



SMALL WOODLAND OWNER
PROFESSOR JULIAN EVANS OBE FICFor

Training for small woods owners

Many owners of small woodlands are unfamiliar with forestry or woodmanship – to use the late Oliver Rackham’s fulsome expression. Some will have only recently acquired their property, others may simply not have had much time or inclination to devote to management. Whatever the reason, in the last decade or so many new opportunities have emerged to provide skills and offer training needed to do woodland work, or at least much of it, safely and successfully.

A preliminary point for anyone contemplating getting upskilled is to join an organisation to network, exchange ideas, see how others are getting on before embarking too far on one’s own. Why are many of us reluctant to learn from others and rely almost wholly on the the classroom of ‘experience’? I leave the question for readers to reflect on.

One must begin with the Small Woodlands Association. The SWA, perhaps unfamiliar to some in Confor, is the ‘must join’ organisation for aspiring and actual small woodland owners. Their magazine Smallwoods is always full of helpful advice, they run practical courses on almost every topic, and they hold field meetings. Some of their publications are free.

Similar to SWA but arising out of the sale of small parcels of woodland, typically around the two hectare mark is the Small Woodlands Owners Group (SWOG). As the name implies, almost all members are owners of small woodland and SWOG is excellent for networking and exchanging ideas, with regular newsletters, training days, woodlands TV, and a rich website full of information for the beginner and small woodland enthusiast.

A rather different genre of opportunities to upskill are the one-day courses increasingly being provided by the Royal Forestry Society in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Today, as I write, an email came in from them announcing eight training courses for 2018 one of which is on my own patch where we look at first essentials when starting out as a new owner or manager of a small woodland. The fact that

a body like the RFS with its long history is now running such days indicates the pent-up demand there must be.

Of course when it comes to matters of chainsaw usage – and forest machinery in general - training by accredited bodies such as many colleges is a prerequisite for successful and safe operation. Similarly if application of pesticide or wildlife control is envisaged proper training is essential. The excellent research updates provided by Forest Research (FR) remain a valued resource though perhaps less immediately relevant to the everyday needs of the small woodland owner. That said, FR’s website is a ‘regular must visit’ for all woodland owners and managers as a way of keeping abreast of the latest news.

Many of the above have in mind growing good timber as a component of management, but if conservation is a priority then The Conservation Volunteers (TCV), local natural history groups, and friends groups offer practical experience on their sites. Also there are subject specific groups such a coppice associations, hedge laying groups and the like.

Today we have a richer variety of opportunities then perhaps ever before; let’s make us of them.

New owners assembling for a training day





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