



# Tree Watch

Issue 9

May 2011

On 10<sup>th</sup> May 2011 we had **4803** trees in our database and **4575** photographs

Welcome to the May issue of *Tree Watch*. I hope you are all enjoying the good weather and using it as a good opportunity to get out and record more trees.

As you all know, at our AGM in March, Barbara Stagles stepped down as our chairman. We had no nominations for the posts of chairman or vice chairman, and these duties are now being shared between members of the committee and especially our secretary, Kerry Clissold, and treasurer, Ian Potts. Barbara also produced the newsletter and nobody has offered to take that over. It gave brief reports on our activities and described forthcoming events. Details about all forthcoming events are on our website and a list will now appear in *Tree Watch*. Ellen, our membership secretary, will continue to send information to our postal members. If anyone wants to write a report on any event or describe a forthcoming one, I will be very pleased to include it in *Tree Watch*. Just send it in.



The next issue of *Tree Watch* will be August 2011 and the copy deadline is 31<sup>st</sup> July. All comments and contributions please to: Elaine Butler [datamanager@wdvta.org.uk](mailto:datamanager@wdvta.org.uk)

**Main items in this issue:-**

p2 AGM Surprises for Barbara  
p2 Rooks Nest Wood, Barkham  
p4 Profile - Patricia Green  
p4 Meeting with Remarkable Trees

p5 Great Yew Hunt - dissertation project  
p7 Commemorative and Notable Trees  
p7 Verification Trial  
p9 Did You Know?

**Events planned for May-September**

- ① Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> May - afternoon walk around Nores Hill and Pearmans Copse, Shinfield.
- ① Monday 20<sup>th</sup> June - afternoon visit to Warburg Nature Reserve - booking essential.
- ① Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> July - evening tree walk at Cantley Hotel, Wokingham.
- ① Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> July - evening talk by Glynn Percival on the effects of leaf miner on Horse Chestnuts.
- ① Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> September - morning visit and guided walk to see the veteran trees at Valley Gardens.

The National Trust are doing their "Woodland Wednesdays" walks in June at Cliveden again this year.

For details see the events page on our website - [wdvta.org.uk/events.php](http://wdvta.org.uk/events.php)

If you come on the Shinfield walk, you'll see the remarkable oak shown above - an old pollard that dates from the time of Henry VIII. It's MRN 432 with a girth of 6.3m and is around 550 years old.

## **TREES AT RISK**

Just as we were beginning to think that the horse chestnut leaf miner moth (*Cameraria ohridella*) was causing only cosmetic damage, Dr Glynn Percival from Reading University published a study showing that it does much more harm. The leaf damage causes a dramatic reduction in seed size and quality and potentially stunts the tree's growth. "It is debatable whether smaller trees would be capable of long-term survival," he writes. With the University on our doorstep, we invited him to tell us about his findings. His July talk should be fascinating, although possibly depressing.



*"Since the 1960s most [plant pathology] research and teaching have turned to short-lived plants that are easier to understand."*

Oliver Rackham (2006) "Woodlands"

## **AGM SURPRISES FOR BARBARA**

The well attended 2011 Annual General Meeting of members was going smoothly through the business items when up popped Kerry Clissold, our Secretary, to present a series of awards to Barbara Stagles in recognition of her magnificent achievement in founding, developing and chairing WDVTA over the past four years.

Barbara stood down as Chair at the meeting, but the occasion was marked by the presentation of a splendid bouquet, together with a leather bound edition of one of her favourite books, "Under the Greenwood Tree" by Thomas Hardy, and of course a retirement card signed by all present.



To cap all these however Kerry announced that, with the invaluable assistance of Andy Glencross, Biodiversity Officer for Wokingham Borough Council, an avenue of oak trees in the new Rook's Nest countryside site in Barkham, would be dedicated to Barbara (and husband Ray). The planting of the final tree in the avenue is planned to be done by Barbara in the autumn.

She was clearly touched by all these, especially the dedication of new oaks. What better recognition than in the veteran trees of the future with a potential life span of over five hundred years?

The meeting then returned to its planned course with an absorbing insight from Elaine Butler into the progress of the Veteran Tree Survey with fascinating facts and photographs. The success of the Survey is another tribute to Barbara's vision for the Association as a champion of our tree heritage.

*Ian Potts*

---

## **ROOKS NEST WOOD, BARKHAM**

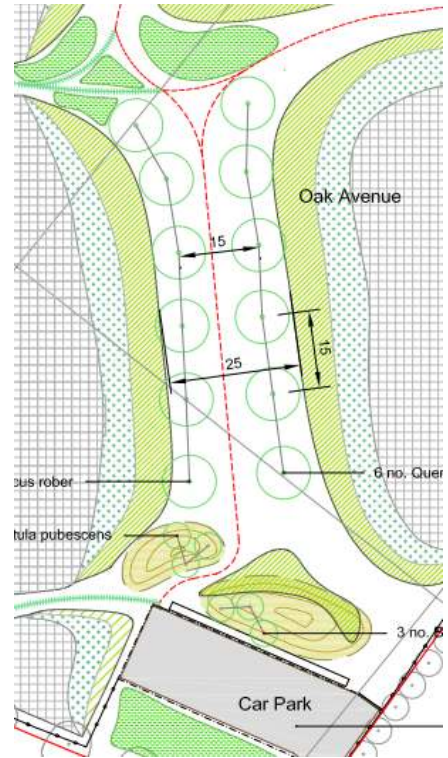
This latest addition to Wokingham's countryside sites was officially opened in March this year and is Wokingham's first SANG.

SANGs - Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces - are required under the 'EU Directive on the Conservation of Wild Birds 1979'. This identifies rare species of European wild birds that need

protection and includes provision for areas of habitat most suitable for them to be designated as Special Protection Areas - SPAs. Nationally important populations of three birds - nightjars, woodlarks and dartford warblers - occur in the heathlands to the south of Wokingham surrounding the Blackwater Valley and these have been designated as the Thames Basin Heaths SPA. These ground-nesting birds are vulnerable to disturbance, particularly by dogs. SANGs are intended to mitigate the impact of new residential development near to SPAs and they are entirely funded by developers as part of their planning permission conditions. SANGs are meant to reduce recreational use of the SPAs. The intention is that these new (as well as existing) residents will walk their dogs in the SANGs rather than using the SPAs. Whilst such sites are designed to provide an attractive recreational opportunity for people, they should also benefit local wildlife.



*The Oak Avenue - now Stagles Avenue at Rooks Nest. It doesn't look much now - you can only just see one of the six pairs of oaks (above). The plan (right) shows their position either side of the main path from the car park. The oaks are just saplings now (left) but are hopefully future vets!*



Rooks Nest is a 19-hectare former farmland site off Barkham Ride. There are 7ha of new broadleaf woodland, with the planting of over 11,000 native trees, including oak, birch, ash, hazel, hawthorn, field maple and rowan. When the site was opened there was a forest of plastic tubes, but now the grass and herbaceous plants have grown tall and the plastic tubes are inconspicuous. The site is quite wet in places and four new wildlife ponds have been excavated. It is criss-crossed by a series of iron-rich streams which support the bacteria *Leptothrix ochracea* and *Gallionella ferruginea*, giving these streams their typical orange colour. [Also of course seen in California Country Park.] Within the site is the Brook Farm Meadow Local Wildlife Site, designated for its characteristic wet rushy grassland. The pre-existing wildflower meadow has been retained and will be enhanced by improved management. New stock fencing has been installed and stock should be introduced soon. The management plan for this SANG includes various surveys, including a veteran tree survey which was completed in 2011 by Janet Firth and her team.

A new car-park and over 2km of new footpaths make the site accessible. The final phase of the project is the construction of the Barkham Ride Footway link which should be finished by the end of June.

With the massive number of new houses planned for the four SDLs (Strategic Development Locations) in the Borough, there will be more local SANGs in the future. There is more information about SANGs on the WBC and RSPB websites - or go to [tiny.cc/aj799](http://tiny.cc/aj799)



## **PROFILE - PATRICIA GREEN**

*Patricia Green is coordinator for Shinfield and the new chairman of the coordinators group. She is also a frequent contributor to Tree Watch. She has recorded over 360 trees during the last two years, mostly with Joan Hancock, giving Shinfield the most trees in our database after Wokingham Town.*

I've often wished that I owed a six-acre wood - too much Christopher Robin as a child, I guess! This wood has to be mainly oak with hazel coppice, containing ancient banks and grassy rides. It would be managed on a coppice rotation and the flora and fauna would flourish. Therefore after gaining my degree in geography it seemed appropriate for me to become a landscape architect. I worked for many years with Berkshire County Council and latterly as a private consultant. It was fascinating to plan for example the reclamation of paper mill waste heaps (interesting plants and ground nesting birds) or the enhancement of river banks including putting in otter holts. I found it particularly rewarding to shape environmental education facilities in school grounds, involving the pupils and staff all the time.



I am a member of BBOWT and of the Reading Urban Wildlife Group, where we carried out Borough-wide Habitat Surveys and where we try to persuade Reading Council to implement wildlife-friendly environmental policies. Each year I join bluebell walks, fungus forays and nightjar patrols around the Thames Valley area, and I am continually impressed with the variety and quality of much of the local landscape.

Development pressures arise regularly in Shinfield where I live, and in between responding to planning application consultations I have helped to produce the Village Character Statement and the Parish Plan. The importance of safeguarding trees has been emphasised at all the public meetings and there was a lot of feedback about the significance of trees in people's lives. Belonging to WDVTA and recording the veteran trees in their individual settings is a positive step for conservation that is important to me. At the same time I am aware of the activities of other nearby groups such as the Chilterns Society and the Living Landscape Project based at Greenham Common, which are able to take matters a step further and demonstrate the proper maintenance of trees and their local environment. The great work done by Barbara and her committee is clearly making an impression on Wokingham Council's policies and attitudes to trees. I hope that we continue to influence policy makers and developers, as well as highlighting the value of trees in the landscape.

*Patricia Green*

*This report from Patricia was held over from the last issue. It is illustrated by one of the remarkable trees she has recorded in Spencers Wood - MRN 4870.*

## **MEETINGS WITH REMARKABLE TREES**

Thomas Pakenham gave a wide-ranging and amusing talk at High Wycombe on 20<sup>th</sup> November 2010 on the occasion marking the final report of the four-year Special Trees and Woods Chilterns Project. The many volunteers are to continue their work with trees across the Chilterns and it is worth noting that the official route of the Chiltern Way now extends into Berkshire, to include the chalk hills and wetlands of 'our' parishes of Remenham, Sonning and Wargrave. Do we have any notable trees along the route?

The 'remarkable trees' of Thomas Pakenham's talk were photographed in Britain and during his visits around the globe to places including Tibet and Namibia where he often collected tree seeds for Kew and to grow on himself at his own estate in Ireland. He has an oak tree 110 feet tall (33.44 m) with a long straight trunk, reputedly planted in 1745, but he noted that oaks once mature change only very slowly over the decades and even centuries that follow. This was illustrated with comparisons of etchings from the 19<sup>th</sup> century and present-day photographs of that oak and of the Crowhurst yew tree [featured in the second issue of Tree Watch]. He encouraged us to check on historic dates of planting by researching old books and prints which often show trees, sometimes incidentally in photos of old buildings.

A photograph of a beech tree showed the phenomenon of 'fusing' whereby main branches curve back and rejoin the trunk, forming a 'chalice' shape which gives extra strength and wind-resistance to the tree. One such tree has a trunk diameter of 23 feet (6.9m). Of course this was not the largest tree to be shown. The largest was a tree of an incredible 120 feet (36.4 m) diameter in the Namibian bush, on the edge of the desert. As we know, it is not possible at present to tell the age of living hollow veteran and ancient trees,

as they have no tree rings to count and cannot be carbon dated. However, the speaker stressed the importance of recording tree rings from stumps. Also if we can be present when an old tree is felled it is worth recording the rings in the main branches as they are taken off the trunk, and sketching their original position on the tree. This enables the specialists to calculate the rate of growth of different trees in various locations, and build up knowledge of the likely age of living trees.

We saw photographs of the only trees that do not become hollow with great age. These are the Bristle Pines of the White Mountains of western USA where the very cold weather and high content of resin in the trees preserve the inner parts. It is known that the oldest tree here has been dead for 1,000 years. Much of the bark and side limbs have fallen away so it is one of the smallest pines in its group.

Global warming is resulting in die back of trees from stress and lack of water in some countries and it may be that more symptoms from climate change will become evident in our trees. Meanwhile Ireland is having a purge of non-native species, including beech trees which are classed as non-indigenous. So magnificent veteran and ancient beech trees are being felled. In Britain we attempt to protect our special trees, such as the largest (hollow) oak tree, which is in Lincolnshire and is reputed to be one thousand years old, and an ancient oak in Birnam Wood in Scotland.

*Patricia Green*

---

---

## **THE GREAT YEW TREE HUNT - DISSERTATION PROJECT**

We had a very successful and enjoyable day with Charlie Harrison using his EpiCollect system to collect data for his dissertation and verifying some of the yews in our database (see February Tree Watch). We surveyed 6 yews in All Saints Churchyard in the morning and 5 in Barkham in the afternoon as well as completing his questionnaires. There is a short illustrated report on the Yahoo site and you can read Charlie's dissertation there too. [They are in the "News - Publications - Survey Reports" folder - see reading suggestions on page 9.] To see the data, photos and map, go to the Yew Hunting website:

[www.epicollect.net/project.html?name=YewHunting](http://www.epicollect.net/project.html?name=YewHunting). The data can be downloaded as a csv file. (Some of the data is in the wrong columns, but this can be easily corrected and the height of girth is not shown, although it was recorded.)



*The 5 trees surveyed at Barkham - red markers show churchyard locations - black markers are on private land.*

The system was easy to use and much, much simpler than recording data on paper and then transferring it to an Excel file. Some people found the phone keys rather small, but that could easily be solved with the use of a stylus and would be less of a problem for people using their own phone.

The grid references obtained were accurate (just as accurate as those from our Garmin eTrex) which isn't surprising since it's the same system as used by Sat Navs. The difference between the grid references obtained from the phone readings and that from the eTrex on that day averaged 4m. The average difference between the grid reference obtained from the web map and that given by the phone or the eTrex was 8m. Grid references are not displayed on the phone. Locations are recorded as lat/long and have to be converted to OS grid references. All conversions introduce errors. We record as OS and convert to lat/long for display on the Google map, whereas the phone method avoids this conversion.

The photos were not good quality (and this obviously depends on the phone model), but automatic linkage to the tree record is invaluable. One major problem some

recorders have is associating the correct photo with the tree record. In practice extra photos could be taken with a camera and then could be added to the database; but the photo taken with the phone would ensure that at least one (correct) photo was associated with each record. Only one photo can be associated with the record by the phone app.

This system could replace our paper recording sheets. We would need some extra fields, but that would be no problem. The downloaded csv file would effectively replace our Excel recording sheet. This could be examined and necessary corrections made before submission to our database. At that stage any extra photos could be added (as could any extra comments).

As smart phones become more widely used, the EpiCollect system will become a real contender for anyone doing a survey such as ours. It could be used alongside a paper recording system, to cater for people who had, or were prepared to use, compatible phones and those who didn't want to use them. The EpiCollect program is open source, hence free to use, and can be adapted to suit individual requirements. Battery life may be a problem, although less so for new phones. The biggest problem is the cost of uploading data. Equipment grants could cover the initial cost of some phones, but running costs are more problematical. Recurrent expenses are a greater problem for voluntary organisations as grants are less likely to cover them or have to be applied for regularly; and the problem of separating survey costs from personal phone costs would present practical difficulties for most voluntary groups like ours. These aren't insurmountable problems of course - they just need addressing before adopting the system. I'd certainly consider it if I was starting our survey now. Of course with the amount just awarded to the 'Kent Heritage Trees Project' by the Heritage Lottery Fund, funding would not be a problem. They've been awarded £650,000 for a five-year programme and plan to survey over 10,000 heritage trees in association with the Ancient Tree Hunt. We have recorded nearly 5,000 trees. Is there another 5,000 to come?



*With a girth of 0.6m, you wouldn't expect to see this tree in our records, but that's set to change - as Alison Griffin explains below.*

*This commemorative oak was planted in front of the church at Finchampstead in 2002 to celebrate the golden jubilee of the Queen. Another oak tree planted to mark the golden jubilee of Queen Victoria stood nearby from 1887 to 2003.*

## **COMMEMORATIVE AND NOTABLE TREES**

Do you know of trees planted near you to commemorate a person or an event?

When you have been out surveying have you ever seen an unusual tree that is not large or veteran so you haven't surveyed it?

These questions were discussed at the committee meeting in March. Our survey already includes 'notable' trees and so the committee discussion clarified two groups of 'notable' trees that can be recorded in the database.



Firstly, we agreed to record individual trees that have been planted to commemorate a person or an event. This will enable the WDVTA database to hold as much information as we can gather for past, present and future commemorative plantings so that it becomes a repository for these details which are too often forgotten or lost. Photographs of any plaques and copies of any newspaper articles about the planting can be held and linked to the tree information on the website. A newly planted lime tree in Langborough Road in Wokingham was reported in the local paper in February and this has now been surveyed and will be in the database shortly. This topic was discussed in the recent coordinators meeting and the agreement was that we really do mean just individual trees as some parishes have large groups of commemorative plantings which would not be appropriate to include in the survey.

The committee also agreed that 'notable' trees can include ones that are not necessarily veteran or large but are of a species that is unusual within the parish or town, providing they are at least visible to the public. This will enhance the WDVTA database so that anyone interested in an unusual tree species can view and find details of local specimens.

Are there other types of 'notable' trees where we should clarify what is included in our survey?

*Alison Griffin*

*Whilst surveying, you might also like to pay particular attention to two other species - Hawthorns and Trees of Heaven - for two very different reasons.*

*Oliver Rackham bemoans the under-recording of veteran hawthorns. This is probably because we don't realise many are veterans. According to the Woodland Trust a hawthorn is a veteran if it has a girth of 0.8m or more.*

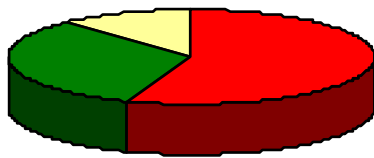
*The National Biodiversity Network has established a "Recording Invasive Species Counts (RISC)" initiative and wants people to report sightings of six non-native invasive species. One of these is a tree - the Tree of Heaven. So if you see any - do let me know or record them directly with RISC. There aren't any in our database (yet).*

---

## **VERIFICATION TRIAL**

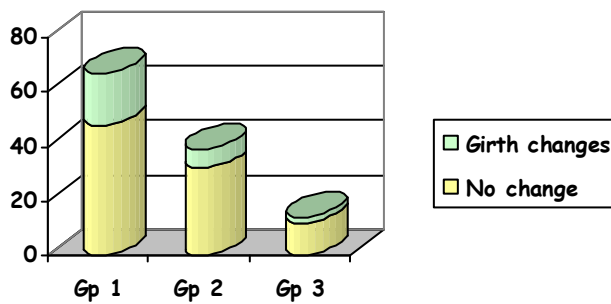
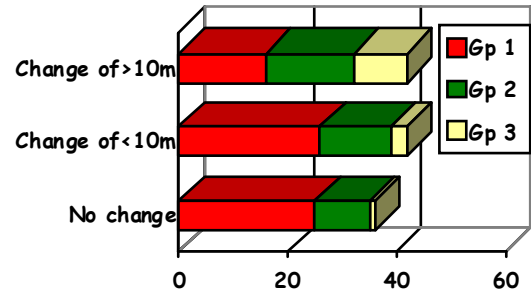
Verification means checking that our records are accurate, which means printing off the record, finding the tree and checking that the data is correct and complete. We finished a trial verification of our records in Wokingham Town last year. Now our records will show where a tree has been verified (have a

look at the full record for MRN 76). Three teams of verifiers checked 120 records. Wokingham Town started surveying before the current procedure was established, and 56% of the records in this analysis date from that period. These records are likely to be less accurate than later ones for a number of reasons, including the use of older GPS models (only 8 digit grid references were recorded initially).



- Gp 1: Original submitted to BTCV
- Gp 2: WDVTS recording sheet version 1
- Gp 3: WDVTS recording sheet version 2

Our aim is to geolocate the trees to within 10m of their true position. The grid references of 65% of records checked were corrected, with 35% being out by more than 10m. One of the grid references was a whopping 154m out! The tree was only found because an address was given (emphasizing the importance of recording locations). The original grid reference was only 8 digits, but there was probably a transcription error as well. The important point is that we could find all the trees again.



Unfortunately there is an interval of up to five years between the original measurement and the verification. Hence it is not surprising that the girth of some of the trees has changed. However in only one case could the difference perhaps be attributed to expected growth, and six trees were smaller than originally recorded. Twelve trees had died or been felled.

Six trees had been incorrectly identified. Two oaks are really limes and one common beech is in

fact a copper beech. A Corsican pine was incorrectly recorded as a Scots Pine and one Sweet Chestnut turned out to be a Red Horse Chestnut.

I was going to include the summary analysis here, but this is rather long already. You can download it from the Yahoo site (see reading suggestions on page 9) or from the website (publications page) or I can e-mail it to you.

In general I think the results are very encouraging, especially since we concentrated on early records with missing information. The quality of the records we have in the database is good, but we do need to continue and extend verification, particular identifying records with missing data. Thanks to the verification team - Kerry Clissold, Alison Griffin, Martin Haslam, Malcolm Inglis, Coralie Ramsey, Michael Rea and Barbara Stagles - for all their hard work - and they haven't finished yet. They will continue verifying Wokingham Town records using the procedure developed during the trial.

This simple procedure can now be used by anyone and if you want to verify a few trees in your area, you can download the verification form from the website (survey page) or Yahoo site. Alternatively just let me know which trees or area you want to verify and I'll produce the forms for you and you won't have to use Excel at all!! We particularly want to get photos for all trees and if you come across a record without a photo, why not go out and take one. You can even verify the record at the same time.



## DID YOU KNOW?



Oak before ash, in for a splash  
Ash before oak, in for a soak



If this rhyme is true we will have a dry summer! The Woodland Trust website has a "Nature's Calendar" section where "you can record and view seasonal events that show the impact of climate change on our wildlife". The first recorded oak in leaf was on 21<sup>st</sup> March in Essex, but ash leaves weren't seen until 4<sup>th</sup> April (in Cardiff). This agrees with the pattern for recent years, with oaks coming into leaf between late March and May, and ash April-May. Compared with 30 years ago, oaks are about 2 weeks earlier and Ash 7-10 days. Ash has only beaten oak a few times in the last 50

years, because we now have warmer springs. Oak is temperature sensitive, but ash is thought to respond more to sunshine than temperature. Back in the 18<sup>th</sup> century ash was more likely to come into leaf before oak. There are records from Norfolk dating back to 1750. In 30% of these, ash came into leaf earlier than oak.

So is the rhyme correct? There is no evidence that the relative timings of oak and ash leafing has anything to do with subsequent rainfall! There are similar rhymes in German and Norwegian, but they both suggest the opposite relationship.

Some recommendations from the Yahoo site:

### WEBSITES:

Links mentioned in this issue:

- ① <http://nbn.org.uk/RISC/Home.aspx> (in Links > Other useful links) - RISC
- ① <http://naturescalendar.org.uk> (in Links > Woodland Trust) - Nature's Calendar
- ① <http://tiny.cc/qj799> (full address in Links > Wokingham Borough Council) - SANG

### READING:

There's a new folder on the Yahoo site for reports related to our survey:

**Files > News - Publications - Survey reports > SURVEY REPORTS**

- ① **Wokingham Town Verification Trial - Analysis**
- ① **Yew data Feb26 - EpiCollect**
- ① **EpiCollect - Yew dissertation**

Images may be subject to copyright, so please do not reproduce any without checking first.

Don't forget: The latest database and all the latest files relating to the survey are on the Yahoo site:

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/WDVTA>

Details of all trees in our database are available via the web map pages: <http://wdvta.org.uk/WDVTS/>

Finally, and most importantly,  
**THANK YOU** to everyone who is out there recording our trees.  
We wouldn't have a database without you.