

▼ **Hugh Dorrington being presented with his certificate by Small Woods' Simon James** | David Reeve



## Innovate to inspire

It was an exciting move for SWA to launch an award in 2022 to celebrate all the innovative ways in which woodland owners and managers are helping their woods to thrive.

The award was named in honour of Esmond Harris, who said he hoped it would encourage small woodland owners to think more widely about the management of their woods, simply by learning about what others are doing.

The long-standing SWA member, author and retired director of the Royal Forestry Society, said the wide variety of entries augured well for its future. "They were all very different and enthusiasm for what was being done in each wood came over clearly," he said. "I am delighted to be connected with this new award and am confident from this first competition that it is set to continue and contribute to the activities of the Small Woods Association."

Here is a breakdown of the entries that made for a strong first competition:

### WINNER

Hugh Dorrington's Nursery Wood, in Lincolnshire, was the winning entry for successfully managing ash dieback, increasing biodiversity and welcoming public enjoyment. Around 1.1ha was planted with a mixture of broadleaved trees and shrubs in 2008. Hazel, field maple, hornbeam, wych elm, midland thorn and wild apple were planted to form the understorey and provide an important habitat while promoting the growth of tall, clean stemmed oak trees for quality timber in the long term.

Woodland management practices through pruning have allowed ash trees to overcome Chalara infections and flourish, and the healthiest ash trees are now being used for propagation.

Now bursting with life, there are three pairs of blackcap and chiffchaff, two pairs of willow warbler, as well as several pairs of robins, wrens and blackbirds.

Also, Hugh has successfully controlled squirrels that stripped the bark from several of the field maples in 2017 by shooting in March, April and May.

### JOINT RUNNERS UP

**Michael Stapleford** was nominated posthumously, both by Gareth Muir and Phil Barwood, for his work of setting up a social enterprise, Woody (Hyndburn) CIC, which enables volunteers to work together on sensitive and productive woodland management. The initiative, run by the Prospects Foundation, provides services for 16 publicly accessible woodlands in Hyndburn, Lancashire. Woody links woodland management, habitat enhancement and provision of woodland products for local use.

**Andrew Allott**, of Bank Wood, Hopesay, in Shropshire, has planted more than 650 trees, since 2016, on a three-acre site where a larch monoculture was felled to pre-empt arrival of *Phytophthora ramorum*. More than a hundred species now grow on site. Diverse planting ensures the spread of pests and diseases is hindered.

### OTHER ENTRIES

**Ross and Gill Floyd**, of Chelvey Wood, in North Somerset, created a fully flushing off-grid toilet by using collected rainwater and a solar panel to charge an old tractor battery that runs a reclaimed caravan water pump. When flushed, the pump kicks in and refills the cistern, then turns off. Waste then runs to a digester made from an old dustbin.

**John McCutchan**, of Beatons Wood, East Sussex, has spent 50 years managing the 9.6-hectare ancient oak wood with an understorey of hornbeam, sweet chestnut and hazel. In 1972, the Arlington Bluebell Walk was born. The aim was to improve vistas of white wood anemones and English bluebells, raise significant sums for local charities (£1m for nearly 80 local charities to date) and encourage more of the public to see an ancient wood managed for wildlife diversity.

**Simon Miller**, of Cotton Wood, in Cornwall, has breathed life back into a woodland left unattended for nearly 100 years. Cotton Wood has seen an increase in wildlife activity and improved biodiversity in the 14 years since sustainable management practices were implemented. In 2021, the first small level of profit was made through a combination of low impact and sustainable income streams.

**Heather Hunt** and the Friends of Newfield Spring Wood look after a diverse 32-acre ancient woodland near Sheffield. To counter climate stress and tree disease, they enhanced the resilience of the woodland ecosystem by planting a diverse range of trees not currently present. In autumn 2021, volunteers made more than 60 tree guards using coppiced sweet chestnut and holly as stakes and upcycled chicken wire. Ninety per cent of the 60 planted saplings are thriving.

**Carolyn Church and Hugh Ross**, of Rawhaw Wood, in Northamptonshire, found a working system of standing up sheaves of brash and parallel staking, to hold them in place for at least three years, long enough for the coppiced hazel to regrow, protected from deer. The dead hedging barrier provides a habitat for many different species.

**Richard Lanyon-Hogg**, of Hafan Heddychlon, Bethania Ceredigion, Wales, uses small and cheap "off-the-shelf" sensor technology to monitor the health of trees and woodlands. For less than £100, the basic Internet of Trees (IoTr) package helps him remotely monitor temperature, ground moisture, humidity, light levels, and the electrical conductivity of the tree. With this insight, he can make more informed woodland management decisions.