



WOODLAND OWNER  
**PROFESSOR JULIAN EVANS OBE PICFor**

# More questions than answers

I whispered to the youngster, “Shh . . . we’re going to meet the elves; pass it on.” The six-year-old turned and passed on the message to the next in the 16 long line of kids, mums and dads. The final recipient shouted, “What’s this ‘something about shelves?’”

A group of young wildlife enthusiasts had come to my wood on a cold and damp February Saturday. We had measured beech trees, done bark rubbings, looked at freshly cut firewood logs and now I led them into a patch of 30-year-old oak and ash. We snaked our way through the undergrowth to find that the elves had gone but had left their caps behind on the ground! This year is one of the best for the colourful, bright, orange-red cup fungus, *Peziza coccinea*, the elf cap. Most fungi appear in the autumn, but elf caps and the wonderful and edible morels appear in early to mid-spring in broadleaved woodland.

Another discovery this year is a question for readers. I was replacing a plaque that names part of our wood after my late father who died more than 30 years ago. The plaque base had completely rotted, though the plastic engraved sign with its inscription was still in good shape. As I removed the sign I found that where the brass screws had secured it, the wood in the vicinity was still sound. This was so around all four screws while all else was badly decayed or gone altogether. Had copper salts, a well know fungicide, leached from the screws sufficiently to ‘preserve’ the wood for a few millimetres either side? I would be interested to learn if this is a common phenomenon.

A second question concerns moss at the base of trees and blunting of chainsaws. In firewood felling of some ash and sycamore this winter experience has taught me always to clean moss from the base of the trunk before starting to cut. Over the years I have gained the impression that seemingly soft, damp, tender moss blunts the chain. I speculate that it is because it traps tiny grains of sand or

other hard particles blown around on windy days. I find, similarly, that cutting into the plastic of most kinds of tree shelters quickly blunts the saw.

Finally to a familiar topic: is this going to be a bad year for grey squirrel damage? I have never seen so many greys, both low down and high up in the canopy. Late January trapping in live cages and with Fenn traps in boxes caught well above average numbers. Has the mild, dry winter led to high over-winter survival and the need for vigilance with control this summer?

Back to the youngsters who so impressed by their fortitude and fun the other Saturday. They may not have found the elves, but all found that even in winter there is much to excite and interest. They departed happy each with a stick and each with a bag of associated bits and pieces to remind of the day.



Even in winter there is much to excite and interest



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