



Annual report 2005/2006

Woodlands for now and for the future



The Small Woods Association encourages the care and enjoyment of small woodlands: registered charity number 1081874

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Small Woods Association 2005 – 2006 Annual Report

This has been a productive year for SWA. After the delays over the long awaited merger with GWC, the first year of the two organisations working together has gone smoothly, with the increased staff resource proving useful to both sites, in terms of answering enquiries, providing information, networking and general admin support. The group continues to deliver a wide range of activities, covering all aspect of small woodlands, their management, use and products. The social forestry projects continue to do well, with the Wye Wood project leading the health and wellbeing agenda in Herefordshire, and Coed Lloel delivering a similar remit in Wales.

Events

The Small Woods Association ran 13 events around the UK during the year, from Kent to Cornwall, Wales and Scotland. They gave interesting and varied close encounters with woodlands, their owners and managers and opportunities to learn about the influences upon them. The events also provided an opportunity to meet and enjoy the company of others with this common interest. Our events have been mostly well attended and well received – your support means more events!

Membership

Membership rose gradually during the year to 1400 members. The new membership database has improved services to members.

Publications and web sites

SWA has published two Marketing Guides for Owners of Small Woodlands and Producers of Wood Products and has distributed these nationally on behalf of Forestry Commission and Countryside Agency. These guides may be downloaded from the website www.smallwoods.org.uk which is also a valuable source of information on the care and management of small woodlands.

GWC continues to support the coppice industry through a web site, www.coppice-products.co.uk, and a national newsletter, Coppice Cuts.

GWC co-ordinated the production of four case studies, funded by the Forestry Commission including one on coppicing as a business. These are available on GWC's web site www.greenwoodcentre.org.uk

Projects in brief

SWA's hosted partnerships continue to flourish including Coed Lloel in Wales, co-ordinating networking, the Woodland Initiatives Network which continues to support the UK's Woodland Initiatives and the Herefordshire Sustain Project which has developed the Wye Wood health and wellbeing project. Work to develop Heartwoods II continues, working with the Forestry Commission and other partners.

At the Green Wood Centre (GWC) Su Barber completed the highly successful HLF-funded Shropshire Woodland Heritage Project, and developed a youth project with excluded young people from the nearby Woodside Estate which resulted in nine young people receiving their first ever qualification – an OCN level 1 in coppice products. GWC delivered a coppice restoration project with the Shropshire Hills AONB, which is helping to provide fuel for the new boiler. Thanks must go to those attending from the Community Payback Unit of Telford Probation Service, who have worked many long hours to help bring coppice back into management.

Policy contributions

SWA's input to national policy forums continues to grow, though servicing regional policy input into the 9 English Regions remains difficult due to a lack of resources.

Funding

The year ended on a poor note due to us failing to secure further core funding through the new English Nature Countdown 2010 Action Fund with only 3 weeks notice (which replaced DEFRA's Environmental Action Fund, which we had received for 9 years). However, due to our building up alternative sources of income, including membership and management fee income we were able to continue as normal with a trimmed down budget. SWA has taken a longer term investment decision by taking a substantial shareholding within Coressence Ltd which aims to turn excess cider apples into green electricity, thus supporting the livelihoods of orchard growers.

The Green Wood Centre has raised over £500,000 for investment in its site at Coalbrookdale, renewing machinery in the workshop as a training centre for green wood product manufacture, renewing the awning as a training space and completely refitting the cruck barn. A Froling log fired district heating system has been installed, which heats all four buildings on site. This has placed a strain on finances, but income has been maintained through grants, landscape furniture production and courses. In 2006-7 the site development will be completed with the extension to the Woodland College.

Graeme McVittie, Chairman

Spotlight on SWA projects

Woodland Initiatives Network

The Woodland Initiatives Network aids communication between woodland initiatives and projects throughout the UK, allowing them to share information, knowledge and best practice. Phase One of the project was successfully completed at the end of 2005 and Phase Two has been confirmed with funding again provided by the Forestry Commission and Countryside Agency until March 2007, which will take the Network through a transition period with the establishment of Natural England. The Woodland Initiatives Network also has an "in principal" funding agreement until 2009 subject to final approval by Natural England.

An Evaluation of the Network was carried out in November 2005 by Lis Whitelaw, she was tasked with assessing its impact and recommending options for its future development. The evaluation confirmed that the "Network provides a very good service that is highly valued by the Initiatives and used differently by different people at different times. The Network is seen by external organisations as an important link to the work that is going on outside commercial forestry."

The Woodland Initiatives themselves are a diverse group of wood related projects and organisations operating throughout the UK. Their areas of work include woodland/forestry management, providing help and guidance with: certification, business, job creation, products & marketing, training, education, biodiversity, diversification, community involvement, access.....and much more. Some operate within local authorities; others are independently run as not-for-profit companies.

The Initiatives met in May 2006 for the 6th National Networking Conference in Cambridge, supported by the Forestry Commission. Speakers at this year's conference included Rod Leslie, the Forestry Commission's Head of Programmes, and Sandy Shattock, Defra Head of Forestry Policy Unit. Through Sandy, the Initiatives were the first to receive and discuss the consultation document reviewing England's Forestry Strategy. Access to funding is always an issue with the Initiatives so Judy Walker of the Green Wood Centre chaired a discussion session which included Fiona Bryant of the Regional Development Agency and Sara Roberts representing the Regional Forestry Frameworks.

In 2006 the Network has provided briefing information to the Biomass Task Force on a variety of projects working with woodfuel. This work was highlighted in the Government's Response to the Biomass Task Force Report in April 2006. A joint response from the Initiatives was also provided in July 2006 to the Defra consultation document – England's trees, woods and forests.

A variety of tools used by the Network are still being supported and are running successfully:

- The **Woodland Initiatives Register**, a searchable on-line database with information on initiatives and their work throughout the UK, receives an average of 2000 visitors each month. www.smallwoods.org.uk/initiatives.
- The **Woodland Initiatives Learning Network**, an on-line information and communication tool, part of the Countryside Agency's group of Learning Networks. A 'membership only' site for initiatives providing news, information, documents and a discussion forum. <http://woodland.net.countryside.gov.uk>.
- The **Woodland Initiatives UPDATE** follows on from the Learning Network by providing news, information and briefings in an e-newsletter circulated to all initiatives and related offices and organisations every 6-8 weeks.
- The **Woodland Initiatives Handbook** helps new and existing initiatives set up and run their group or organisation. Copies have been distributed by post or downloaded from the Small Woods Association website. The content will be revised and updated from time to time.

For further information contact: angelapollard@smallwoods.org.uk or tel: 01743 792654.

Herefordshire Sustain Project

1. The Wye Wood Project: 2005 saw the continued development of the Wye Wood project; a woodland and health initiative looking at innovative ways to improve peoples' health using the woodland environment, through coppicing, clearing rides, making art works, walking and so forth. The project, funded by The Forestry Commission, Primary Care Trusts of Herefordshire and Shropshire and West Mercia Probation Service, is being run as a National Demonstration project for rural areas.

Since November last year this third phase of the Wye Wood Project has been based in the village of Wigmore, at Teme Valley Youth and Community Resource Centre in North Herefordshire. This phase of the Project is managed by Herefordshire Sustain and the Greenwood Centre and is funded by the Primary Care Trusts for Shropshire and Herefordshire plus the Forestry Commission. Although the activity is based around North Herefordshire and South Shropshire, the Project is a pilot project for the Commission nationally and so we have received funds from both regional and national sources. The Project links health and woodlands, and trials ways in which communities can benefit from using local woods and green spaces to enhance their wellbeing.

Since November, 45 local people from Hereford, Leominster, Ludlow, Craven Arms and many villages in between have been regular participants of the Wye Wood Project. We have hosted activities in Mortimer Forest, near Ludlow which is already a popular spot for walkers, and in Wigmore Rolls – an 80 hectare Forestry Commission wood in North Herefordshire which features 10 acres of neglected coppice.

A group of young men were signposted to the Wye Wood Project from various organisations who felt they would benefit from learning some rural skills. They have been coppicing and making coppice products including charcoal, hurdles, rustic furniture and brooms since February. Six of them have achieved at least one OCN in Level Two Coppicing, and are about to be submitted as candidates for the OCN in Coppice Products.

For further information on the Wye Wood Project please contact Beth Parrott on 01568 770422, elizabethparrott@smallwoods.org.uk

2. The Orchard Topic Group (OTG) LEADER+ national co-operation project.

HSP with the OTG developed a project which aims to engage the community once again with their orchards. This initiative will establish the true benefit of orchards to the County with regard to their value through tourism, landscape, well-being, ecology, archaeology. The project started in 2005 and is being run by the Bulmer Foundation, one of the members of the OTG. Results will be published when the project is complete in 2007.

A further output of the OTG has been the establishment of a company, Coressence Limited, to convert the surplus supply of cider fruit in Herefordshire into bio ethanol and then in to green electricity. SWA took a position on the Board as a founding shareholder. This year has seen the long development process towards the capitalisation of the company. Although it will become entirely separate from SWA as an independent company, its success could ensure the long term future of HSP and SWA.

3. Cycle routes HSP was approached early in 2006 and asked to help with an initiative to encourage landowners to allow access to their land along old railway lines to open up an off road cycle trail. Many meetings later, we have in principal agreement to open 15 miles of old railway. It is hoped the first stage will be open by Easter 2007.

For further information on Herefordshire Sustain please contact Katie Eastaugh (until November!) on 01568709240, katie.eastaugh@smallwoods.org.uk

Katie will be on maternity leave for much of 2006/7 but she will be back!

Green Wood Centre courses, education and volunteering

1 Training Mary Lewis, Training Manager at Green Wood Centre has taken forward many aspects of our work this year. She has helped Lantra develop National Occupational Standards for coppice and green wood crafts, and set up the national coppice apprenticeship in partnership with the Bill Hogarth Memorial Apprenticeship Trust and accredited many GWC courses with the Open College Network, as well as starting on the process of centre accreditation. For further details please contact courses@greenwoodcentre.org.uk

2 Forest Schools at GWC The Green Wood Centre ran a pilot programme of Forest Schools from December 2005 to March 2006 with a group of children from Woodlands Primary School in Woodside, led by Dominique Avery. The project was aimed at developing motivation, self-confidence, interpersonal and communication skills, emotional intelligence, team work and physical fitness with children with behavioural difficulties and at risk of exclusion. All children who participated in the programme showed improvements at school. Dominique also ran several short programmes and one-off days of woodland activities and woodworking. Children from Captain Web Primary School in Dawley made three legged stools and glockenspiels out of single logs. All education programmes have been very successful with participants interested in continuing in the next academic year. GWC has bid to Donnington Fair Share Trust to run year long programmes with local schools. Meetings are scheduled for September with the education Improvement Partnership in Telford and Wrekin to discuss further funding. Dominique is currently looking into possible funding from Big Lottery and other grant organisations. GWC has also established a new education site at Tick Wood Farm which has been developed this summer. GWC will have access to the woodland to run up to 4 education sessions per week through out the year.



3 Courses at the Green Wood Centre The Green Wood Centre introduced several new courses including Wood fuel Systems, Boyne Coracles, Woodland Skills for Forest School Leaders, and our first family oriented course, Family Bushcraft. There are also several new courses in 2006/7 many of which utilise the newly refurbished workshop. These include, Bowl Carving, Workshop Skills, Steam Bending, Rounding Planes for Rustic Furniture, Carpentry and Joinery, Shaker Chairs and further courses in Fruit Tree Pruning. GWC has benefited this year from a Vocational Training Scheme grant awarded by Defra to a partnership of forestry training agencies in the West Midlands. GWC has helped over 40 people in farming and forestry work to extend their skills by attending accredited courses. The VTS funding is for anyone who spends a portion of their time working directly in forestry or agriculture. When booking on a course, please enquire as to your eligibility. For further information on education and courses at the Green Wood Centre please contact Dominique Avery on 01952 432769, courses@greenwoodcentre.org.uk

4 Coppice Apprenticeships Funding has been successfully sourced from the Headley Trust to begin a National Coppice Apprenticeship Scheme. This will use the existing apprenticeship model developed by the Bill Hogarth Memorial Apprenticeship Trust and the Open College of the North West, and will be jointly administered by the Green Wood Centre and BHMAT. The aim of the project is to have 10 apprentices in place over the next five years; at present we have funding available for 5 and are awaiting the results of a grant application to fund 1 more. The five existing apprenticeships are being placed as follows: 2 in the North West, 1 in West Sussex, 1 in Devon, and 1 to be confirmed. The first selection event will run at Westonbirt Arboretum in September from which one apprentice will be selected to be placed in Devon with hurdle maker Brian Williamson.

5 Volunteering at GWC Volunteering in the Gorge is a partnership project with the Severn Gorge Countryside Trust, to engage with disadvantaged communities and increase opportunities for volunteering and training in the World Heritage Site. Funded by the Heritage Lottery, the Green Wood Centre element aims to start a coppice restoration programme across the Gorge and in nearby woodlands, and to encourage young people into the coppice industry. For further details please contact Ron Smart, Volunteer Supervisor, on 01952 432769

The 'Light is Life' project

The Greenwood Centre has secured funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund for the 'Light is Life' project that started in March 2006 with the appointment of the project officer Richard Thomason. The project is based on work carried out by Ron Smart and Richard Wellings who over many years documented the memories and thoughts of Mr Osborne the last of a family line of Worcestershire woodsman dating back to 1768. 'Light is Life' is a term used by Richard and Ron that depicts the importance of light at the woodland floor to regenerate new life. The project will recreate and document, within a book and DVD, the unique terminology and method of coppice management that was successfully followed for many generations within North Worcestershire. The project will form a model of good practice for today's coppice industry not only for the production of quality hazel in harmony with a diverse range of woodland species but will emphasise the skill of woodland husbandry and the need for long term continuity.

The project is based at Hornhill wood, Nr Himbleton, which is part of a group of woods within North Worcestershire that Mr Osborne's family would have worked and is one of the best examples of coppice woodland with standards within the West Midlands. The wood is privately owned and is currently managed by the Worcestershire Wildlife Trust whose valuable support is greatly appreciated. The project will conclude with a conference to disseminate information gathered through the project in September 2007. For further information please contact Richard Thomason, project officer, on 01952 432769 or 07716657117
Hornhill Wood, near Himbleton, Worcestershire



Coed Lleol II

“Restoring the links between people and woodlands in Wales“

After the successes of Coed Lleol I, funding was secured to provide continuity to this important initiative. Following an independent evaluation it was decided to employ a Partnership Officer to develop communication among the woodland sectors in Wales and to promote the importance of woodlands to agencies and organisations that have the potential to use this resource to attain their individual goals. A partnership of environmental, health, tourism and education organisations has been formed to help drive this forward.

Since the initiation of this new phase in August 2005 the partnership has re-launched and improved the Coed Lleol web site which includes clickable maps to locate your local woods. These guides have been extended to Powys, Flintshire, Wrexham and Monmouthshire and will be available in the same web format this autumn. The Partnership has also published a 20,000 copy run of the Wales Woodland Celebration 2006 which promotes over 300 events.

The Coed Lleol partnership is also sponsoring students from the City and Regional Planning Department of Cardiff University to investigate barriers and opportunities for public participation in woodland in Wales.

Considerable interest from the Welsh health sector has been shown in using woods and woodland activities to promote physical activity and to develop a general sense of wellbeing through participation in confidence building green woodworking crafts and environmental arts. To help facilitate this, the partnership is writing a guide for health care professionals and support workers who want to know how they can get their service users into the woods. This summer a gathering of woodland owners and groups, health care bodies, social services and local authorities took place at Pen yr Allt wood in Ceredigion to exchange ideas on health and wellbeing promotion. This was a great success and is hoped to be the start of many fruitful collaborations.

For further information contact the Coed Lleol Partnership Officer 01970 890441 or email: johntaylor@smallwoods.org.uk

Health and Wellbeing from Woods Workshop August 2006

Small Woods Association Directors, Staff, Honorary Officers and Advisors 2005 – 2006

Vice Presidents of SWA

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David Saunders

Russell Rowley, Group Executive Director
Ron Smart, Volunteer Supervisor
John Taylor, Coed Lleol Project Officer
Richard Thomason, Light is Life officer
Judy Walker, Director, Green Wood Centre

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Angela Pollard, Woodland Initiatives Officer

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Steve Livesey-Bennett, Surrey
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