STTT

Newsletter

July 2021

(Formerly Men of the Trees following the work of Richard St Barbe Baker)

SEVERN TREE TRUST

Event - Picnic at The Stag's Head, New Invention. Saturday, 10th July 2021 (Sat Nav ref; SY7 OBS)

Dear Member,
Those of you who ignored the forecast of possible rain were awarded with a rain-free and very interesting visit to Andrew Allot's plantation and the woodland pasture in Hopesay village of his neighbour David Trenchard. (See below for John's report.) We must hope that our next picnic on 10th July is equally lucky with the weather (also see below).

In my recent contacts with British forest nurseries I have heard that the 2021 spring and early summer has been unusually unkind to the open ground nurseries and the withdrawal of the chemical Basamid in mid-summer 2020, while excellent for the environment was an additional major headache for them. This product not only sterilised the soil from harmful organisms but also killed most of the weed seed in the seed-bed. The result has been that this year's seed beds are much fuller of weeds than has been the norm, which is costing money to correct, (hand weeding and/or a contact herbicide). All this has followed an exceptionally wet winter, a record breaking period of freezing mornings in April then another very wet month of May. The result of all these abnormal conditions is that small seeded crops have germinated badly, whereas large seeded stratified crops have germinated reasonably normally. Some species such as birch, aspen, alders will be in short supply for planting in winter 2021-22 and some nurseries have already stopped taking orders! Following Brexit making up short-falls by importations will be more difficult although no-doubt the traders, as opposed to the true nurseries will find a way round the problem.

It seems that to overcome the gap left by the withdrawal of Basamid, some of the larger nurseries are investing heavily in a steam soil sterilisation machine. Reports from Denmark suggest that once the technique is mastered, steam sterilsation is better than Basamid.

These conditions highlight the benefits that cell-growing nurseries experience. Not only can they sow their seeds when they want to, but apart from increased fuel bills, they are largely unaffected by the weather. One large cell-growing nursery has switched much of its production from native broadleaves to conifers as in recent

years the genetically improved Sitka Spruce in particular has been in short supply and they saw a relatively easy way to increase their profits!

The Severn Tree Trust will be well advised to reserve its expected requirement of plants as early in the season as possible.
Andy Gordon, Chair

Visit to Hopesay: Sunday, 20th June 2021
This was an afternoon of two visits. Two visits for the price of one. In actual fact, two visits for the price of nothing. What wonderful value you get by belonging to the Severn Tree Trust! Firstly, we visited Andrew Allott's wood and this was followed by the mini-arboretum of David Trenchard, both in the beautiful village of Hopesay, one of those tucked-away Shropshire villages that many don't know about.

Andrew's wood is of 24 acres and he, firstly, told us something of its history. Part was originally owned by Kempton Estates who felled many of their trees during the First World War but replanted in the 1920s. So many of the Douglas Firs and Larches are almost one hundred years old. The other part was the wood of a private owner who felled his trees during World War Two and replanted in the 1950s. When both woods came up for sale fifteen or so years ago, Andrew bought them as one large wood and has been managing them ever since.

His aims have been threefold: to capture as much carbon dioxide as possible; to increase opportunities for wildlife conservation; to increase opportunities for biodiversity.

To attain the first of these objectives, Andrew has insisted on felling the minimum number possible of his existing trees and has made efforts to plant many more. As for wildlife conservation, the birdlife is maintained and, hopefully, increased (we saw buzzards and kites on this occasion but Andrew told us of a goshawk that he regularly sees there) whilst the mammal life consisted of rabbits, grey squirrels, badgers and roe deer and, possibly, dormice with, hopefully in the future, the scope for attracting pine martens which have moved into areas not far away. Now that would be a coup.

As for biodiversity, most of the trees in the wood are non-natives: with Douglas Firs, European and Japanese Larch, Sitka Spruce, Sycamore, Grand Fir and Western Red Cedar among them. There are a few natives there: beeches, rowans, a wild service tree and ash and one particularly old oak, a veteran Sessile Oak (*Quercus petrea*), which is thought to be about 500 years old. This was a very handsome specimen, almost hollow, and visited by Aljos Farjon when he came to talk to us a couple of years ago.

Andrew has added much to this existing planting. Native limes – small-leaved and large-leaved – have been planted on a broad slope together with Common Cherry (*Prunus avium)*. Also planted have been non-natives: alder (*Alnus acuminata*), laburnums, some cryptomeria, a davidia and, on this particular occasion, a Dawn Redwood (*Metasequoia glyptostroboides*).

There are some who think that only native trees should be planted in our woodland situations that are not commercial forests grown specifically for timber production. Andrew obviously does not agree with this and is willing to try a wide range of species to see if they will equally provide wildlife habitats and food for wildlife. Certainly, any species is going to be a useful tool for mopping up carbon dioxide, one of the principle reasons for growing and preserving this woodland. Personally, I agree with this and think that, especially with climate warming, we should be experimenting beyond just our native trees to see how effective other species are in fulfilling the carbon capture and biodiversity and wildlife diversity objectives.

We had our picnic lunch sitting outside Andrew's log cabin, his base in the wood which he described as his tool shed. Well, it was certainly the most elaborate tool shed I've ever seen. A very bold construction of Douglas Fir logs with a planted roof and wood-burning stove inside. What a wonderful place to sit outside as one looked towards Hopesay Common having spent many hours working in your own woodland. We were very envious.

Thank you Andrew (and we mustn't forget Alison – thank you both) for such an excellent visit. We were all inspired by your personal contribution to coping with these present-day issues and, of course, we all now want to have our own woodlands!

Andrew then took us to meet local resident, David Trenchard, who owned a small arboretum about a hundred yards or so away from, his house next to Hopesay Church. The number of different species here was somewhat limited but, nonetheless, this was a beautiful spot with magnificent trees located around a lake. There were six Giant Redwoods (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*), one Coast Redwood (*Sequoia sempervirens*), a Western Red Cedar, two, possibly, Deodar Cedars, some alders and a Cut-leaved Beech (*Fagus sylvatica* 'Asplenifolia'), among a number of willows, birches and ash. One of the Giant Redwoods, Andy Gordon informed us, was the largest of this species in the County.

Figure 1: Members enjoy the woodland at Hopesay (photo Richard Dorrell)

One further tree caused some discussion. It was certainly a Hemlock, but was it Western Hemlock (*Tsuga heterophylla*) or Eastern Hemlock (*Tsuga canadensis*)? Graham and I thought it might be a “Western” but following the afternoon’s events, Andrew put its details through a botanical key and is certain that it is an ‘Eastern’ Hemlock. Going back to the Western Red Cedar, this was the none too common Zebrina variety (*Thuja plicata* ‘Zebrina’) with its yellow scaly leaves crossed by bands of green, a beautiful tree.

We thank David for allowing us to visit this very special corner of his village and, once again, we must thank Andrew for putting together both Hopesay visits for us. What a wonderful way to spend an afternoon. *John Tuer*

The next visit: Picnic at The Stag's Head, New Invention. Saturday, 10th July 2021 (Sat Nav ref; SY7 OBS)

When we planted trees for Sarah and Simon Jameson at New Invention last December, they suggested that we might return to have a summer picnic on their site among the trees of their new woodland. And that occasion has now arrived. Please come along and bring your picnic. Sarah says she will provide tea and cake. **We meet there at 1.00pm**.

Sarah will show us around her plantings and tell us what she intends to do next. Those of you who came to help plant will remember what a beautiful site it is and we shall all be interested to see how 'our' trees have come into leaf.

I shall provide you all with a tree identification quiz and we'll get Sarah and Simon involved in it too. And, yes, a prize to be won!

How to get there- Go to Craven Arms and turn west to Aston on Clun, Clunton and Clun. Cross the river bridge in Clun and carry on uphill and straight on. This is the A488 to Knighton. After 3 miles, look for the New Invention village sign and the house, called Stag's Head, is at a road junction on your right.

Parking: 4-5 cars can park on the roadside outside the house (better to turn around and face the way you came). Please don't park by the chapel on the opposite side of the road. If you turn right at this junction, 2 small cars can park along this lane on the right hand side. For further cars, go into the land next to the house and park on the dry woodchip site. If, when you arrive, all these places are full, please just stop by the roadside and ask.

Covid rules: It will still be a little short of the magical day – 19th July – so we are allowed up to 30 people outside as an organised group. Any more than that, well that's easy considering where we are. We simply spread out and form two groups. Just as we did when we were planting in March.

We look forward to seeing lots of you there on Saturday 10th July. *John Tuer*