Wokingham District Veteran Tree Association

Tree Watch

Issue 69 November 2026

Our Veteran Tree Database was closed in June 2024. The 8,696 trees and 13,976 photos are detailed on our map.

Welcome to the latest issue of Tree Watch.



When you read Cathy and Denise's accounts (*pages 2 & 4*) I'm sure you'll be impressed by their efforts. I'm particularly inspired by the proposal to collect acorns from our veteran oaks and raise them in a WDVTA tree nursery (*see page 5*). It's so important to preserve the genetics of these trees. This year has not been a good acorn year but, if not this year, I hope many of you will collect acorns from your favourite veteran oak, plant them in a pot and care for them; not forgetting to label the pots with the identify of the parent tree! What a great activity for your children or grand-children. Please let Denise and me know which trees you have chosen and take photos. We'd love to have photos of smiling children with their plant pots – but of course only if you are happy for the children's photos to appear in Tree Watch, which is on our website. We have recorded 740 veteran oaks with public access, of which 27 have girths of 5m or more (21 maidens and 6 pollards) spread over 10 parishes, with the most (six maidens) in Wokingham Town. A wide choice. Shown here are four candidates:







Top right is MRN **3967** in St James' Churchyard, Finchampstead 5.7m girth in 2010. Centre right is my favourite, the Henry VIII tree in Shinfield MRN **432** (*see page 7*). Below that is MRN **443** (with MRN **444** behind) – if you collected acorns between these two you wouldn't be sure which tree they'd come from!

Above is the **Bound Oak**, MRN **4197**. Although only classified as notable by ATI, it is a very significant tree. It's marked on the 1876 six-inch OS map and mentioned in a 1922 history as being "*quite 650 years old*". I just hope it still produces acorns. See page 7 for some other candidates.

The next issue of Tree Watch will be February 2027 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:-

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Tree Week Events organised by Wokingham **libraries**

- Children's art competition - 3 categories: under 8, 8-11 and 12-18 – winners get a small tree - **details**
- Saturday 21 November – 11:00 - **Talk** about self-guided tour of trees on Reading Campus – free, drop-in
- Tuesday 24 November – 16:00 - Wokingham Library - Drop-in tree-themed story-time
- Wednesday 25 November – 16:00 - Woodley Library - Drop-in tree-themed story-time
- Thursday 26 November – 18:00 – Wokingham Library – '***Stories behind our oldest trees***.' Free event, but places limited so **booking required**

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

VIEW FROM THE CHAIR

Cathy Boddy



My colleague Denise has done such an excellent job of summarising this quarter's activities (see below), that I shall mostly just provide a little more detail on our planned tree planting activities.

Re-planting to replace trees WBC had to fell last year

The tree for the Manor Road play area has now been ordered by our friend Matt at Freely Fruity. It's a Buccaneer variety of English walnut that I've chosen as it should cross fertilise well with the Broadview variety that we planted in nearby Redlands Farm Park last November and because it's a smaller variety with an upright habit for the relatively small space. The planting was planned for Saturday 14th November, as that is the wedding anniversary of the gentleman in whose memory we are planting it, after the one he paid a company for was sadly neglected.

Don't worry, we won't just be planning walnut trees!



I've been working on Marianna at the Town Council to let us plant a tree in Elms Field in central Wokingham, to replace one that has died there, and she has now agreed. This will be a joint venture with The Lions Club who will pay for the tree and commit to watering it for 3 years. Marianna will provide the tree guard, watering tube etc and even have a digger to prepare the ground for us. Apparently the hard tennis court underneath wasn't broken up, which may explain why the previous tree died. The planting will be on Sunday the 29th of November, during the Winter Carnival. Town Mayor Alwyn will be attending, so I'm sure he'll lend a spade for a photo opp - it should be a nice profile raiser for us.



We decided on a liquidambar tree (*right*) which gives lovely autumn colour and is apparently well suited for climate change, being heat and drought tolerant. It's one of the broad-leaved species with broad climatic envelopes that perform strongly in future-proofed landscapes.

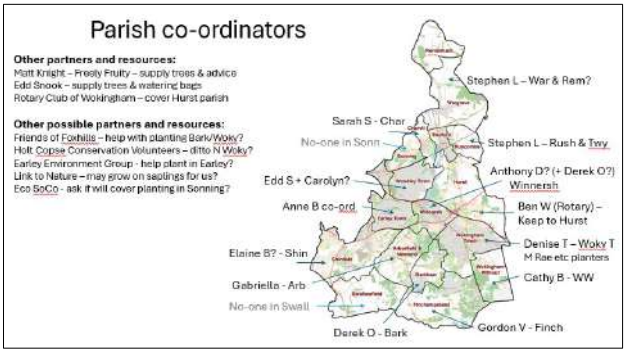
It will provide rich food, shelter, and nesting sites for a massive variety of wildlife including moths and early pollinators. The tree that failed was an English Oak, but Marianna was concerned about oak processionary moth and so didn't want to replace like with like.

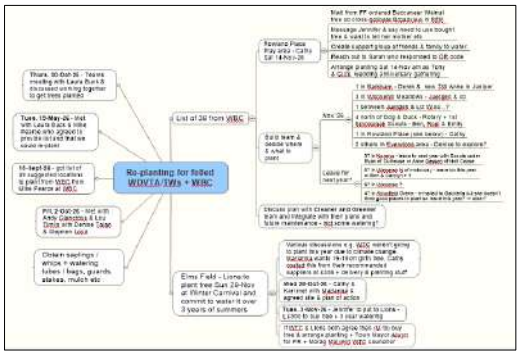
We wouldn't usually plant trees this big as they are harder to establish and need more watering, but Marianna said if they plant small saplings in that area then youths just come along and snap them off. Similarly, she didn't want to use watering bags as people would just steal them – hey ho!

In fact, Andy Glencross from WBC suggested that we solve our watering problem by planting small whips instead of saplings as he believes they wouldn't then need any watering at all. They are also able to establish better and will overtake larger saplings in just a few years. We will probably plant a mix of saplings where we are sure of a watering team and whips elsewhere.

I won't bore you with all the planning for the remaining plantings, suffice it to say that my study is starting to look like a WWII control room, but if you'd like to be involved in the planting and more especially the watering of the new trees do please **get in touch**.

As our friend Barbara never tires of telling me, it's the watering that is the most important part. Even if you are less physically active, I'd love some volunteers to organise watering rotas.





My early planning was for the whole borough, but WBC decided to focus on the area from Winnersh to Arborfield, which included 39 suggested planting sites and that is more than enough and we will do well to manage a third of that. If we make a good job of planting and caring for the trees that we do plant, then we can ask to expand it to the other parishes in future years.

In other news

Derek is making great progress on the grant applications to towns and parishes, having already received a total of £850 from Twyford, Wargrave, Barkham and Shinfield, with other parishes having advised us of the date they will be able to consider us. Unfortunately, Wokingham Town have decided not to plant this year (with one notable exception, see above) after losing so many trees during this summer's drought, but hopefully we'll get a grant from them next year.

We had 22 people at our Forum meeting in October. We welcomed new Tree Warden Carolyn and new WDVTA member Kevin and Assistant Treasurer Anthony (who has joined the WDVTA committee). Our thanks to Alison for writing the minutes and to Anthony for agreeing to do them at next meeting. We are still looking for a Secretary though, so please let me know if you can help, it's not an arduous role but I would love someone to work with me e.g. in arranging our next AGM.

Facebook Followers are up from 138 to 145 this quarter. Our most popular post, in the groups I cross-posted it to, was about Stephen, Barbara and me helping with a Woosehill Meadows / SERT project, building a berm in the Emm Brook. Only slightly tree related but it all helps to raise awareness of our group. Wokingham Borough picked it up and got 70 Likes and 11 Comments!

It feels worth mentioning that one of our new Tree Wardens, Ben found us just by searching for "*tree planting Wokingham*" in Google, which highlights what great standing we have on web searches. I tried it myself and a few paragraphs in got: "***Wokingham Tree Warden Network***: *Run in partnership with the Tree Council and WDVTA* (*Wokingham District Veteran Tree Association*), *allowing local volunteers to protect and manage neighbourhood trees and hedges*" along with links to our page on the Tree Council and our own web sites. Good work Malcolm.

We also have an even newer tree warden - Anne, a friend of Derek's who we bumped into when he was giving Denise and me a tour of the Coombes wood some months ago. I kept in touch with her, hoping she would help Derek establish a tree in '*The Junipers*' for the above project. This week he did a similar tour of the Coombes with her and looked at the prospective planting site and found her to be very knowledgeable about trees. We look forward to welcoming her on board. Derek suggested that a weeping willow would be a good choice to plant in a damp area of the park.

After our talk to the Wokingham Society in July, we helped one of their members, Kevin, to find out more about a couple of trees near where he lives and he has now become a WDVTA member. He and Barbara are developing a Tree Walk for Wokingham Town and we look forward to trying it. This will be a joint venture between us and the Wokingham Society.

In September, Barbara and I went on a walk round Dinton Pastures, led by SERT (South East Rivers Trust) and enjoyed tea and conversation afterwards. We hope to get some Tree Warden events of our own going next year but in the meantime there are quite a lot of events like this run by other local groups (such as the **Reading Tree Wardens** who

recently had a walk led by the knowledgeable tree walks guide Marcus Wheeler) which perhaps a few of us could join.



I'll leave you with a photo of the tree anchor and watering tube being installed for the walnut tree we planted in Redlands Farm Park last November, as we plan to do the same for the new tree in Elms Field this year. Hopefully next time I'll be reporting on further successful planting.

TREE WARDEN NEWS

Denise Tolan

As the fierce heat of the summer began to subside, Tree Wardens (TWs) across the country started to mull over winter plantings. Wokingham Tree Wardens were no exception. Armed with a list of suitable planting sites from WBC, Cathy Boddy (WDVTA Chairman) began assessing the areas across the Borough for their suitability. As a result there will be a small number of saplings planted this winter and Cathy has already been in touch with TWs in relevant parishes to begin the planning. Watering schemes are now a major consideration for all saplings and so we are going to proceed with caution, with all new sites having a concrete plan in place.



Playing the Stick Game at the Family Fun Day

The first real day of blustery, autumn weather found a small but plucky band of TWs trying to erect a gazebo, a banner and secure displays at the '*Barkham and Arborfield Family Fun Day*'. That part was not fun but the rest of the day was. We spoke to many local residents about the condition of trees new and old across the two parishes. There were plenty of donated orchard fruits and hawthorn saplings to give away, a scavenger hunt and a stick game plus lots of information about WDVTA and Tree Wardens.

September saw the start of a number of meetings with WBC officers. Kerry and I had an initial meeting with the '*Net Zero*' team, a group of council staff who volunteer their time to support and advance the borough's climate emergency goals. The objective was to inform the group about the work of the WDVTA, focusing on the survey and the celebratory plantings across the years, but then to broaden the talk out to include the future plans of the Tree Wardens across the district and how that could align with the Climate Emergency strategy.

The Strategic Climate Engagement Officer, Resh Thorpe, requested a further meeting which Stephen Loyd and I attended in October. Here Resh outlined her plans to promote the TW group by including some of our reports '*from the field*' into the fortnightly Environment News email which is delivered to 20,000 residents across the borough. She has also organized a public talk for us, loosely based around National Tree Week, at the Wokingham Library where we can showcase our work. This will take place on Thursday 26th November at 6pm.



A hedge at Rocks Nest



A speckled wood butterfly in a Rooks Nest hedge.

Cathy, Stephen Loyd (fellow TW coordinator) and I subsequently met with Andy Glencross, WBC Environmental Services Manager, to discuss both future planting opportunities and also potential hedge tree rescue work across the new Rooks Nest SANG extension in Barkham. An exploratory visit had revealed several oak trees lost in the hedges across the site and a number of dilapidated hedgerows. We are currently having further discussions with the council about the possibility of starting a hedge project there next year.

The Tree Council's Seed Gathering Season initiative this autumn inspired us to start planning for our own TW Community Tree Nursery. We met with another TW, Matt Knight, founder of '***Freely Fruity***' and a Tree Forum member, to learn how to set one up. Andy Glencross had suggested we focus our attention on the veterans we have surveyed and collect acorns from those trees, making sure that we labelled the pot of each potential sapling with its WDVTA survey number. The council is rightly concerned about the provenance of trees planted in the Borough. So this seems like a neat solution whereby we guarantee the biosecurity of our future plantings and we nurture saplings from trees which are adapted to our local environment, whilst also securing the lineage of our venerable oaks.

Finally, we welcomed Ben Morrison as a new WDVTA/TW member this month. With a background in web design, he has arrived brimming with ideas about how we can further use the Survey data and bring it to a new, younger audience. We are excited to see what transpires!



As we head into November we are looking forward to **National Tree Week (NTW) between the 21st-29th November**. Stephen Loyd and Michael Rae will be checking up on the health of the hedge trees they 'liberated' across the borough a number of years ago, Alison Griffin will be training new TWs on the art of surveying (focusing on oaks at Arborfield Green which had previously been out of reach on MOD land) and Cathy will be planting on Elms Field. The librarians at Wokingham Library are holding special tree-themed story times during NTW and are aiming to construct a tree around a pillar in the library! And of course there is the **WTW talk and a tree quiz at Wokingham Library at 6pm Thursday 26th November**. All are welcome, but you need to **book**.

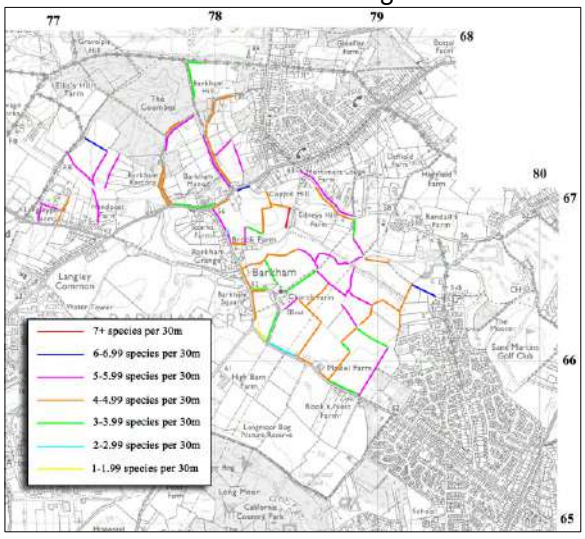
Local News

Learning Garden The University of Reading has established a '***Learning Garden***' within the walled garden of the Harris Garden on their Whiteknights campus. Formally opened in June this year as part of a £1 million investment and part of the University's centenary celebrations, it's a new outdoor education space designed to support learning about climate change, biodiversity and sustainability. It will support the education of school pupils, university students and community groups through dedicated bookings and won't be publicly accessible except at specific times. It has already welcomed almost 1,800 school pupils. There was a public open day in September.

Tree City of the World Status - Wokingham has been granted this for second year. (See Tree Watch **63** page 8.)

Rook's Nest Wood - **extension proposals**. Denise has mentioned this and she circulated details of the consultation of the plans. It will incorporate the **avenue of limes** recorded in our veteran tree database and several old hedgerows.





From the research carried out by Steve Clark of the Berkshire Archaeology Research Group and Janet Firth from WDVTA and **BARG**, (and shared with Denise for the National Hedgerow Week display at Wokingham library) the zig-zag hedgerow pattern and a ditch/holloway along the western edge of the site (from Brook Farm to Coppid Hill) suggest that the boundary and its hedges date to the late medieval or early post-medieval period; as shown on the map above.

The age of a hedge can be estimated using the Hooper hypothesis, which, as a rough rule of thumb, suggests the date of a hedgerow can be estimated as a hundred years for every tree/shrub species in a 30-yard (now approx a metre) stretch of hedge. Along the zig-zag hedge at Rocks Nest site as a whole 12 different tree/shrub species were found: ash, beech, blackthorn, briar, cherry plum, elder, elm, field maple, hazel, hawthorn, holly and oak.

It will be a wonderful opportunity to take a closer look at these landscape features if the plans go ahead.

Loddon Riverside Park This is an ambitious plan by the Loddon Ramblers and hopefully will be as successful as the **Lower Earley Green Way**. There are over 60 veteran trees within the planned area.

TREE OF THE YEAR

The **Bendy Tree** is the new UK Tree of the Year. Unfortunately I don't have a royalty-free photo to include here, but you can see it in by following the links. It's a wych elm on The Promenade in Newcastle, County Down, Northern Ireland and is the first time a tree from Northern Ireland has won. It received 31% of the vote. The Woodland Trust has described it as "*gravity-defying...much-loved...and a real fighter*". The coastal setting has resulted in its almost horizontal growth pattern. It is the only survivor of a several trees planted in the mid-19th century, possibly as part of the grounds of a hotel. The **Donington Oak** near Donnington Castle in Newbury came 10th (last).

THE WEDDING OAK

Sarah Swatridge

One of my sons got married in August and I've gradually been making an old-fashioned scrapbook of photos of the wedding, rather than the digital ones that are so popular these days. It's dawned on me that trees feature quite a bit. I can't say it was my influence because they planned and organised most of it themselves.

A beautiful oak became the focus of the outdoor 'mock' ceremony led by my eldest son and the groom's two brothers - such a personal tribute and so moving. This '*Wedding Oak*' had photos of the bride and grooms' parents and grandparents pinned to the trunk – "*the love stories before ours*".







Later, once the chairs had been taken inside for food and speeches, the oak provided much needed shade and we had 'Kubb' (Swedish Chess) set up underneath it.

The Veteran Tree Survey – Maiden and Pollarded English Oaks

As well as defined species, we also have trees just recorded as 'oak'. In our analyses we usually treat these as English oaks (*Quercus robur*). Incidentally in the ATI (the National **Ancient Tree Inventory**) the common name used is Pedunculate oak. I surveyed with a arboriculturist once who said, "*It's an English oak, but I don't know which*" meaning he didn't know whether it was *Q. robur* or *Q. petraea* (the sessile oak) – it was winter! In our database we have 2,257 oaks classified as veteran by the ATI (they haven't processed all our records yet). That's 1,739 recorded as English oaks and 518 as oaks. The largest **maiden oak** is MRN **2278**





(*photo left*) with a girth of 7.5 at 1.5m, in Waltham Road in Ruscombe. However it may not be one tree!! It bifurcates above about 2m and the comment on the record is "*Probably 2 trees fused together (canopies of each bifucation are different). Girth would then be combined girth of 2 trees - age more likely to be 200 yrs (rather than 650 yrs).*" It's in a private garden, but is visible to the public.

Apart from that the largest recorded oak is an English maiden in Barkham MRN **7125** (*photo left*) with a girth of 6.95m when measured in 2013. Again it's in a private garden, but visible from a bridleway.

There are two other oaks with girths over 6.5m (both maidens): MRN **1388** in Remenham with a girth 6.9m, but with no public access and MRN **1902** in a garden in Pitts Lane, Earley, girth 6.55m and visible to the public.

MRN **7370** in Wokingham Without had a girth of 6.62m when recorded in 2014, but was felled by Storm Clara in 2020.

We have six **pollards** with girths of 5.5m or more, two are on private property with no public access, but four do have public access.



MRN **432**. The '*Henry VIII Tree*' was first measured in 2011 in the arboricultural survey prior to the development of the Shinfield Park housing development. It had a girth of 6.28m then and 6.68m when re-measured in 2014. It featured in the Woodland Trust '**Ancient Tree Guide**' as a good example of trees being protected on a development site. This area was part of Windsor Forest in the time of Henry VIII (1491-1547) and with a hunting lodge nearby, he probably saw this tree!! It seems to have been regularly pollarded in the past and is hence estimated to be about 700 years old, geminating around 1350. It's shown here in November 2023 with one of the Jubilee oaks (#**50**) planted as a succession tree.

The Henry VIII tree is one of several superb oaks in the Shinfield Park housing estate, previously the Meteorological Office College, which left Shinfield in 2002, moving to Exeter in 2004. Two more are shown on page 1. MRN **443** has a girth of 5.82m in 2014.





In Hurst, MRN **2163** (*left*) had girth of 5.8m when first recorded in 2007 and 6.3m in 2016. It's growing by a footpath near the Twyford Brook that marks the boundary with Twyford. I wonder how many of the scouts who measured it nearly 20 years ago remember doing so. Perhaps some are now members of WDVTA.



In Earley, MRN **5930** (*right*), the '*Solly Joel Oak*' in Maiden Erlegh Drive, had a girth of 5.5m in 2011. This is not just a splendid tree, but also historically significant, being one of the original oaks in an avenue leading to Maiden Erlegh House. Its genetic heritage is definitely worth preserving. A manor house has existed there since 14th century, changing over the years and being substantially enlarged by its last owner, Solomon "Solly" Joel, who bought it in 1903. It was demolished in 1960 with the development of the Maiden Erlegh housing estate.

THE MAJOR OAK

The Major Oak in Sherwood Forest and its demise was described in the **last issue** , in the 'Sadly Departed' section. on page 7. Work has now begun to **preserve it**, three months after its death was confirmed.





These photos were taken at the end of September, when a branch had recently fallen. The scar left is clearly visible. Arboriculturists were examining a black fungal growth exposed by the fallen limb. They didn't know what it was and were sending it for analysis.







One of the Arboriculture Association 's webinars this month was '**The Major Oak - Legends never die**' and is well worth watching.

DID YOU KNOW?... *Coincidentally, ash dieback in the wild in the UK was first observed in Ashwellthorpe in Norfolk and the first part of that village's name means "ash tree spring" in old English.*

That was in Autumn 2012 in an ancient woodland a few miles outside Norwich.
Research into ash dieback continues, including **pangenomic analyses** to help researchers breed trees resistant to ash dieback. Pangenomes provide a more comprehensive way of studying susceptibility to pathogens, compared with using single genomes, because they detect gene sequences (known as dispensable DNA) carried by some trees but not others. The work was done by Dr. Daniel Wood, Kew research fellow, and colleagues. Here is her description of them: "*If each ash genome is the same movie, these findings highlight how many director cuts, extended editions, deleted scenes and alternate endings nevertheless exist in wild populations - perhaps most of the runtime is the same, but the variable bits can potentially make the difference between a box-office smash and a flop.*"

You can listen to a recent radio 4 program '***The Scientists Who Love Ash Trees***'.

TREE RIGHTS

In September Lewes in East Sussex became the **first town** in England to officially grant rights to its trees. The council adopted a '*Tree Charter*', recognising the intrinsic value of all local trees, hedgerows, and forests. It affords them "*the right to flourish and to maintain their natural life cycles, ecological functions and evolutionary processes*".

Such rights are promoted by a growing international '***rights of nature***' movement. Several countries, including New Zealand, Panama and Bolivia, have passed national legislation granting legal personhood to forests and rivers.

Lewes was already an official '***arboretum town***', an international accreditation awarded in recognition of diverse, conserved and well-managed tree populations. Sidmouth in Devon is also an arboretum town.

" In time we hope that the concept of working with trees in 'partnership' to protect and enhance our environment will supercede the idea of trees being a passive resource."

Dinah Morgan, Lewis District Council, East Sussex (2026)

National (Tree) Treasures

Sarah Swatridge

Sheffield Park and Garden – National Trust

Sheffield Park and Garden is in East Sussex TN22 3QX. If you have the '*Gardeners 'World 2 for 1'* booklet it's in there, or free if you're a National Trust member. It's also worth knowing that it's close to the Bluebell Railway, making a delightful trip from East Grinstead right to Sheffield Park, approximately 45 minutes each way, much of it still very rural.

The garden itself was originally designed in the 18th century with help from Capability Brown and has many points of interest. There are several lakes, bridges, a rockery-cum-waterfall, a cricket pitch and a pavilion.



The National Trust describe it as a garden for all seasons. We were there in September and amazingly some of the rhododendrons were in flower. The bluebells are worth seeing in the spring and when the trees change colour you should get some spectacular photos. Considering the heatwave we've had this year, it was surprisingly green.

There are several areas to look out for, including the palm walk (*below*), the Acers, a Dawn Redwood and interestingly a Willow Oak (*Quercus phellos*). Near the entrance was a very impressive ancient Sweet Chestnut (*above*).



Wandering around we saw some interesting fungi (*below right*) and there were one or two willow sculptures of life-sized horses which were beautifully made.



Ideally, you'll need a good day because it's a large garden to walk around. The paths are good and there's some shelter but not a great deal.

Inside there is a large gift shop and café.

Whilst there, I noticed their (free) '*Tree Bingo*' game based on the trees you can see in their gardens. I thought this was a lovely idea. Although it didn't come with any instructions, I suppose a family of four could each take a card and tick off what they see on their Bingo card and it's the first one to complete their card that's the winner.



Veteran Tree Survey snapshot

English Oaks

4575
oaks recorded

~ 7%
of ancient, veteran & notable oaks* recorded in UK

90%
maidens

6%
multi stems

3%
pollards

<1%
coppice

1%
stumps

* *Q. robur* + *Q. petraea*
[TreeTalk (2026)]

A C R O N Y M S / I N I T I A L I S M S	
EDGE	Evolutionarily Distinct and Globally Endangered **ELF** - Endangered Living Fossils
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature: **IUCN red list** has 9 categories :-
EX	Extinct - beyond reasonable doubt the species no longer exists (after exhaustive surveys).
EW	Extinct in the wild - survives only in captivity, cultivation and/or outside its native range.
CR	Critically endangered – in a particularly and extremely critical state.
EN	Endangered – very high risk of extinction in the wild.
VU	Vulnerable – at high risk of 'human-caused' extinction without human intervention.
NT	Near Threatened – close to being endangered in the near future.
LC	Least Concern – widespread and abundant in the wild.
DD	Data Deficient – inadequate information to assess extinction risk.
NE	Not Evaluated – has not yet been assessed.





For conservations status, the IUCN categories are grouped into Extinct (EX, EW), Threatened (CR, EN, VU) and Least Concern (LC). If you use Wikipedia, you'll be used to seeing the status displayed against any species description (shown here for English oak and the Jellyfish tree).

EDGE species are biologically unique and face a high risk of extinction. Scientists at institutions such as the Kew Royal Botanic Gardens identify and rank them to prioritize urgent global conservation efforts. They represent millions of years of distinct evolutionary history. If lost, there will be nothing else like them on Earth.

At the top of the **EDGE** **angiosperm list** is *Hondurodendron urceolatum*, a dioecious tree with a few scattered populations found across a single mountain range in the Parque Nacional El Cusuco, Honduras.

The list also includes:

Wollemi Pine (*Wollemia nobilis*): Often called a "dinosaur tree," this conifer dates back 200 million years and was thought to be extinct until discovered in a remote Australian canyon in 1994.

Ginkgo (*Ginkgo biloba*): The last living species in its order, native to China, possessing a highly distinct evolutionary line dating back over 270 million years.

Dawn Redwood (*Metasequoia glyptostroboides*): A deciduous conifer once widespread across the Northern Hemisphere but believed extinct until a small population was found in China in the 1940s.

Monkey Puzzle (*Araucaria araucana*): You might be surprised at the inclusion of this one, especially as it was widely planted in UK in Victorian times and seems to have gained popularity again. It is described as a 'strange-looking, ancient conifer native to central Chile and Argentina that is highly endangered in the wild.'

Jellyfish Tree (*Medusagyne oppositifolia*): I just had to choose this one for 'Species in Focus' - because my favourite animal phylum is Cnidaria (previously Coelenterata) - hydra, sea anemones, corals and jellyfish.

Criteria for **ELF**:

- scarcity and narrow distribution of endangered species (IUCN EW & CR) and
- evolutionary singularity in phylogenetic reconstructions (ie no closely related species) and
- ancient divergence (split from the closest extant relatives in a distant geological epoch).

One of the listed ELF trees is *Franklinia alatamala* ('Species in Focus' in issue **64** - June 2025 – page 12) which diverged from its stem group 22 million years ago.

The ELF approach is considered a relatively quick method to identify the species most urgently in need of protection and is complementary to EDGE and other methods searching for phylogenetic diversity. Proponents think it should be prioritized in conservation because ELF species are the most threatened lineages representing an exceptional evolutionary heritage.

SPECIES IN FOCUS – JELLYFISH TREE (*MEDUSAGYNE OPPOSITIFOLIA*)

12 miscellaneous facts about *Medusagyne oppositifolia*



Juan José Areso, iNaturalist CC-BY-NC-4.0

1. In risk of becoming extinct, it's on the EDGE and ELF lists (see page 10) and on the IUCN Red List as Critically Endangered. One of the rarest known tree species, being the only species in its genus and family, it diverged from its stem group 50 million years ago.
2. Only about thirty known specimens exist in the wild, all on the Seychelles island of Mahè, where it's called *Bwa Mediz*. It grows in just four areas in the Morne Seychelles National Park, all in cracks of exposed granite within 2km of the sea.
3. Discovered by John Gilbert Baker (keeper of the herbarium at Kew 1890-99); officially described and named in his 1877 book "*Flora of Mauritius and the Seychelles*". He chose *Medusagyne* after the mythical figure in Greek mythology (both the fruit and the numerous stamens perhaps resembling the hair on Medusa's head). Its common name came later because the dehiscent fruits resemble a jellyfish when they open to release the seeds (*lower two photos*).



Young fruit - Juan José Areso, iNaturalist CC-BY-NC-4.0

4. Declared extinct in 1930, with the last record being from 1903; but 'rediscovered' in 1970 when six trees were found.
5. It's wind pollinated and the few seeds produced by the surviving mature trees, either fall on stone, with no chance of germination, or are quickly blown out to sea. No young plants have been found in the wild since it's rediscovery.



Christopher Kaiser-Bunbury, CC BY 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons

6. Only a few plants have been successfully cultivated in botanic gardens, and only in very humid conditions. They are not found in areas of high humidity today. Perhaps they've been lost from their original habitat of moist forests through competition and/or climate change; with the surviving ones being outlying members of the original population.
7. It's a small tree (exceptionally reaching 10m) with a thick canopy of densely interlocked, slightly elongated dark green leaves. The small, white flowers (both male and bisexual) are difficult to see amongst the dense foliage.
8. The trunk is thin and the bark is dark with deep interlocking fissures.
9. As they age, the bright green rounded fruits become reddish-brown and the leaves turn bright red.
10. A food source for bees (*Apis mellifera* and *Lasioglossum mahense*), wasps (*Rhynchium brunneum* and *Delta alluaudi*) and ants.
11. Susceptible to infection by the parasitic powdery mildew, *Podosphaera fusca*.
12. Sometimes called the octopus tree, but not to be confused with a particular Sitka spruce in Oregon, also called the octopus tree!!



Sophie Morel iNaturalist CC-by-NC-4.0

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

Historic:

Ancient oaks reveal rewilding of Mediterranean forests after the Black Death

Woodlands of Antiquity: A millennium of dendrochronological data on forest exploitation and timber economy

Indigenous fire stewardship shaped North American Great Lakes forests

Five historic Trees and Their Extraordinary Stories

Long-term consequences on ground water of planting eucalyptus in **South Africa** and **Australia**

Looking to the future:

How climate change is **reshaping Britain's trees**

'Everything is so out of whack': UK trees experience **spring six months early**

Calls grow to protect key a**ncient woodland**

Finding solutions to the UK's **oak generation gap**

We need to talk about *Rhododendron ponticum* and **temperate rainforest**

Trees planted and saved:

Woodlands project records more trees than expected

Success of trees planted in Dorset in 2013

A forgotten 30-year **forest experiment** just delivered a huge surprise

China restored its **mangrove forests**, and something remarkable happened

Success of **mangrove planting** in Guyana

Arborists use **supersonic air** to save 300-year-old tree that survived American Revolution

Welly boot fundraiser in **Reading** plants seeds of hope

Volunteers clear invasive plants from woodland in **Greenham**

Stevenage **plants 80 trees** to mark the new town's 80th birthday

Swindon's Commonweal School **plants 100 trees for 100 years**

Brompton Cemetery: ***replanting*** after the loss of holm oaks

How some of UK's ***rarest trees*** are being saved by cliff-climbing pensioners

Rare tree offspring given lifeline at Logan Botanic Gardens

Trees felled and lost:

How **Africa's 'wall'** to hold back the desert unravelled

Hundreds of newly planted ***tree deaths*** under investigation in Brighton and Hove

Council criticised over decision to approve felling of 'significant' protected tree in **Enfield Town**

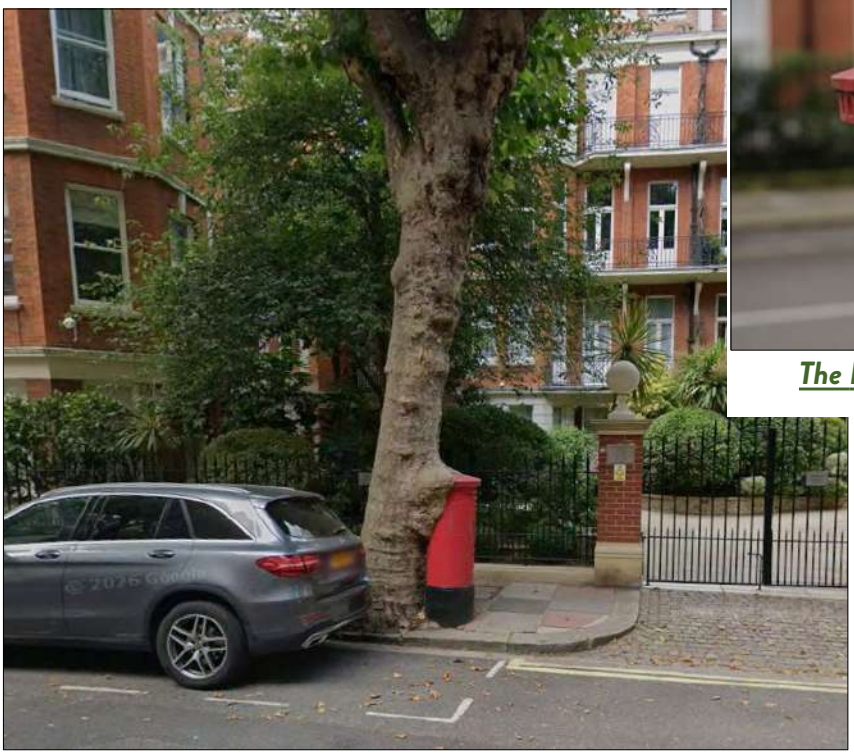
Miscellaneous:

"James and the **Giant Atlas Cedars in Morocco**" – Radio 4 programme from its 'Nature' series (28mins)

Hadrian's Wall **Sycamore Gap tree** stump shows 'encouraging' signs

Wokingham is ranked 79 out of 296 as the most friendly place to live !!

.... And to make you smile:





The Hungry Tree (3) by Peter Trimming

Called "*The Hungry Tree*" by Peter Trimming who took the photo above, it's even marked of Google Maps – and labelled "*The Iconic Postbox*". It's in Fitz-George Avenue in Hammersmith.

In July 2025 *© Google Maps Street View*

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