Wiltshire Tree Warden News

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Message from Vicky

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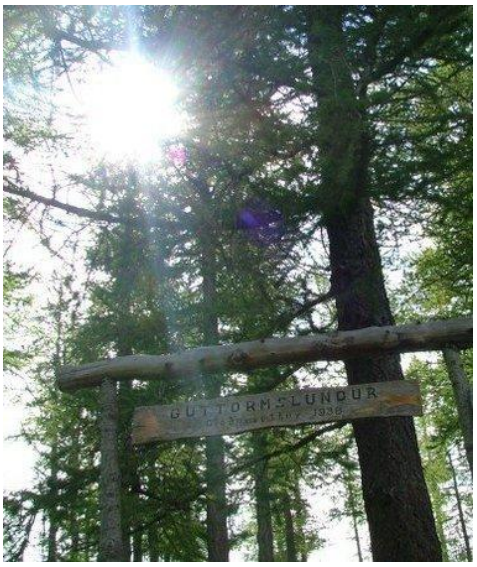


After a long, and rather mild winter here in England, an 'island vacation' seemed to be in order. When the opportunity to visit Iceland came along, I took the opportunity to go and see for myself what attracts people to this moon-like country. But where were all the trees?

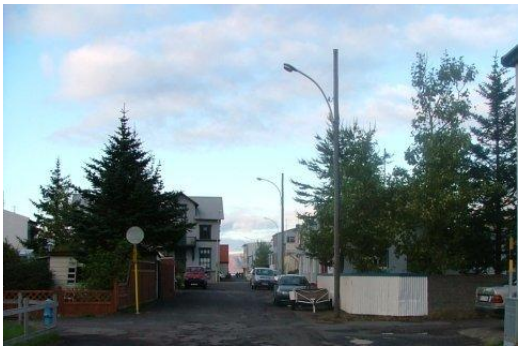
Why aren't there any trees in Iceland?

Ancient Icelandic writings from the 12th century tell how the settlers three centuries earlier found a country that was covered with trees from mountain to shore. The fact that they mention this point suggests that trees were already becoming scarcer then. Over the centuries they were chopped down for timber and firewood, while grazing sheep, harsh winters and ash from volcanic eruptions caused erosion that prevented trees from taking root.

When the Vikings arrived the country was forested "from mountain to shore" – at which point they promptly cut all the trees down for building material and firewood. Then their sheep made sure they could never grow back and subsequent erosion and soil loss ensured that the reign of trees really was over.

Reforestation work began early this century and although there is still only one proper forest in the country (Hallormstadaskógur in the east), Iceland today plants more trees per head of population than any other nation in the world (around four million a year, or 16 for every man, woman and child.)

Reputations, though, are not gained for nothing and Iceland does indeed have fewer trees than many other countries. So why the fuss you ask? It probably has something to do with the intonation that Iceland doesn't have any trees because it's too cold for them to survive there; however, trees actually do well in Iceland.



Birch is Iceland's biggest and most widespread wild and truly native tree today and there are many examples of these attractive, gnarled plants reaching heights of five metres! Most parts of the world with Iceland-like climates seem to abound with evergreen pines, spruces, firs and conifers; but in Iceland they are a relatively recent introduced species to.

Iceland is unusual in having more trees in its towns than in its country- side; and a stroll around the leafy suburbs of Reykjavík or Akureyri will reveal how wide a variety of trees can thrive on this windy sub-Arctic rock. Most towns also have a forest area (mostly established after 1940) and two of the most impressive are near Egilsstaðir and Akureyri. The long Icelandic winters do not help the trees out much but the endless summer daylight is a real boost to them. In fact the country's lack of tall trees probably has more to do with their young age than anything else. But that's just as well really, because a massive tree wouldn't stand much of a chance in some of the Icelandic winter gales!

News from Tree Wardens

Genista Aethensis (Mount Etna Broom)

Richard J Bowen, Salisbury

A recent walk through the Salisbury Council Grounds, adjacent to Churchfields Industrial Estate alongside the River Nadder revealed an interesting and unusual tree species. The stretch of land features a plethora of fascinating trees, including variegated maples and ash, large black, white and grey poplar, several unusual willow species and an immense Caucasian alder, located where the Nadder meets the Avon.

The unusual tree was identified as *Genista Aethensis*, a Mount Etna Broom. The species is a member of the *Fabaceae* family, which features flowering, leguminous plant varieties. The Mount Etna Broom species is a native of Sicily, and also Sardinia. The typical natural habitat would be upon the lava rich slopes of Mount Etna, an active Sicilian volcano. In 'tree' form (rather than shrub) the species seems to be relatively short lived (typically 15 to 20 years) in the UK. Owen Johnson's comprehensive journal 'Champion Trees of Britain and Ireland: The Tree Register Handbook' (2011) records only two Mount Etna Broom specimens in the UK, both comparable in size and stature to the Salisbury tree.

After clearing the thick undergrowth from around the tree, the largest 'bole' from the multiple stemmed, large footprint was measured as 107cm in circumference, at a height of approximately 120cm. Assuming pi, the diameter is calculated to be 34cm. The height appears to be between 10 to 15 metres. Online correspondence with the Tree Register has confirmed the identification, and the tree has provisionally given 'Champion Tree' status for the specimen for the County of Wiltshire. Hopefully a Tree Preservation Order (TPO) can be also awarded to compliment the 'achievement' of the rare specimen, if one does not already exist.

Vale of Wardour Ancient Tree Survey

Jenny Bickerton, Fovant

The survey looking for ancient trees in the area of Donhead St Mary and Donhead St Andrew has now been extended to cover the whole of the Vale of Wardour which stretches roughly from East Knoyle in the west to Wilton in the east. The aim is to gain a better understanding of our current and historic tree landscape enabling us to ensure their preservation, making landowners more aware of the value of trees on their land and to educate the next generation about the value of trees.

Jill Butler from the Woodland Trust came to Ashley Wood Farm in May to inspire the local volunteers and provide the initial training. The survey has begun concentrating initially on selected parishes to cover all the roads, footpaths and bridleways identifying trees which are veteran, notable or ancient. These are being recorded on the Woodland Trust Interactive map and also by Hugh McNair, one of the volunteers, on our own working map with a view to supplying a report on our findings at the end of two years. Monthly meetings are planned to monitor progress. It is quite a daunting but exciting task and there is lots of enthusiasm.

Action for the River Kennet

Report on Black poplars by Anna Forbes (ARK Project Officer) provided by Bryan Castle, Marlborough

When Action for the River Kennet (ARK) and Marlborough Town Council jointly purchased a 15 acre water meadow in Marlborough, Wiltshire with the River Kennet flowing through it, we did not realise we were also the privileged new guardians of eight rare native female Black poplar trees (*Populus nigra*).

Wiltshire Botanical Society carried out a survey for ARK at Stonebridge Meadow (part of Stonebridge Wild River Reserve) and discovered amongst the Lombardy and hybrid poplars were eight mature pure Black poplars, the most endangered native timber tree in Britain (according to the Forestry Commission) and yet one of the least known.

Black poplar is dioecious, meaning male and female flowers are found on separate trees. The flowers are catkins and are pollinated by the wind. Black poplar populations are now fragmented, making pollination unlikely. In the past Black poplar wood was used to make match sticks, carts and floorboards, but the wood is no longer in demand and more recently riverbanks and adjoining habitats have fallen victim to urbanisation and land drainage on a grand scale. These trees are found where conditions are damp, in our case on a floodplain along the banks of the River Kennet, they are now isolated and scarce nationally, particularly the female. In favourable conditions Black poplars can exceed 200 years old but another reason for their decline is safety felling in areas where the public have access and organisations are worried about hazards and being sued.

Black poplars serve a very useful function and can still benefit humans today. They have the potential to help in flood management and can help the control of diffuse pollution. They are also highly beneficial to a wide range of wildlife, being the food plant for caterpillars of many moth species and catkins provide pollen and nectar for insects including bees.

Mature specimens have a distinctive appearance; the bark of the trunk has many deep fissures and is crusted with bosses and burrs. The branches are distinctly angular. In October 2012 The Cotswold Water Park kindly gave ARK two young Black poplars to plant at the reserve, a nationally scarce female clone and a more common male. The idea being that one day they will be in a position to produce viable seed. This autumn we hope to receive several more young specimens from the water park for our volunteers to plant. Responsible management of Stonebridge includes planning for the future and making sure, as trees naturally reach the end of their life, that we replace them to keep this rare and special species and the habitats they provide alive and in turn allow the site to prosper.

Churchyard renovation (Part 2)
Norman Hodnett, Sutton Benger

In the last newsletter I wrote about being asked to do a survey of the churchyard in Sutton Benger shortly after I had attended the excellent training session in Monkton Park Chippenham last November.

My proposals eventually formed the basis of the planning consent application and agreement from the Diocesan authorities for the go-ahead. In total there were 39 tasks with 17 requiring the expertise of professional tree surgeons. The work is now almost complete; the trees and branches posing a risk removed and a general tidy-up which alone entailed sending some 75 bags of twigs, roots etc to the recycling site.

The Churchyard is now opened up - light penetrates the dark areas and the Church can be seen from every angle. A rather lovely old box tidied and in the sun, lumps of stone piled over its roots turned by an imaginative volunteer into a ziggurat alongside and what I now think is a Japanese Crab (*Malus floribunda*) lighting up the spring.

Basic Tree Survey
Jenny Bickerton, Fovant

In April we were lucky enough to have an excellent presentation by Jim Mulholland and Richard Murphy, two experts in the Council, on hazardous trees and what symptoms of ill health to look for. They explained that hazardous trees only present a risk if there is a target so priority is given to trees in populated areas where the risk is greatest. We were shown how to conduct an inspection, the equipment to use and how to recognise and record hazards and this was followed by a practical look at the trees nearby at Bourne Hill in Salisbury.

A bonus was watching Rich shin skilfully up a tree which had already been identified as in need of attention at the completion of the training!

Matters of Interest to Tree Wardens

Chalara Update

In case you haven't seen the news, there's been a breakthrough in dealing with Chalara ash dieback!

UK scientists have, for the first time, identified an ash tree that shows clear tolerance of the fungus which causes the disease raising the possibility of breeding tolerant trees. Chalara Ash dieback is now found in most parts of the UK and a great number of trees are infected in one woodland in Norfolk. However, some of the trees in the woodland appeared to have very low levels of infection and researchers identified one of them which they nicknamed 'Betty', as having a strong tolerance of the disease.

The team compared the genetics of trees with different levels of tolerance. From there, they identified three genetic markers which enabled them to predict whether a tree is likely to be tolerant – even whether it is likely to be 'mildly' or 'strongly' tolerant. Betty, they discovered, was predicted to show strong tolerance. The findings were announced in April during a visit to the John Innes Centre in Norfolk by Defra Minister Lord Gardiner and Professor Nicola Spence, the Chief Plant Health Officer. For more information and guidance on Chalara, see the Forestry Commission website.

Training opportunity

Bringing History and Nature Together - July 16 (10am - 4pm)

Local archaeologist and historian Graham Bathe and ancient tree expert **Ted Green** will be conducting a tour of parts of Savernake on July 16 (10am - 4pm) to discuss the history and archaeology of this, one of Europe's oldest woodlands. This is a fantastic opportunity to admire some of the largest deciduous trees left in the whole of Europe in the company of two renowned experts.

Savernake was first mentioned in the Saxon charters in AD 940 and established as a royal hunting forest shortly after the Norman Conquest. It is unique in having been in the hands of a single family from Domesday (AD 1080) to the present time, contributing to the preservation of thousands of documents which help interpret the landscape today.

The tour will combine observation (tree shape and archaeology, signs in the landscape, species composition, LiDAR images) with the documentary evidence that survives for this site like no other. Participants will be able to investigate how influences such as Roman occupation, commoning, social unrest during the baronial wars of King John, management of the royal hunting forest, landscaping by Capability Brown, the second world war and modern policies have shaped the forest we see today.

If you would like to attend this event please book via **Steve Russell**, Woodland & Countryside Management Ltd

Woodland Trust Community Tree Packs

Another reminder that there are 4,750 tree packs available for autumn and that applications by community groups and schools for November delivery close on 7 September 2016.

Remember

Seed Gathering Season Tuesday 23rd September to Tuesday 23rd October 2016

National Tree Week Saturday 26th November to Sunday 4th December 2016