emm Brook restoration project, which, from 2018, was undertaken by the South East Rivers Trust. At our AGM in 2021, Sam Hughes and Nick Hale gave us a [presentation](#) about the work of the trust, including work on the Loddon and Charvil Backwater as well as the Emm Brook. There's a November 2022 update about the Emm Brook on the Trust's [website](#).

Veteran Tree Survey snapshot

UPDATED STATUS

6% (558)

records updated

174

felled

53

fallen

219

dead

208

re-measured

11

re-pollarded

THE VETERAN TREE SURVEY

We've added 92 new trees to our database this month. You may well be wondering how that can be since the survey was closed at the AGM in 2022, 18 months ago! As was said at the time, there were several records to be submitted and whilst that was in progress, new photos and updates to existing records would be processed. This has taken rather longer than anticipated for a variety of reasons. However, many of the trees added this week were surveyed in 2013 and 2014. They were on private land and although the owners allowed them to be surveyed, they did not want the trees on a public website. That land has now been sold and we can now add the records to our database (making the delay in finalisation worthwhile). This was the only incidence we had of permission to survey, without wanting them added to the database. We've had refusals to survey some areas and, in one case, permission to survey, but not take photos.

Together with the photos of these new trees, we've added 175 new photos to our database, including an update for the old coppiced ash (MRN [2199](#)) in Pearman's Copse (Shinfield) which was tragically damaged by fire in February/March 2008. It's still visible beside a path in the woods partly obscured by vegetation, and does not look as dramatic as it did in February 2008, when its girth was measured as 6.18m at 0.3m; but perhaps this means it's less likely to attract the attention of vandals. It survived the fire and by March 2017 its girth had increased to 6.53m (again at 0.3m).



Above left to right: March 2008 (after the fire); March 2017 and November 2023.

Below left: February 2008 (before the fire). Below right: November 2023.



AN OAK LEAF WILL FEATURE ON THE NEW 5P COIN.

New coins, marking the reign of King Charles III, will come into circulation by the end of the year. The reverse side of every coin from the 1p to the £2 will feature the country's flora and fauna, reflecting one of the main interest and concerns of King Charles.

There's a hazel dormouse on the 1p and a red squirrel on the 2p. The 10p has a capercaillie, with a puffin on the 20p. An Atlantic salmon is depicted on the 50p, whilst the £1 has bees and the £2 features the national flowers - a rose for England, a daffodil for Wales, a thistle for Scotland and a shamrock for Northern Ireland. The denomination digits alongside the symbols are large, designed to help children identify numbers and learn to count.

COATE WATER

Coate Water is about an hour away, just off the M4 at Junction 15 (Swindon).

Here we found a lake with an avenue of small trees leading you on a circular walk, much of it in blissful shade. The walk was about 30 minutes and there is a kiosk selling hot drinks and a few snacks. There's ample, inexpensive parking but the machines do require cash!

There's a lot to do at Coate Water, although some of it is in the process of being refurbished. You'll find an outdoor swimming pool, pitch and putt, a lovely new children's play area and plenty of footpaths taking you further afield to neighbouring villages.



Richard Jefferies was born at Coate Water, Wiltshire in November 1848. His family farmed a smallholding of some 40 acres. He seemed to like nothing better than walking around the area often with the gamekeeper. He's known as a nature writer noted for his depiction of English rural life.

'The Council Oak' was named in his memory and, I think he'd be pleased to know it's now home to bees.

I was drawn to a sign a little way away from the lake. It said 'Tree Collection' and it was immediately

obvious that it was in fact a collection of all sorts of different types of trees - weeping willow, a beautiful red Acer, Indian Bean Tree, silver birch, and several oaks, to name but a few.



Two trees that stood out for me were the Paperbark Maple (*Acer griseum*) with its distinctive cinnamon red bark (photo left) and a Himalayan Birch (*Betula utilis*).



In early September, it was lovely to see these flowers (photo left) of the Glorytree (*Clerodendrum trichotomum*),

Fascinating though this area was, with its wide variety of different sorts of trees, it became all the more special when you realised it was actually a memorial

arboretum - family members had chosen or planted trees in memory of their loved ones. Messages were left for aunts, uncles, parents and children. People had decorated trees with a garland or wreath. Painted stones could be found at the base of one tree, whilst wind chimes hung from the branches of another.

I love the idea of a memorial wood and, from the number of plaques we found, so do many other families.

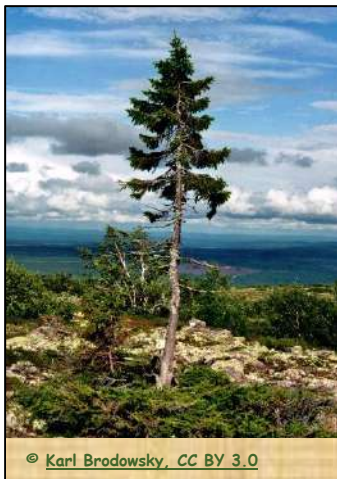
"The distribution of tree species will inevitably change in response to climate warming. However, if the trees are to stay within appropriate climatic envelopes there will be a requirement for species migration rates to be more than 10 times faster than those achieved in reaching present distributions after the last ice age."

Combating Climate Change - A Role for UK Forests (2009) p67

SPECIES IN FOCUS – NORWAY SPRUCE (*PICEA ABIES*)

15 miscellaneous facts about the Norway Spruce.

1. The Norway or European Spruce is native to Northern, Central and Eastern Europe; but is planted world-wide for its wood and is the main Christmas tree species in several countries around the world.
2. It was probably introduced into Great Britain before 1500.
3. The latinised name is a little confusing, since '*Picea*' refers to a pitch-producing pine and '*abies*' means fir. Spruce trees are in the genus *Picea*, whilst pines are *Pinus spp* and firs are *Abies spp*. However, all three genera are in the pine family (Pinaceae).
4. *Picea abies* is the accepted name for this tree, but more than 150 synonyms have been published.
5. The Trafalgar Square Christmas tree is a Norway Spruce (usually 50-60 years old). This year's [tree](#) is 62' tall and comes from Nordmarka, forests just north of Oslo. It's an annual gift from Oslo, also given to Edinburgh and Washington D.C.



6. They often reach heights of 35-55m (115-180'), growing up to 1m per year for the first 25 years. The tallest measured Norway spruce is 62m (204') and is in Slovenia.

7. They can be long-lived. The oldest known *individual* specimen, tree-ring dated as 532 years old, grows in the Trillemarka Nature Reserve in Norway, but is only 14.5m tall. However, the oldest living *P. abies* is 'Old Tjikko' (left), carbon dated as 9,550 years old and just 5m tall with a girth of 0.5m. It grows in the Fulufjället Mountains of northern Sweden and is a *clonal* tree, regenerating new trunks, branches and roots over the millennia. It featured in our Veteran Tree Survey training sessions as an example of girth not necessarily being indicative of age.

8. Female flowers are red (43mm long in the photo here), turn green when fertilised and then brown. The seed cones are the longest of any spruce (9-17cm long), with bluntly to sharply triangular-pointed scale tips.



9. As well as adapting to a variety of soil and moisture conditions, it is tolerant of acid soils and was planted to stabilise mine spoils in Indiana from 1928 until the 1960s. It is more tolerant of hot, humid weather than many other conifers; but its germination rate is reduced in such conditions.
10. Vanillin, a synthetic substitute for vanilla, is produced from Norwegian Spruce by one company in Norway (Borregaard). It has a much lower carbon footprint than petrochemically synthesized vanillin.
11. The timber, often called white wood, has a wide variety of uses, from joists, rafters and flooring, to furniture, boxes and musical instruments. In Europe, roof shingles were commonly made from spruce, but are now restricted for fire safety reasons. It's also used to make paper.
12. In good conditions, with their height and fast growth, they are frequently planted as wind breaks.
13. Norway Spruce provides important winter cover for a number of animals and is a food source for some species. In Europe red deer strip the bark and red squirrels eat the cones. In Quebec the seedlings are preferred winter browsing for snowshoe hares.
14. It was the first conifer to have its genome sequenced.
15. We don't have any in our veteran tree database.

HAZEL SPRUCE

As mentioned above Norway spruce is used to make musical instruments, and hazel spruce is a very special form of the species, a superior tonewood used by Stradivarius. [Tonewoods are wood varieties used for making woodwind and acoustic stringed instruments and include wood from many different tree species.] Hazel spruce (Haselfichte) is not related to *Corylus avellana* (the hazel tree that produces hazel nuts). The name arose because its wood does look very similar to that of hazel. It has slightly wavy annual rings with very small brown inclusions in the grain, reminiscent of teeth. Hazel wood has similar rings, but lacks the toothing. The living trees can often be distinguished from ordinary Norway spruce by their cracked bark, split lengthways; but once the bark has been removed, its unique characteristics are obvious. Longitudinally, there are grooves up to about 25cm long and 0.5-2mm deep. In cross section, sawtooth-like indentations are particularly visible in the latewood, running radially in several tree rings lying one above the other, giving the appearance of interlocking growth rings. These wavy fibres are probably responsible for sounds and vibrations lasting longer than in other woods. Good hazel spruce wood has longer fibres, is more elastic and tougher than normal spruce wood. The growth rings are very narrow and uniform, characteristic of the slow growth of trees growing in adverse environmental conditions.

Hazel spruce grows in certain alpine areas of central Europe, thriving on sunny mountain and valley sides. It is, unsurprisingly, more common in impassable areas difficult to use for forestry purposes. Bedrock seems to have no influence on the growth, but altitude does. Good hazel spruce grows at 1000m, or above. It seems that hazel spruce is a genetic variant of Norway spruce in which the variant genes are only expressed in certain climatic conditions, combinations of strong winds, low temperatures, snow and sunlight. At high altitudes, hazel spruce trunks often protrude above other trees, exposing them to winds.

Although climate is a determining factor, it is not the only one. Fungal infections also determine the quality of the wood. Certain fungi prefer to grow within the secondary cell walls, leading to the formation of cavities, but not destroying the cell walls completely. The density of the wood is reduced, making it lighter, but with a relatively high bending stiffness - exactly the properties characterising good tonewood. Quite probably, the climatic conditions restrict the fungal growth that might otherwise destroy the cell walls completely. Recent research aims to discover which fungal species are important in this process and how long the fungi have to work on the wood so that only the secondary walls are broken down, leaving other components of the cell wall intact, and retaining the strength of the wood. Fungal activity in the timber could then be halted by steam treatment at the appropriate time. This research aims to improve the quality of all species of tonewood, but the fungi species involved will differ for different woods. Infecting trees or timber with specific fungi to produce better tonewoods is needed as natural sources, especially of hazel spruce, are becoming rare.

The growth and use of hazel spruce in the alpine Klostertal valley, in the Vorarlberg region of Austria, has been recognized by UNESCO for its 'intangible cultural heritage'. This heading includes 'the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts', with UNESCO asserting the 'importance of intangible cultural heritage is not the cultural manifestation itself but rather the wealth of knowledge and skills that is transmitted through it from one generation to the next.'

Hazel spruce is used in the manufacture of a variety of musical instruments, including the alpine horn (alphorn) shown here.



© Hans Hillewaert / CC BY-SA 4.0

CHRISTMAS QUIZZES FROM THE WOODLAND TRUST

Very suitable for children and adults - my 8-year-old grandchildren were engrossed and did very well.

Ancient tree quiz: just 8 multi-choice questions

UK winter wildlife quiz: 8 true or false questions

Wildflower quiz: name these 10 common wildflowers - 10 multiple choice questions

Wildlife mythbusting: fact or fiction? - 10 yes/no questions with explanatory answers & further information

RECOMMENDED READING, VIEWING AND LISTENING *Just click on the green links*

TREE AFTERCARE -The Government should target tree aftercare rather than planting. Tony Kirkham is quoted as saying *"It's not rocket science - most of the time a tree dies because it needed a drink."*

STATE OF NATURE REPORT 2023

MANY FLOWERING PLANTS THREATENED WITH EXTINCTION

TREES BLOOM IN AUTUMN AS WEATHER DISRUPTS NATURE

WOODLAND WALKS PODCASTS: Listen or read the transcripts of Martin Hügi's podcasts.

As mentioned in a previous Tree Watch, Martin Hügi (now nick-named the 'Tree Pilgrim') is walking from Land's End to John O'Groats, visiting trees from the Ancient Tree Inventory.

WOODLAND TRUST NEWSLETTERS: Two versions of the October Woodland Trust newsletter (both sent out on 17th October at 18:00). There is some overlap, but they are different and both contain some interesting articles. [Link one](#). [Link two](#)

HOST OF THE MONTH: From Observatree - a description of the tree followed by details of the pests and diseases it might have. The November tree is the **Sweet Chestnut**.

Observatree also has very useful downloadable identification and information **guides** for individual pest and diseases - and you can subscribe for updates.

INFECTED TREES TO BE FELLED: About 1,300 trees in the Hafod Forest on the Hafod Estate in the Ystwyth Valley near Aberystwyth, are being felled because they are infected with diseases such as fir canker.

A LIVING STUMP: In New Zealand, a fallen Kauri stump, with no leaves, is alive, being provided with nutrients and water through its associated mycorrhizae.

PLANE TREES TO BE REPLACED: In Australia, Sydney plans to gradually replace its street plane trees with more drought-tolerant species. Apparently, plane trees were once described as '*about as much use to our wildlife as concrete posts*'.

OLDEST WOODEN STRUCTURE: A couple of logs shaped with sharp tools may have formed part of a walk way by the Kalambo River on the border of Zambia and Tanzania. They are nearly 500,000 years old.

SHEFFIELD TREE CAMPAIGNERS RECOGNISED: You probably remember the publicity around street trees being felled in Sheffield. Now a plaque commemorating the efforts of campaigners to save these trees will be unveiled in the entrance to the Town Hall in March next year.

BURNING MANGROVE TREES: Indonesia has 20% of the world's mangroves; and burns more of them than any other country. Burnt for charcoal production, it's the only source of income for many people.

WOKINGHAM COMES SECOND: Wokingham has been ranked the second cleanest area in UK, based on a range of factors including re-cycling data, CO₂ emissions, general cleanliness, environmental expenditure and park quality. Wokingham scored 7.79 out of 10. First place went to Durham with a score of 7.84.

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

Barry Anderson had to smile when he saw this London Plane "oozing" out onto the pavement in Bloomsbury Square in London at the end of October.



'A tree in a gap - thankfully this one hasn't been cut down'.

This caption made me smile. It's the caption of a photo taken near Maidenhead and posted on the BBC's 'Berkshire's Big Pictures' at the beginning of October. It was taken across a field showing a tree in a gap in a hedge. (Scroll down to the 5th photo for that week.)

Some sources used in this issue: all web pages accessed/checked 28-11-2023 (unless stated otherwise) Links embedded in the text are not repeated here. -Email me if you want a list of them.

p12-Species in Focus: Mitchell, Alan (1974) 'A Field Guide to the Trees of Britain and Northern Europe' ISBN 0 00 212035 6
Coombes, Allen J (1994) 'A-Z of Plant Names' ISBN 1-85152-533-5 Leif Kullma (personal comm)
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Picea_abies https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_Tjikko <https://www.bowhayestrees.co.uk/norway-spruce.html>
<https://sciencenorway.no/age-agriculture-fisheries-forest/the-oldest-spruce-in-northern-europe-is-532-years-old/1378265>
<https://www.fs.usda.gov/database/feis/plants/tree/picabi/all.html#MANAGEMENT%20CONSIDERATIONS>
<https://www.waldwissen.net/de/waldwirtschaft/holz-und-markt/verarbeitung-und-technik/die-haselfichte>
<https://www.windbreaktrees.com/norway-spruce> <https://nfs.unl.edu/CommunityForestry/Trees/NorwaySpruce.pdf>
p13-Hazel spruce: <https://www.waldwissen.net/de/waldwirtschaft/holz-und-markt/verarbeitung-und-technik/die-haselfichte>
<https://www.waldwissen.net/de/waldwirtschaft/holz-und-markt/verarbeitung-und-technik/besseres-klangholz-fuer-den-geigenbau>
<https://ich.unesco.org/en/what-is-intangible-heritage-00003> <https://ich.unesco.org/en/traditional-craftsmanship-00057>
<https://www.zukunftstraumland.at/project/1822> https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alphorn#/media/File:Alphorn_player_in_Wallis.jpg

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

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 our trees.
We wouldn't have a database without you.