

THE MAGAZINE OF THE FRIENDS OF WESTONBIRT ARBORETUM | SPRING—SUMMER 2025

£5
FREE to members

Westonbirt

40 trips around the sun

We take a look back at the incredible impact of The Friends as we celebrate our 40th anniversary in 2025!

Celebrating 40 years of The Friends 🌿 Interview with Dan Crowley, Curator 🌿 Launch of the *Sorbus* Conservation initiative

In this issue

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Funded through your membership and our fundraising efforts.



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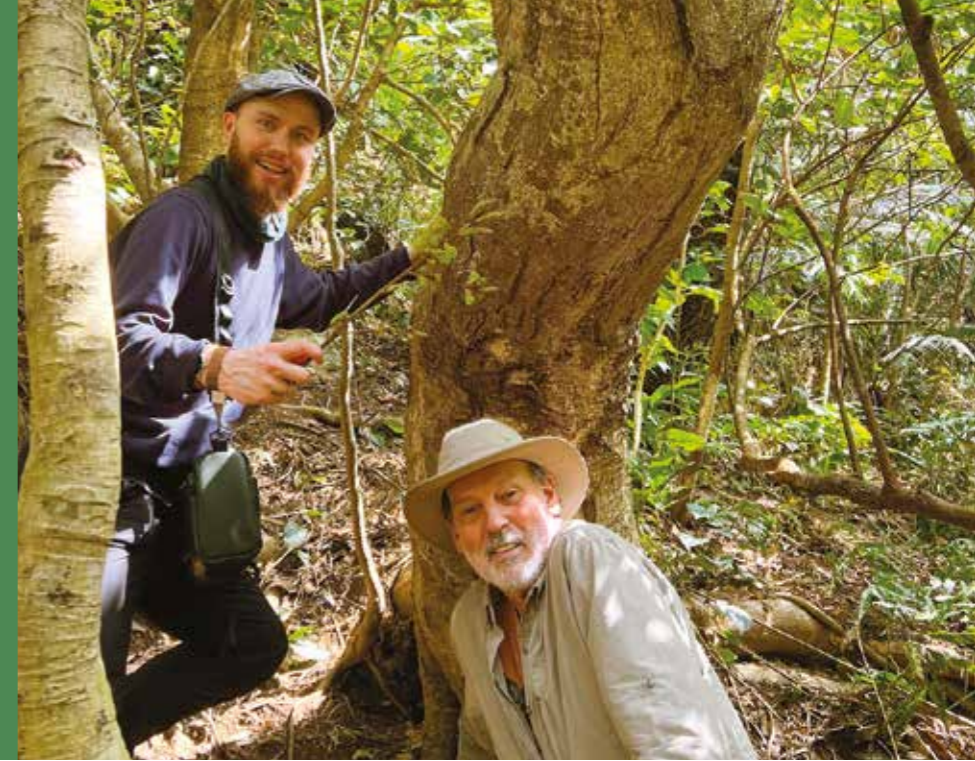
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ISSUE 125
Spring and summer 2025:
March – August. © Friends of Westonbirt
Arboretum. Reg. Company 4965522
Reg. Charity No. 293190

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Tetbury, Glos GL8 8QS
Email: membership@fowa.org.uk
fowa.org.uk

COVER IMAGE
Friends of Westonbirt Arboretum

DESIGN
Oyster Design
oysterdesign.co.uk

PRINT
Stephens & George Print Group
stephensandgeorge.co.uk

Printed on Woodforce, sourced from responsibly managed forests.
Mailed in recyclable FSC material.

EDITORIAL TEAM
APT Marketing and Jo Murray.

Views expressed in the Westonbirt Magazine are not necessarily those of the Friends of Westonbirt Arboretum or Forestry England. Every effort is made to check factual accuracy, but no guarantees are expressed or implied.

In particular, readers should satisfy themselves about the authenticity of products advertised.

Celebrating our 40th anniversary



In the day-to-day life of a charity, it is so natural to become focused on where we are going, and what needs to be done, leaving little energy to reminisce.

The 40th anniversary has given me the perfect excuse to delve deep into the archives, to meet with the countless dedicated people that came before me, and to reflect on the incredible, awe-inspiring, and impactful journey The Friends has had so far. Refreshing the timeline on page 6 has also been a joy, considering how very many people, and very many members, have been involved at every stage of the last 40 years. I hope you enjoy reading about the far-reaching impact of the past 40 years, and I look forward to celebrating together at the AGM this July.

Emma Griffiths
CEO, Friends of Westonbirt Arboretum

Becoming a world-leading botanical garden



Congratulations and thank you to The Friends for 40 years of supporting the arboretum. Without The Friends' support, and you as their members and donors, so many of the projects we have and want to undertake, simply wouldn't be possible.

This issue highlights just some of the amazing work being done by the Westonbirt team to position the arboretum as a world-leading botanical garden, and to ensure we are at the forefront of conservation efforts. I am particularly excited about the *Sorbus* consortium (see page 22), while the seed collecting trip to Greece (page 24) highlights the incredible value being given by The Friends' funded facilities such as the Quarantine House and the Propagation Unit. Here's to another 40 years. Thank you!

Andrew Smith
Arboretum Director, Forestry England

The spring switch

As we speed into spring and the 40th anniversary of The Friends, it's the perfect time for new beginnings, and what better way than a refresh of our much-loved magazine?

You'll already have noticed a fresh look and feel and new paper, so you might be wondering why? Aside from better reflecting the current reality of The Friends and the impact we are making together, a key focus is the sustainability of the publication:

- The new paper requires less finishing and is sourced from even better managed forests than before.
- Removing the fold-out on the seasonal highlights map uses the paper more efficiently and therefore reduces resources and waste.
- We're now carbon-balancing this publication via the World Land Trust, which is protecting and replanting forests globally, including Kites Hill in Gloucestershire.

What's more, Stephens & George, our long-term printing partner, is already at the leading edge of sustainable printing. This publication is and has long-been printed with vegetable inks and no nasty chemicals, with a paper wrap to be 100% recyclable at home. They also prioritise printing practises that minimise waste wherever possible, meanwhile their factory runs off renewable energy, and they also opt for low-water, low-resource suppliers themselves.



Image credit: Paul Groom

the friends
of Westonbirt
Arboretum

You're invited!

Join us for our summer celebration and 39th Annual General Meeting as we explore the impact your membership makes.

Date for the diary: 02 July 2025 from 2pm to 4pm

Where: The Great Oak Hall

Enjoy talks and tours that celebrate how you are helping to make Westonbirt Arboretum a world leader in trees, supporting conservation, combatting climate change, and connecting people with nature.



Book online on our website, or look out for a link in the eNews.



CELEBRATING 40 YEARS

OF THE FRIENDS OF WESTONBIRT ARBORETUM

Looking back at the extraordinary impact of The Friends

Taking up my post, almost three years ago, I was filled with wonder at the heritage of The Friends, and the incredibly real, and wholly tangible effect that membership and donations have here. I knew I was joining a really purposeful organisation, but even then, I underestimated just how far-reaching and important that work here is.

Some of the unsung initiatives that cross my desk every week are the underprivileged communities that are hosted here, the Access to Nature support work that is done, the Tree Team roles that are funded by The Friends, and countless stories that are so easy to overlook in a partnership as expeditious as ours.

In 2024 alone, we secured £213,000 through our fundraising efforts, grew the membership to its highest level in recent years, launched a new young person membership, significantly uplifted funds generated through the shop, supported the launch of the Robin bus to encourage access to nature; and much more besides. Your membership has delivered a direct contribution to several of these initiatives, as well as funding the new on-site shuttle bus and replacement mobility scooters, enabling much of the tree-planting in Silk Wood, the new outdoor play areas, the latest trainee arborist, seed collecting trips, conservation projects and much more besides. That's just in one year!

Stretch that back over 40 years and the impact is extraordinary. It shows just what can be achieved in a proactive partnership, and it is testament to your continued investment in us via membership, donations, legacies and time.

Just think. Without The Friends, there would be no "Westonbirt Project". No moving of the car park to restore The Downs. No Welcome Building. No Treetop Walkway or Maple Loop. No arboretum expansion via Silk Wood House or Silk Wood Community Planting Project (SWCPP). No Quarantine House. No Community Shelter. No Arboretum Explorer.

The Great Oak Hall wouldn't be here celebrating its 25th birthday this year, and Her Majesty The Queen would not be our Royal Patron. It's true that some of these projects might have happened in some guise, but without The Friends, the size, scale, and speed would certainly be diminished, assuming they had happened at all. It is a pleasure to support Forestry England to deliver the breadth of care and attention that they provide for the arboretum.

Looking ahead to this year and the next 40, it is obvious what a powerful impact we still have to make. Climate change offers significant threats to the arboretum (see Dan's interview on page 18) and The Friends is primed to offer funding and support to ensure collection resilience. The Julia Rausing Trust has become the latest to help fund the SWCPP (more on page 21) which will come to fruition in the next few years, alongside several other conservation initiatives. We're fundraising for the next phases of nature-based play at Westonbirt and set to start fundraising for a replacement roof for The Great Oak Hall, as well as several other exciting projects that are yet to be unveiled. It's clear we'll be busy for at least the next 40 years, and I'm hoping that the charity will reach its centenary and beyond.

The Friends is not possible without the dedication of you as a member, and those that make donations, leave gifts in Wills, or make a purchase in the shop. If you want to help us more, our website offers suggestions for donations and gifts; you can recommend us to others; or you can purchase membership as a gift as well.

Thank you for everything that you have helped us to do, and here is to the next 40 years. Read on to reflect back on what we have achieved together, and our look ahead to the next 40 years.

Emma Griffiths,
CEO, Friends of Westonbirt Arboretum



2023/24 improvements
Catch up on last year's progress in our Autumn/Winter magazine.



2023/24 Annual Review
View our most recent report online.

1985

- Founding of The Friends

1986

- 80 members
- First Friends' newsletter
- Volunteer Guide Service launched

1989

- 250 members

1990

- 1,000 members
- First public wheelchair funded thanks to a donation
- Arboretum Volunteer Programme launched to help clean up storm damage
- First Magazine from The Friends: "The Holfordiana"

“

It meant a lot to me to help John Workman to found The Friends, whose hardworking volunteers and staff have now made it one of the UK's premier visitor attractions in the UK.

Sir Henry Elwes, one of the Founders of The Friends

1993

- 1,500 members

1994

- First mobility scooter funded

1997

- 4,000 members
- Funded an extension of the undercover education area, increasing the Education Centre capacity from 50 to 100 children at any one time, whatever the weather

1998

A year of firsts:

- First employee of The Friends
- First computerised membership database
- First trail leaflet funded

1999

- 5,000 members

“

It was only after I left that I realised the enormity of what I had experienced here in terms of the people and the landscape. We give a lot to Westonbirt, but it gives a lot back too.

Jacqueline Dalton, first Charity Manager of The Friends

2000

- 9,000 members

1985

1990

1995

2000

“

The thing with Westonbirt is that whenever you go, particularly if you go off the seasonal paths, you find something different all the time.

Margaret Headen, former Trustee and lifelong supporter

1990–1994

New Propagation Unit

The unit was funded and built to provide a wider range of rooting environments to attain better results with the incredibly large range of plant species cared for at Westonbirt.



1995

Computerised mapping system

New system funded to record all on-site species, the predecessor to the Arboretum Explorer.



“

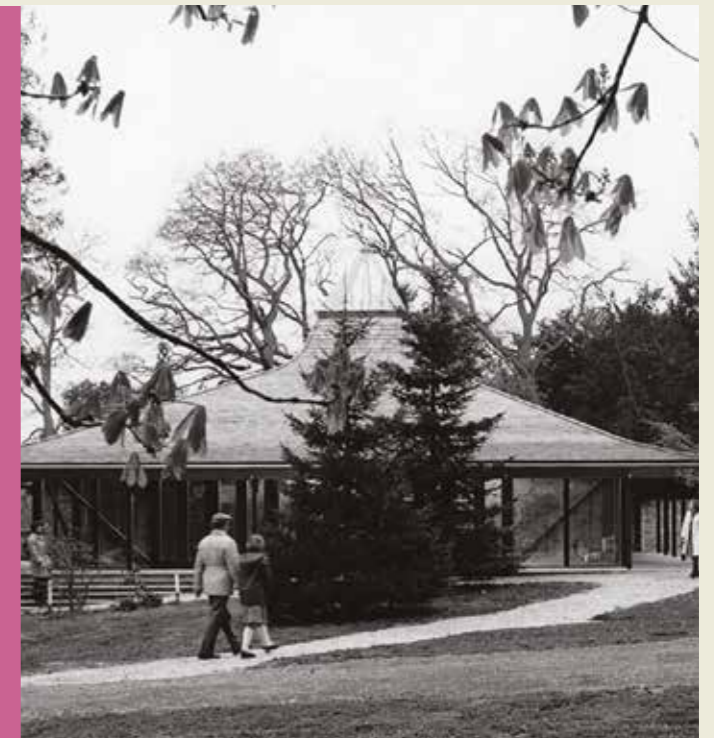
Westonbirt is part of our family history.

Martin Green, Former Trustee, donor to the Westonbirt Project and Quarantine House, volunteer guide, and lifetime member

1995–1999

New Visitor Centre

The centre was built to help educate the public who visited Westonbirt Arboretum. This building, which is now the Westonbirt Shop, became an award-winning design with its timber construction from several tree species.



2000–2004

Great Oak Hall funded and built, opened by the then HRH The Prince of Wales.

A functional and beautiful building, the Great Oak Hall was funded firstly as a home for The Friends, but also as a testament to our steady growth, and a visual statement of our strength, support and faith in the future of Westonbirt Arboretum.



2008

Silk Wood Barn funded and built as an outdoor craft shelter for courses about native woodland and its management.



“

Looking back I am delighted that the Great Oak Hall was not only built but we inspired enough people to provide about £300,000.

Chloe Darling, long-standing member and supporter of The Friends



2010–2014

Seed collecting and surveying trips funded all over the world, including Japan, USA, South Korea, Italy, Vietnam, South America.



2015–2019

The Westonbirt Project

- Treetop Walkway funded and built
- Welcome Building funded and built
- Wolfson Tree Management Centre and Mess Room funded and built



2000

2005

2010

2015

2001

- Gift Aid introduced, allowing us to claim an extra 25p from the government for every £1 donated

2002

- Indoor classroom funded

2005

- Queen Camilla, then the Duchess of Cornwall, becomes Royal Patron of The Friends

- 17,000 members

2007

- Funded the Exploratree Playground

2014

- Car park moved to a new location, with funding from The Friends: restoring a natural habitat as part of The Westonbirt Project

- The Downs landscape restored

2015

- Accessible toilet funded

- 28,000 members

2010

- New interactive map funded

- Forestry England adopt the volunteers, which The Friends had been running for 24 years

- 26,000 members

2012

- Funded the composting unit

“

Westonbirt Arboretum is lucky to have a charity to fight the corner of the arboretum, and to ensure that the needs of the arboretum are represented in the financial and grand plan of the national forest estate.

Simon Toomer, Former Director of Westonbirt Arboretum

“

What you see today with the Treetop Walkway, Welcome Building and Tree Management Centre is down to the commitment of members, donors, volunteers and Westonbirt staff.

Stephen Segar, Former trustee (1998–2018) and Chairman (2003–2016) of The Friends

2018

- The arboretum's first shuttle bus funded

2019

- 10-year vision for Westonbirt launched: 'Our place in a changing world' aligned the goals of Forestry England and The Friends for the arboretum
- 30-acres added to the arboretum with the purchase of Silk Wood House, part-funded by The Friends
- The Westonbirt Woodworks Centre restored

2022

Community shelter completed

- Engaged with local community groups to help design and build this unique structure to create a base for the Community Programme as we work to connect underrepresented people with trees

2023

- New Tree Conservation Manager role funded
- First 3,300 trees planted as part of the Silk Wood Community Planting Project

2024

- Holford Hollow and Branch Out play areas part funded
- New mobility scooters and shuttle bus funded
- Tree plinths funded for 39 key species
- 37,000 members

2020

2025

40 years of The Friends

25 years of The Great Oak Hall

Watch this space...



2020

The Friends take over the shop

This ensures every penny you spend funds vital projects at Westonbirt.

We were thrilled to welcome our Royal Patron

at the time The Duchess of Cornwall (now Her Majesty The Queen) for an official visit to see the progress of the Community Shelter in Silk Wood.



2021

A new Quarantine House was built to further improve Westonbirt's Propagation Unit.

This facility provides a much needed additional line of defence against plant pests and diseases, helping to better protect the arboretum's world-renowned tree collection.



The next 40 years

When the Holford family first set out to establish Westonbirt Arboretum, turning a very different landscape into the world-class tree collection it is now, they certainly needed ambition, enthusiasm, and a healthy dose of vision. It's not easy to visualise how a landscape can and will look, when dealing with the life span of not just one, but many trees. Yet, vision they had, and what an arboretum they created.

Even with all their apparent mastery of the future, the Holford's are unlikely to have predicted some of the changes that have happened here in the last 40 years. And, as we look ahead to the next 40 years, we are arguably in a similar position. How can we determine, with any great certainty, the needs of a collection as diverse as the one here at Westonbirt, and what will be needed to keep the collection resilient for another 40 or 440 years? Yet that is the job of the team here at Westonbirt Arboretum: to make decisions that will have an impact today, but also a relevance tomorrow.

Dan Crowley, new Curator for Westonbirt Arboretum hits the nail on the head in his interview (page 18), where he says "We need to be careful about strategy going forward. The arboretum is facing global challenges, and we need to focus where we can best contribute and play to our strengths. Climate change in particular will shape the future of the collection, and we need to be clear on what and how we can best contribute."

His comments echo those of Andrew Smith, Director of Westonbirt Arboretum, who says "Looking forward to the next 40 years we'll be taking the lead from our recently revised conservation management plan. Three key issues emerge from this if we are to secure our heritage for future generations."

He continues "First, climate change and sustainability: we need to focus on the resilience and adaptation of our buildings, trees and landscape, and manage the impact of our events while also ensuring financial sustainability. Second, accessibility and circulation: this is fundamental to our visitor experience, diversifying our audiences and appreciation of the picturesque landscape which is what makes the arboretum so special.

Third: visitor facilities and experience; we need to resolve capacity limitations in catering, toilets, and undercover shelter while also providing new facilities and experiences that meet the expectations of The National Arboretum. There is much that will need to be undertaken, and much more that will be identified over the next 40 years, but for now, these considerations are enough."

Westonbirt is of course just one part of the national tree management strategy set out by Forestry England. But the arboretum is somewhat unique in the Forestry England portfolio, and one that offers unique opportunity for research and insights not available at some other sites.

Whatever the next 40 years brings, The Friends will be standing side by side with Westonbirt Arboretum and Forestry England, bringing the vision to life, and helping assure the sustained and sustainable future of the collection here. Emma Griffiths, CEO of The Friends says "Westonbirt Arboretum is world-leading in botanical collections, and the team here is nothing short of exceptional. What they achieve every day is inspiring, and we are privileged to provide the investment and fundraising needed to bring their aspirations to life. The next 40 years will be no different, and just as Westonbirt is working to assure the resilience of the collection, we are working to assure the resilience of membership, fundraising, and donations, to protect the trees, every which way we can."

Mike Seddon, Chief Executive, Forestry England says "The Friends of Westonbirt Arboretum, working with Forestry England, have had a transformational impact at The National Arboretum. From the whole site redesign, to providing an iconic shelter for community programmes, and shared scientific endeavours for tree conservation, the partnership between the two organisations has made a tremendous difference for people, nature, and heritage. I look forward to seeing this partnership growing as we work together to ensure the arboretum continues to develop as a world class visitor attraction and the tree collection is secure in the face of new pests, diseases and our fast-changing climate." ✨



What's on

Forest Live

Experience live music amongst the trees and reconnect with nature.

Tue 17 Jun: Snow Patrol

Wed 18 Jun: Sting

Thu 19 Jun: Elbow

Fri 20 Jun: Paul Heaton

Sat 21 Jun: McFly

Sun 22 Jun: The Script



Don't miss



ARB Show

The Arboricultural Association invites you to their annual, educational event, featuring family-friendly activities.

Fri 16 & Sat 17 May



Bioblitz family fun

Become a wildlife explorer for the day and discover what's living at Westonbirt with a series of guided survey walks.

Sat 26 & Sun 27 Apr



Outdoor Cinema

Soak in the sunset while enjoying your favourite film.

Fri 15 – Sun 17 Aug

GUIDED WALK & TOURS

Westonbirt Guided Walk ^F

Explore the seasonal highlights of Westonbirt's Old Arboretum.

Mar: Daily, 11:00am

Apr – Aug: Daily, 11:00am & 2:00pm

Discovery Walks ^F

Take the path less travelled and delve a little deeper into our captivating trees.

Every Thu, 11:30am

Wildflower Guided Walk ^F

Discover the fascinating world of wildflowers and other flora at Westonbirt Arboretum.

First Tue of the month, May, Jun, Jul, Aug, 10:30am

Booking essential

Sensing Nature Guided Walk ^F

Let our visually impaired guides lead you through an immersive and interactive sensory experience.

Every Fri, 10:30am



ACTIVE FOREST EVENTS

Nordic Walk with the Nordic Nomad

Join the Nordic Nomad as she teaches you how to Nordic walk.

Every Tue & Wed, 10:00 – 11.15am

Price: £8.50 pay as you go.

Must be a member of the Friends of Westonbirt Arboretum

Canix

Canix (Cani-cross) is running with your dog on a course around Silk Wood.

Sat 22 & Sun 23 Mar, 8:30am

Price: £10 Children, £20 Adults

Relish Running

Races for everyone, all ages, and abilities. Half Marathon, 10km, 5km and 1 mile fun run at The National Arboretum.

Sun 07 Sep, From 8:00am

Price: Half = £42, 10K = £29, 5K = £24, 1-mile fun run = £7.50



WORKSHOPS & COURSES

Willow Sculpture Workshop

Spend a relaxing day crafting and weaving in a small group of like-minded people.

Sat 15 Mar, Sat 05 Apr, Sat 24 May, Sat 28 Jun, Sat 12 Jul, 10:00am – 4:00pm

Price: £95

Planning Garden Borders

Everything you need to start making your own borders bright and beautiful, including your own drawing kit.

Sat 12 Apr, 10:00am – 4:00pm

Price: £145

Spoon Carving

Learn to make a spoon out of a branch from a tree at the lovely Silk Wood Barn.

Sat 26 Apr, Sat 21 Jun, Sat 28 Jun, Sat 19 Jul, 10:00am – 4:30pm

Price: £75

Windsor Chair Making Course

Create your very own Windsor chair using traditional skills.

Various dates in 2025, 9:00am – 5:00pm

Price: £585

Cleaving Oak

Learn the art of cleaving big timber with the Westonbirt Coppicers.

Sun 23 Mar, 9:30am – 4:30pm

Price: £80

^F Activities marked with this symbol are free for members



Image credits: Alison Whaley, Craig Morgan, Dave Hughes and Johnny Hathaway



WORKSHOPS & COURSES CONTINUED

Creating Garden Plans

Spend a day learning how professional garden designers create a well thought out garden.
Sat 10 May, 9:00am – 5:00pm
Price: £145

Beekeeping for Beginners

Introduction to the important basics of beekeeping to anyone thinking about keeping bees in their garden.
Sat 14 Jun, Sun 15 Jun, 9:30am – 4:00pm
Price: £85 or £150 for couples

Printing with Leaves

Create unique botanical textile designs using fallen leaves and a heat press.
Sat 21 Jun, 10:00am – 3:00pm
Price: £80

Introduction to the Japanese art of kintsugi ceramics repair

Learn the Japanese art of kintsugi repair for broken ceramics with like-minded folk, using traditional natural Japanese Urushi (tree sap) lacquer.
Sat 29 Mar, Sun 8 Jun, Sat 5 Jul, Sat 16 Aug, Sat 8 Nov 10:00am – 1:00pm
Sat 14 Sep 1:00 – 4:00pm
Price: £50



FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Bio-diversity Detectives Family Spring Trail

Follow our spring trail and find out about how all the amazing nature we have at Westonbirt is connected! Aimed for ages 6 years and above.
Sat 01 Mar – Sat 31 May

Wildlife Walks

Aimed at 7–11 year olds, join us for a family walk exploring wildlife in spring through games, challenges and discovery activities.

Tue 08 – Thu 10 Apr, 10:30am – 12:00pm & 1:30 – 3:00pm
Booking essential

Awakening Woods

Drop in to discover new life as spring arrives, try our quiz, and make leaf burst and wildflower crafts.
Tue 15 – Thu 17 Apr, 10:30am – 3:30pm

Bioblitz Family Fun

Become a wildlife explorer for the day and discover what's living at Westonbirt. Experienced naturalists will be running a series of guided survey walks to find and identify as many different species as possible.
Sat 26 Apr, Sun 27 Apr, 10:30am – 3:00pm
Booking for walks is required

Community Woodland Public Volunteering Day

Join us for the day to look after the trees at the community woodland through mulching and weeding. Plus other activities to learn about native woodlands. Open to all ages and abilities.
Sat 17 May, 10:00am – 3:00pm
Booking essential

F Activities marked with this symbol are free for members



Home Educated Learning Event for 7–11 year olds

Using the arboretum's magnificent surroundings, your children will have the opportunity to engage creatively with the natural setting.
Thu 01 May, Thu 03 Jul, 10:00am – 12:00pm
Price: £6 per child age 7–11, £4 for younger and older siblings

Woodland Webs

Discover how living things in woodlands are connected through discovery, crafts and play.
Tue 27 – Thu 29 May, 10:30am – 3:30pm

Meet the Machines

Climb in and discover how and why we use these machines to care for the arboretum.
Sat 14 Jun, 10:30am – 3:30pm

Roots of the Past

Join Marion Hill from The Green Pledge Project, Gloucestershire Council to discover Westonbirt's history through challenges and design.
Sat 19 Jul, 10:30am – 3:30pm

Fabulous Fibres

Find out about fibres made from trees and use the fabric and tree dyes to make crafts.
Tue 05 – Thu 07 Aug, 10:30am – 3:30pm

Arboretum Apprentice

Aimed at 11–14 year olds, these activity sessions invite you to step into a different role each day and try real tasks.
Tue 12 – Thu 14 Aug, 10:30am – 1:00pm
Booking essential



Lotions and Potions

Find out about the medicinal uses of trees before making your own potions to take home.
Tue 19 – Thu 21 Aug, 10:30am – 3:30pm

Woodland Wellbeing

Come for a wellbeing day with mindful activities, nature connection and storytelling with the fabulous Michael Loader.
Tue 26 – Thu 28 Aug, 10:30am – 3:30pm

Tots & Twigs Forest School

Forest School for Preschool aged children (2–4 year olds).
Term time, Mon, Thu & Fri, 10:15 – 11:45am & 12:30 – 2:00pm
Price: See website for term prices



What's on

Keep up to date on what's on via The Friend's eNews or on the Westonbirt website



Image credit: Dan Crowley

“It’s a privilege

Eyed against the backdrop of a misty afternoon in November, there is something ethereal and everlasting about Westonbirt: as if it has always been here and will always be here.

Yet the reality of the collection is that it thrives only because of the people that care for it, and none more so than Dan Crowley, the new Curator of Westonbirt. For many, the role of Curator would feel overwhelming: incorporating a wide remit to protect and manage what is already established, while making timely and future-focused decisions. It’s complicated further by the reality of dealing with tree life spans where the trees you plant now may not reach maturity until long after you are gone, and for which we must appreciate the vision of those that came before. Dan’s role must therefore ensure Westonbirt is here for the generations that come next, just as others have done for us.

Westonbirt is so much more than a slowly evolving collection. It also offers untapped potential according to Dan, with Dan’s role building on the legacy of past Curators such as his predecessor Mark Ballard. He’s clear he must continue to push the arboretum to the forefront of global collecting, maintain a world-leading tree collection, and fulfil Westonbirt’s role as a leading botanic garden, just to maintain parity. But, as if that wasn’t enough, Dan inherits the collection at a time of deep uncertainty. That of the Anthropocene. A time when climate change will have an unprecedented and somewhat unpredictable impact on the collection, giving Dan the unenviable task of predicting the future.

Dan explains “I was looking at historic photos of Westonbirt recently, and not all that long ago there were many more elms in the arboretum. With Dutch elm disease they are no longer there. Threats to trees are massively concerning: there are pests and diseases effectively on the doorstep,

ABOVE: Dan Crowley (left) with Douglas Justice (right), Associate Director at the University of British Columbia Botanical Garden, stand before the largest known *Acer amamiense* in the world, on Amami Oshima, Japan.

and we have to keep our eyes open, to keep ahead of them as best we can, and to be the guardians that the trees need us to be.”

“What I have inherited here is the scale of the challenge to tree species and the increasing need for succession in the landscape. Westonbirt has one of the best collections in the world, but there is more we can do. More we can build on. More of the conservation work that is befitting of The National Arboretum and a leading botanic collection,” he continues. “We need to be judicious about strategy going forward. The arboretum is facing global challenges, and we need to focus where we can best contribute and play to our strengths. Climate change in particular will shape the future of the collection, and we need to be clear on what and how we can best contribute.”

Dan is clear that this is also a period of significant opportunity, where the collection, and future plantings, can contribute to research and enhance conservation efforts. Dan highlights “Some of the species that we already grow will become ever more important in the context of global threats to trees. What’s more, our research can help to identify improved growing conditions, where we might optimise the future of tree species within the context of climate change. Some wild species are already at the very edges of their historic range, now growing in conditions that are sub-optimal, ultimately threatening their survival. Part of the value of the collection is offering the opportunity to learn, monitor, and research different species, and to offer insights into the potential for managing and maintaining wild populations.”

“

Westonbirt has one of the best collections in the world, but there is more we can do. More we can build on. More of the conservation work that is befitting of The National Arboretum and a leading botanic collection.



Image credit: Rosie Anderson

Despite just a handful of weeks in the role at the time of interview, it is clear that Dan is not advocating change for change’s sake but is recognising that there is a deep responsibility to ensure that the arboretum can withstand the challenges coming its way. He highlights “I have a deep history with this place. I have planted trees here that I am watching mature. This gives me a contextual understanding and appreciation of the history.”

“All of us would like to keep Westonbirt much the same; we have our favourite trees in the collection, and we enjoy the slow evolution and addition of new taxa” Dan muses. “At the same time, however, the trees are also facing a potentially intense threat, which is why we are working on succession planning for the collection, seeking understanding for which species might be most impacted, and looking at what specimens will be better suited elsewhere. The threats faced in the Anthropocene bring challenges unlike anything seen before in human history. The collection has never been as old as it is today, and it will be older again tomorrow.”

Dan continues “There is a huge heritage piece involved in what we do, looking back where we have come from and aligning it sympathetically to where we want to go. Certainly, there are new taxa that we want to grow, but we must move forward strategically in how we improve the collection. It falls to us to bring together the engagement work we are doing, the conservation, the education, and the research, in a way that is meaningful to Westonbirt and the global sector.”

INTERVIEW

On Dan's desk sits a well-thumbed copy of the Jackson Catalogue published in 1927 which offers the first recording of trees and shrubs at Westonbirt. In terms of historical records, this is as extensive as they come, and a good number of the individual trees recorded in it are still here. It shows the depth of Dan's commitment and respect to the legacy he has inherited. Unsurprisingly to those that know him, there are also three books on maples, which Dan describes as a "massive interest of mine", as well as his fascination with the "big old plane trees" that feature heavily in the Old Arboretum. It's here you will find Dan if he has a spare five minutes, exploring the winding ways of the Old Arboretum, any chance he gets.

Dan elaborates "There are lots of species we have got here at Westonbirt, and lots we haven't. There are several maples which have conservation and research significance which Dan is targeting, but this role is not the same as stamp collecting. It's not about having a complete set, but about making sure that everything is contributing within the wider context of Westonbirt. The maples link back to the history, but these are far from the end of what we do here. The goal is to always have Westonbirt as the best it can be. That means ensuring we have a resilient collection that we know more about, as well as making sure that when new people come, they know where they've come to, and they understand what they have experienced when they leave."

He continues "For a great many of the global tree community, Westonbirt is inspiring. There are already other arboretums that have based their footprint on Westonbirt, and there are individuals that want to base their own collections on ours too. Westonbirt is in the top tier of collections of significance. This is something that I take very seriously, but it is exciting and a privilege to push the arboretum forward."

“

The goal is to always have Westonbirt as the best it can be.

Dan will be a familiar face to most, thanks to his deep and longstanding connection with Westonbirt. He became Tree Conservation Manager in January 2023, a role funded by The Friends, but his career here spans far longer than two years. Dan started his Westonbirt life as a trainee arborist in 2009, then arborist in 2010, before becoming the arboretum's very first Dendrologist in 2013. A brief sojourn took him away from Westonbirt to study, undertaking a Master's in plant diversity at the University of Reading in 2018. He went on to join Botanic Gardens Conservation International from 2019 to 2023, consulting with Westonbirt to develop the conservation objectives, and spending much of his time hosted by the team. The pull of Westonbirt proved too strong to resist, and he returned full time in 2023, armed with plenty of new connections and knowledge at the arboretum's disposal. Dan describes it as "having seen every part of Westonbirt, as well as being able to see, experience, and bring back best practice from elsewhere in the world." What could be better than that?

In our closing questions, we asked Dan about his Westonbirt favourites. It's hard for him to choose, but he's clear he has a soft spot for spring, which brings a glorious variety of hues to Westonbirt while cradling the carpets of bluebells. He concludes "I love trees. I love nothing more than to plant a tree. To do that somewhere like here – at Westonbirt – with the significance of the place, the history of the place, the gravitas, is extraordinary."*

BELOW: Dan Crowley (left) with Rosie Anderson (right) measuring an ancient *Acer heldreichii* (Greek maple) in northwestern Greece.



Image credit: Rosie Anderson



Funded by
The Friends

Staff and volunteers for the Silk Wood Community Planting Project (SWCPP) have already achieved great things (see page 26) and now, thanks to the Julia Rausing Trust, work can continue apace.

At the end of 2024, we were delighted to announce that the Julia Rausing Trust has awarded The Friends £190,000 to help fund some of the activity over the next two years.

Silk Wood, which comprises 150 hectares of ancient semi-natural woodland, is a critical part of the arboretum's ecosystem. This funding partnership will not only allow SWCPP to restore five hectares of the habitat lost to Chalara ash die-back, but will also help facilitate new audience engagement in nature and the work at Westonbirt Arboretum, encouraging diversity and inclusivity. 9,000 trees will be planted over three years, incorporating a diverse range of species. It will also enable Silk Wood to contain new physical interpretation, delivering a series of both artist and educational workshops. It is anticipated that the project will lead to improvement of the woodland habitat, while enabling more people to actively connect with nature and heritage by identifying and removing barriers to engagement.

The Julia Rausing Trust is a prestigious charitable fund that gives away £100 million each year to UK charities and organisations. Relunched last year to honour the late philanthropist Julia Rausing, the funder does not accept unsolicited applications, and instead invites organisations that align with the aims of the programme, to apply.

Emma Griffiths, CEO, The Friends says "We are over the moon and beyond grateful to The Julia Rausing Trust for partnering with us and offering this significant award.

The SWCPP is all about inclusion and community; it would be easy to simply bring in contractors to 'put things right,' but instead the heart of SWCPP focusses on young people, those from disadvantaged backgrounds, and those with physical and neurodiverse conditions, across a broad range of ethnicities. This means that the arboretum's beautiful newly restored woodland is designed, planted, managed, monitored and cared for, now and in the future, by Westonbirt Arboretum teams, community groups, schools and other volunteers. It will help more than 2,000 people make personal connections with nature, building skills and creating treasured memories."

“

9,000 trees will be planted over two years, incorporating a diverse range of species.

Andrew Smith, Director of Westonbirt Arboretum says "I'm delighted with the success of the first year of the Silk Wood Community Planting project. We've already planted 3,800 trees, so far restoring 6 acres of ancient woodland that had been devastated by ash dieback. Nearly 1,000 people from community and specialist groups have been involved in the planting, providing new opportunities for those people to access nature and forging partnerships for the future. This wouldn't have been possible without the support of The Friends charity and their success in raising the necessary funds for us to be able to embark on such an ambitious project. I am extremely grateful for the grant from The Julia Rausing Trust, which will allow us to see the current project through to conclusion in 2026."*



Global initiatives

Image credit: Rosie Anderson

Did you know, 40% of the UK's native tree species are threatened, and that the at-risk species all fall into the *Sorbus* genus? That's according to the 2021 State of the World's Trees report, published by the Botanic Gardens Conservation International (BGCI), which highlights the threat to the UK's whitebeams, rowans, and service trees.

Conserving threatened tree species is a core part of Westonbirt's vision to be a world leader in trees; work that has led the team across the globe. The *Sorbus* genus is just one focus, which is why Westonbirt Arboretum has partnered with BGCI to launch a collaborative initiative – the Global Conservation Consortium for Whitebeams, Rowans, and Service Trees.

Sorbus is a group of trees that belongs to the rose family (*Rosaceae*) but their complex genetic diversity means that many are a far cry from the common garden rose. Historically, all species were considered within the pear genus, *Pyrus*, but modern interpretations now split the group into several different genera. According to the Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland, and as assessed for the Red List of Threatened Species, 42 *Sorbus* species are native to the UK, of which 33 are also endemic, meaning they are not found in any other country. Individual species are often geographically restricted, and 16 of them comprise fewer than 50 mature individuals. Several sites with endemic taxa are geographically close to Westonbirt, in the Avon and Cheddar Gorges for example, as well as the Wye Valley.



WORDS THIS ARTICLE HAS BEEN ADAPTED FROM AN ARTICLE SUPPLIED BY ROSIE ANDERSON, WESTONBIRT ARBORETUM DENDROLOGIST

“**Conserving the world's threatened tree species is a core part of Westonbirt's vision.**”

Whitebeams, rowans and service trees hold great ecological and cultural significance.

They are an important food source for birds, supporting a wide array of wildlife.

They are valued for their beautiful foliage and fruits.

Rowan is strongly associated with mysticism; the Celts named it 'fid na ndruid', the wizards' tree, for its ability to protect against evil.

Historically the fruits of the wild service tree were used in the production of alcoholic drinks.



To support conservation projects like these please make a donation to The Friends

Threats to these species are numerous and often site-specific. They include rockfalls, overgrazing, mismanagement, and pests and diseases, all exacerbated by a changing climate. Since the majority are confined to small areas, they are particularly vulnerable; isolated events could potentially lead to the loss of these small populations.

To address the conservation needs of these trees, in September 2024, Westonbirt Arboretum was a lead for the launch of the Global Conservation Consortium for Whitebeams, Rowans, and Service Trees. This in turn forms part of BGCI's wider Global Conservation Consortia (GCC) initiative. Collectively, the GCC aims to 'mobilise a coordinated network of institutions and experts to collaboratively develop and implement comprehensive conservation strategies for priority threatened plant groups'.



To mark the launch of this GCC, Westonbirt hosted an event bringing together specialists from conservation organisations across the UK, who share the commitment to protecting these trees. The event provided an opportunity to share the aims of the consortium, to discuss conservation priorities within the group, along with the next steps for their conservation.

The launch of the consortium represents the beginning of a new phase of conservation for whitebeams, rowans, and service trees. Collaboration is at the heart of this work; with the collaborative partners, Westonbirt aims to build on the previous and existing work of the group and coordinate future efforts, focusing initially on threatened UK and Irish species, before expanding into other parts of the group's range in the Northern Hemisphere.

“We are very grateful to the Friends of Westonbirt Arboretum who are supporting this work and we are looking forward to sharing updates on our progress in the coming years”.

Westonbirt Arboretum: a botanical collection of global importance, made possible by Victorian plant hunting and modern-day seed collecting. Intrinsic to its vital role in ex situ conservation, seed collecting offers species security by helping to establish a genetically diverse range of specimens, safeguarding the future of populations in the wild.

Famed for its collection of Japanese acers, you'd be forgiven for assuming all the maples on site at Westonbirt are of eastern origin, but recent *Acer* seed collecting has been happening much closer to home.

Aiming to enhance the National Collection of maple species, Curator Dan Crowley (then Tree Conservation Manager) and Dendrologist Rosie Anderson embarked on a 2024 maple odyssey to Greece, spending nine days exploring an astonishing 3,100km in search of precious maple seeds.

Famed for its beaches and sparkling azure water, it's startlingly easy to overlook Greece's impressive *Acer* diversity. Yet the rocky mountainsides and drizzly forests are home to nine species of *Acer*, including the field maple (*A. campestre*), Norway maple (*A. platanoides*) and sycamore (*A. pseudoplatanus*) familiar to us in the UK. Furthering the research, conservation, and education agenda of the arboretum, sourcing high quality seeds in the wild is crucial.

Many of Greece's maple species are under-represented in gardens, particularly by plants of known wild origin. Dan and Rosie's expedition set out with the goal of collecting from and recording populations of all nine Greek maple species to increase their genetic representation here at Westonbirt.

“

Famed for its beaches and sparkling azure water, it's startlingly easy to overlook Greece's impressive *Acer* diversity.

Maple Odyssey

Despite high hopes for the trip, seed collecting conditions were often challenging, with many of the trip's target taxa (species and subspecies) suffering from the effects of sustained drought. Dan and Rosie's perseverance paid off though, sourcing seed samples from eight of the nine target taxa, across 18 different collecting sites.

Since then, the seeds have been transported to the UK, with samples sent to Forest Research at the Northern Research Station in Roslin, to be x-rayed for pests and viability. The seeds are now in the care of the brilliant Westonbirt Propagation Team who are sowing them this spring, to be planted out in the collection within the next few years. Duplicate seed samples have also been banked in Greece, with plans for ex situ plantings at a Greek Forest Research Institute site.

Rosie observes "Finding Queen Amalia's maple (*Acer hyrcanum* subsp. *reginae-amaliae*) on Mt. Parnon and Mt. Taygetos in the Peloponnes was particularly special. This delicate, shrub-like maple has the smallest leaves of all *Acer* and evolved to grow in picturesque and exposed rocky clearings at high elevations. Unfortunately, we saw evidence of extensive grazing by herds of goats and of the 25 or so trees we found, only three had seed which had survived.

"Visiting the beautiful Prespa National Park, which traverses the borders of Albania and North Macedonia was also memorable. Here we had the misfortune of breaking down but were fortunate to be rescued by a forestry professor, who proceeded to take us to a spectacular old Heldreich's maple (*Acer heldreichii*) in the cold and misty mountains.

Perhaps our most divine collections were field maple and sycamore from Mt. Olympus, home of the Greek Gods. Nearby, we were also able to see horse chestnut (*Aesculus hippocastanum*) in its natural habitat, a far cry from the parks and gardens where it is often found in the UK."

Dan highlights "In the case of Queen Amalia's maple, which is rare in the wild and in cultivation, monitoring the trees we grow will help us to understand how to maintain ex situ back up collections within the UK. Material from some of the most southerly populations of field and Norway maple, and sycamore, may also prove valuable for researchers looking to see how they respond to future climatic changes. In addition, observation of the trees in their natural habitats will help inform updated conservation assessments in the future."

WORDS THIS ARTICLE HAS BEEN ADAPTED FROM A BLOG WRITTEN BY ROSIE ANDERSON, FOR THE FRIENDS' WEBSITE



Image credit: Rosie Anderson

Tree conservation efforts are made possible thanks to The Friends. Greece-based Dr. Fotios Xystrakis proved invaluable to the trip, not only as a driver, facilitator and excellent translator, but importantly thanks to his encyclopaedic knowledge of Greek forest ecology. Thanks also go to the researchers who kindly shared their field data, and the in-country partners who made the trip possible, including the hosts the Greek Forest Research Institute. It is hoped that the seeds will germinate well despite the complications of drought, allowing new trees to be planted at Westonbirt, with other saplings offered to other collections. 🌱

Funded by
The Friends

Image credit: Rosie Anderson



Beating the odds



Funded by The Friends

In what is colloquially known in conservation as a 'beat-up survey', the inspection results from the Silk Wood Community Planting Project (SWCPP) highlight a 97% survival rate of the saplings planted in 2023/24. The industry standard is 85%, so the efforts of the arboretum team and volunteers have beaten the odds by a whopping 12%.

This means, of the 2,150 trees that were planted eighteen months ago, just 67 were found to have failed, testament to the care that was taken during planting, as well as the time taken to look after them by the visiting community groups and schools.

Work continues on the SWCPP, which takes a battalion of volunteers to keep it thriving. ✨

Last summer alone, 397 volunteers spent 18 days:

Weeding around

2,150

saplings to reduce their competition from dominant vegetation such as brambles and help ensure their survival.

Giving

21,438

hours to the project.

Moving

1,053

wheelbarrow loads of mulch amounting to 34.8 tonnes.

What's next?

Work continues to reach the goal of 9,000 trees planted, with extra thanks to The Julia Rausing Trust for their grant (see page 21).



An arboretum full of life

OUR SEASONAL HIGHLIGHTS THIS SPRING & SUMMER

While many will cite autumn as the best time to visit the arboretum, spring is an unsung hero of the botanical calendar here.

The acers, so famed for their autumn leaf peeping appeal, bring just as broad a range of hues in the spring, while a carpet of bluebells and abundance of magnolias add even more delight. Blossoms and blooms bewitch around every corner, and the thrill of a new season adds oomph to the already playful wildlife. In summer, The Downs come alive with native grassland wildflowers, hazy days offer chances to play and explore, and the arboretum sings with birdsong.

This new-look map signposts many of the seasonal highlights, so take it with you when you visit. We've also added some hidden gems you may not have found before.

Don't forget, the Today Board and Window on Westonbirt Map outside the Welcome Building offer even more seasonal insights. Plus, if you're looking for a specific tree, the Arboretum Explorer is your friend. ✨

Please turn over for our map









Arboretum Explorer

Visit this digital map of the arboretum to discover more insights about the collection

What to see & do

Make the most of spring and summer at the arboretum, including plenty to do with the kids!

Play at Westonbirt

-  Stick Man trail
-  Holford Hollow & Troll Bridge
-  Branch Out
-  Wild bird viewing area
-  Gruffalo sculptures
-  Play spaces. Look out for the clock, felled giant, the tipi town, the tyre tunnel and many more!



Bird Hide
A hidden gem that's often overlooked.



Stick Man Trail

Join Stick Man on a forest adventure! Take part in lots of fun stick-based activities, discover tree-mendous facts and learn about forest wildlife along the way.



Our Shop

Enjoy 10% off purchases of £10 or more with your membership. See more on page 46.

Spring

Melliodendron xylocarpum
Chinese parasol storax

Off the beaten track in Sand Earth, this small tree from southern China is well worth a visit in mid April. A relatively new introduction to UK gardens, the Chinese parasol storax is still rare in cultivation but its captivating, pink, parasol-shaped flowers have quickly cemented its place as a favourite here.



Illicium simonsii
Simons anise tree

The star-like, cream flowers of Simons anise tree emerge in March or early April, persisting throughout spring. A relative of the star anise (*Illicium verum*), its intricate flowers and crushed leaves are pleasantly aromatic. Later it produces similarly star-shaped woody seed pods, however unlike its close counterpart, all parts of this species are poisonous!



Acer japonicum
Fullmoon maple

While the fullmoon maple is renowned for its vibrant autumn colours, it also brings warmth to the cooler days of spring with its unfurling, orange-tinged leaves, that later transform to lush green. Though often celebrated for its foliage, keep an eye out for the clusters of vivid scarlet flowers that open in April and May.



Magnolia kobus
Kobushi magnolia

One of our most graceful magnolia blooms are those of the kobushi magnolia, with creamy-white flowers appearing in late March to early April. This extremely hardy tree really packs a punch – ‘kobushi’ is the Japanese word for ‘fist’, possibly named for the shape of the opening flower buds.



Summer

Aesculus indica
Indian horse chestnut

At the height of summer, the Indian horse chestnut is swathed in extravagant panicles of white blooms with raspberry and yellow blotches. Unlike its more recognizable European counterpart, *Aesculus hippocastanum*, which flowers in spring, this Himalayan native flowers later and has graceful foliage that is bronze-tinged when new.



Eucryphia × nymansensis ‘Nymansay’
Nyman’s hybrid eucryphia

Named for Nymans, a garden in Sussex where it arose, this hybrid between the Chilean species *E. cordifolia* and *E. glutinosa* is a popular late summer spectacle. Its glossy, dark green leaves provide an attractive backdrop for the cup-shaped, white flowers that often flower so profusely that the branches sag under their weight. In Chile, *Eucryphia* honey is valued for its perfumed flavour.



Catalpa bignonioides ‘Aurea’
Golden Indian bean tree

Catalpas are usually noted for their showy flowers in summer, but golden Indian bean tree is, unsurprisingly, most noted for the colour of its leaves. Like the typical form of the species, it is late to leaf out – often with bare branches well into June, when its yellow leaves emerge. July is the time to come and admire its large trumpet-shaped blooms, along Main Drive in the Old Arboretum.



Arboretum Explorer

The arboretum’s digital map with species insight.

forest live

WESTONBIRT ARBORETUM

Gloucestershire

SNOW PATROL

Tuesday 17 June

STING

Wednesday 18 June

ELBOW

with special guest **The Coral**
Thursday 19 June

PAUL HEATON

with special guest singer **Rianne Downey**
Friday 20 June

MCFLY

Saturday 21 June

THE SCRIPT

with special guest **Tom Walker**
Sunday 22 June

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Members of The Friends get free parking (usually £10)



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Pick up a trail pack

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Stick Man © 2008 & TM Julia Donaldson & Axel Scheffler.

Kids Go Free!

Down with screen time, up with green time



“Beautiful to walk around the arboretum, great for the mind, body & soul – while the kids can roam free.”

Red Kite Days Oxfordshire

There is extensive research which supports what our innate understanding and experience tells us: children that spend more time outside have better mental health as adults.

However, the rates of outdoor play have declined dramatically in just a few generations, representing a huge change to the nature of childhood experiences: just 27% of children said they regularly play outside their homes, compared to 71% of the baby boomer generation.

According to Ofcom research, by the age of eight, a child will typically spend two hours and 45 minutes online per day. By age 11, that figure will have risen to over four hours – all while they are still in primary school.

The short term benefits lead to long term results:

- 1. Off path exploration** – fosters independence and self-reliance
- 2. Physical exercise** – boosts energy, strength, and healthy habits
- 3. Fresh air** – alleviates stress and encourages emotional regulation
- 4. Time in tranquil spaces** – enhances emotional intelligence and life satisfaction
- 5. Pushing limits** – develops risk assessment and healthy self-esteem
- 6. Play equipment** – develops spatial awareness, balance, and co-ordination
- 7. Making friends** – strengthens social skills, conflict resolution, and cooperation
- 8. Imaginative play** – cultivating creativity and problem-solving skills
- 9. Connection with wildlife and nature** – appreciation of the great outdoors
- 10. Embracing the elements** – builds resilience and adaptability

Advice for parents: put the kids in charge

Give kids more control by letting them choose the route, sending them off ahead to scout for interesting spots, or allowing them to curate activities.

Westonbirt: Fresh air, freedom, and free-range play

Alongside year-round entry, members can bring up to four children or grandchildren (age 18 and under) completely free.

With amazing natural play areas, engaging family trails, and fascinating discovery days too (all included for free with membership), children can explore nature’s elements affordably, freely, and safely. ✨



Family Fun

Do you have what it takes to be a nature detective? The arboretum is filled with hidden secrets, mysterious creatures, and camouflaged clues. Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to uncover them all...

Ready? Let's go!

MISSION 1: Invent your secret identity

First, you will need to keep your identity top secret. Start by using our code name generator to create your alias.

Next, it's time to blend into the forest – find sticks, leaves, grass, and whatever else you can find to craft your perfect camouflage.

Finally, use your imagination and the natural materials at your disposal to create your ultimate spy gadget! Is it a camera disguised as a pinecone? A stick communicator? A secret decoder leaf? The possibilities are endless!

Now you're thinking like a spy, you're ready to move onto the next mission.



MISSION 2: Find something hiding in plain sight

Forest creatures rely on their homes being safe and undisturbed, which is why they've become masters of disguise. Look carefully at the bark of trees, the forest floor, and up in the treetops – can you spot any animals or insects trying to hide?

Super spy top tip: move slowly to get a closer look without disturbing the animals. You might even be able to uncover clues of animal activity including bird nests and paw prints. P.S. check out the Bird Hide (see the map on page 28) – it's like HQ for feathered friends! From this hidden spot, you can see tonnes of birds up close.



MISSION 3: Operation stealthy snaps

Agent, we have a problem! The forest's surveillance system has failed and it's up to you to gather vital intel. Using a phone camera, take pictures of the following targets:

- Something that flies
- Something that crawls
- A hidden path
- An unusual plant
- A tall tree
- Something soft
- Something blue
- Interesting tree bark
- Your own reflection
- Something close up

Congratulations! You've completed your missions and uncovered some amazing secrets of the forest. Keep your spy skills sharp and visit the arboretum often to discover even more hidden wonders!

Now, it's up to you to protect the forest.

CODE NAME GENERATOR

Use the cipher below to create your new secret agent code name.

Your new name should be 'secret agent' + the first letter of your first name + your birth month.

- | | |
|---------------|--------------------|
| A – Shadow | January – Ember |
| B – Midnight | February – Mole |
| C – Red | March – Serpent |
| D – Frozen | April – Panther |
| E – Secret | May – Wolf |
| F – Thunder | June – Hunter |
| G – Lightning | July – X |
| H – Invisible | August – Rebel |
| I – Swift | September – Rocket |
| J – Storm | October – Seven |
| K – Rogue | November – Falcon |
| L – Ace | December – Hacker |
| M – Golden | |
| N – Creeping | |
| O – Ocean | |
| P – Echo | |
| Q – Lucky | |
| R – Double-Oh | |
| S – Quick | |
| T – Stealth | |
| U – Winter | |
| V – Sonic | |
| W – Leaping | |
| X – Moon | |
| Y – Sneaking | |
| Z – Phantom | |



Wild Ideas

Nature journaling for families

How does it work?

1 What you'll need

While you don't really need anything more than pen and paper to get started, there's a few supplies that might help spur your imagination:

- A fresh notebook/sketchbook
- Coloured pencils/pens
- Paints and brushes
- Glue
- A blanket to sit comfortably
- Binoculars
- A water bottle and some snacks.

Journaling and getting into nature are two of the most powerful outlets for emotion, so why not combine the two?

It's practically free, really fun, and easy to do! What's more, it's a great way to deepen your tweenager's connection to nature. Little kids will often enjoy their own variation too.

Everyone experiences their surroundings in a unique way, and you can learn a lot about yourself, or your kids or grandkids, simply by recording your thoughts when in nature. It's totally up to you what you include and can evolve with your interests. The key to deep relaxation and better connection with nature is focus. Often referred to as mindfulness, it's about ensuring your mind and your body are present, together. ✨

2 What to document

A blank page can be daunting. This is when you should let the environment and your natural instincts take over. If you're alone, sit and observe whatever your eye is drawn to the most.

The hues in the sky? The shape of the trail? Or the symphony of the dawn chorus? Whatever inspiration you decide to study, take the time to engage with your senses and get curious about details you'd normally take for granted.

If you're out with the whole family, why not select a theme. It could be a category like moss, a particular colour, or even a shape, sound, or smell. Everyone can enjoy the hunt.

Helpful hints

Let go of expectations

Don't focus on 'wasting pages' or what other people might think, otherwise you're less likely to keep up with your nature journal. Try to capture the essence of a scene rather than perfectly replicating what you see. Remember, it doesn't have to be perfectly curated or Pinterest-worthy, it just has to be yours.

How to collaborate with Mother Nature

Introduce organic textures by pressing flowers or leaves between the pages, use crayon rubbings to record tree bark, or smush berries between the pages. Although this activity might be most comfortable on a lovely sunny day, don't be afraid of getting out into the elements! You could let the rainwater blend your paint colours or let the wind scatter seeds across your page. By working with the environment, you invite spontaneity and creativity into your journal.

When it becomes a habit

Over time, a journal will become a reflection of your personal journey, capturing not just what's been seen, but what was felt in those moments. It's an opportunity for introspection and growth, offering a deeper connection between self and the world around.

3 How to capture nature

Now you've decided what you want to document, it's time to bring it to life on the page.

Nature journaling is an opportunity to express yourself, so trust your instincts and let your unique style shine through. You don't have to stick to one medium or style either – try a combination of methods on a single page, blending sketches with words, or using paint alongside pressed leaves and flowers.





Follow your nose...

...from the stinky to the sublime!



Image credit: Johnny Hathaway



Image credit: Alison Whaley

For our four-legged friends, smell is the crucial sense that allows them to gather information about their environment.

Sniffing triggers the release of endorphins in dogs and can reduce their overall stress levels.

Get your canine friend's snout a-snuffing with our pick of the smelliest trees around Westonbirt Arboretum, from the stinky to the sublime...

The smelliest trees

The Tree of Heaven

(*Ailanthus altissima*) may sound divine but the leaves of male trees smell like musty socks. This tree is heaven-sent for the sock-stealing members of our canine crew!

Ginkgo

(*Ginkgo biloba*) or the maidenhair tree, is probably the most infamous of smelly trees. Luckily you can usually only smell the vomit/dog excrement scent in the winter, so spring is the perfect time to appreciate the yellow leaves of this beauty.

White spruce

(*Picea glauca*) is known as the 'skunk spruce' due to the smell it emits when its needles are crushed.

The box tree

(*Buxus sempervirens*) is a popular choice for many home gardens but the smell of cat urine may put off a few people.

Common hawthorn

(*Crataegus monogyna*) is described as having a sweet, spicy, almond-like scent, but most people dislike the smell instead describing it as sickly sweet, pungent, or sometimes even fishy. It's a distinctive scent and you'll know it as soon as you pass by.

Harlequin Glorybower

(*Clerodendrum trichotomum*) has leaves that pleasingly smell like peanut butter, but its clustered white flowers are another story. Despite smelling sweet, the scent is pungent and described as 'cloying' and 'knock out strong'.

Did you know?



Dogs smell separately with each nostril

This is a phenomenon known as 'sniffing lateralisation'. Dogs sniff with their right nostril first, and for familiar and fun scents, they switch to their left nostril. For exciting scents, they stay with the right nostril. This is to do with how their neural pathways process and categorise information!

1000 times stronger than humans!

Dogs have more than 100 million sensory receptor sites in their nasal cavity compared to 6 million in the average human. The area in their brain dedicated to analysing smells is 40 times larger than in the human brain, with some experts estimating that dogs can smell between 1,000 and 10,000 times better than people.

The loveliest trees



The incense cedar

(*Calocedrus decurrens*), named for the odour it emits when leaves are bruised, is not only delicious smelling, but also rather pretty to look at. Look out for twisty branches curling their way to the sky.

The eastern hemlock tree

In spring, we are all desperate for some freshness and light as a contrast to the gloominess of winter. The eastern hemlock tree (*Tsuga canadensis*) may be the perfect tonic for you with its zesty, lemony smell.

The candyfloss tree

(*Cercidiphyllum japonicum*) is so known because of its sweet smell paired with pretty autumnal foliage.

Paperbark birch

The bookworms among you will like the paperbark birch (*Betula papyrifera*) with its earthy papery smell, much like stepping into the pages of your favourite novel!

American witch hazel

Our personal favourite is the American witch hazel (*Hamamelis virginiana*) which is said to smell like sunshine, something which we all could do with more of after winter!



Search 'the Arboretum Explorer' to find the precise locations of all of these trees dotted around the arboretum.

Don't forget to call into the shop where you can find a selection of dog treats and accessories to enhance your visit!

Luckily for dogs, humidity caused by light rain has been found to be an important factor in improving olfactory processing so if you are visited by a few April showers on your trip to Westonbirt, it will actually enhance the experience for your furry friend! 🌿



It's the sound of the underground

WORDS THIS ARTICLE HAS BEEN ADAPTED FROM A BLOG WRITTEN BY SAM ROBERTS, FOR THE FRIENDS' WEBSITE

No, Girls Aloud aren't one of this year's Forest Live acts. This story is far more unusual!

We're talking eco-acoustics. Or more specifically, the sounds of the soil here at Westonbirt Arboretum.

Westonbirt has welcomed member of The Friends, Robbie Sidhu, Masters student from the University of the West of England, to support his study of eco-acoustics. Measuring the Silk Wood community woodland, Robbie has used a sound recorder, headphones, equaliser, and contact microphones attached to two spatulas that push into the ground, to help record the sounds of the soil we have here. It's not the most high-tech equipment, but it works!

Huh? What is eco-acoustics?

Eco-acoustics, or acoustic ecology, is the study of sound in the environment – including human generated noise (anthrophony), sounds generated by nature (biophony), or even sounds of the earth such as wind, waves, and geological movements (geophony). It's a relatively new field of study, and currently has applications in monitoring bat species, tracking whale vocalisation, judging the health of the coral reef, and understanding the effect that naturally occurring high frequency noises have on our wellbeing. You may use the bird-song ID app Merlin – this uses sounds and algorithms to identify what birds are singing nearby – and is a great example of how we can use sound to reveal what is nearby without being able to see it.

But soil?

One place we have little knowledge of is the amazing world beneath our feet – fungi, worms and invertebrates, moles, and billions of microbes all make a home in our soil, and this is where the next generation of acoustic ecologists are pointing their microphones. Studies have revealed that soils are incredibly noisy places, and much has been insinuated about these noises being the sound of the vast ecosystem that resides in it.

Robbie explains “There's been a lot of press recently about initial findings of soil acoustics, but we're still not sure if the sounds we're hearing are of what lives there”. Robbie's work starts with sterilised soil, working in sound-proof chambers to record the noise of the soil itself. He can then test how different soil types and structures sound, and how they are affected by the addition of water for example. The purpose is to allow scientists to split baseline soil sounds from natural recordings, determining what sounds come from the soil itself, and what from the ecosystems that thrive there.

It's early days, but the hope is that Robbie's recordings will contribute to future UK research. This could be algorithms that know the difference between earthworm species, can tell you what fungi are present and how they're connected, or can tell you the health of the soil by simply listening to it. It has potential applications in agricultural productivity, supporting soil restoration, or offering understanding of the impact of fungal species in woodland planting survival rates.

“

What's surprised me the most is how far sounds from vegetation permeate the soil – you can hear someone tapping on the trunk of a tree as well as the branches moving in the wind.



Speaking of his initial research, Robbie says “What's surprised me the most is how far sounds from vegetation permeate the soil – you can hear someone tapping on the trunk of a tree as well as the branches moving in the wind.”

One habitat Westonbirt was keen to test was at the Silk Wood Community Planting Project. Heading into the sea of saplings with his equipment, Robbie pushed the metal spatulas into the ground. Immediately, the soil was transformed into a world of chirps, clicks, swishes and taps – it's incredibly noisy under there!

The team ended up testing a few different locations – one of which was unplanted and still quite bare of ground vegetation – which was rather quiet.

Then a fresh molehill where imaginations ran wild with the sound of scratching. Right next to the base of a mature oak, you could indeed hear the branches swaying, but also a gushing sound of what could be water being transported from the earth, up into the roots and

throughout the tree's capillaries – bringing life to the fresh spring leaves. An interesting spot was directly near an established badger sett – knocking and scratching sounds, and what sounded like thudding against the microphone.

The noisiest spot was a yet-to-be-replanted site where grass and brambles dominate. Robbie's assessment was that the sound comes from the many blades of grass being blown in the wind and transferring that noise through their stems and roots into the ground. ✨

Image credits: Robbie Sidhu



Listen for yourself here!



WORDS ROSS MARTIN, WILDLIFE AND CONSERVATION RANGER



Seeking and searching

Based on their preference for old coppice woodland, hedgerows, and the new woodland growth that comes after active woodland management, it's no surprise that Westonbirt Arboretum could be the perfect home for the hazel dormouse.

These elusive creatures are under threat and now classed as both a vulnerable species and a European Protected Species, with studies in 2023 suggesting that dormice may now need reclassifying as 'endangered'. That's why Westonbirt's Wildlife and Conservation Ranger, Ross Martin, has recently undertaken a dormice survey here at the arboretum, with further volunteer-led surveys planned this summer.

Ross explains "Ever since I started working at Westonbirt I have noticed the wonderful, rich and diverse habitats spread across the arboretum, supporting an array of fantastic wildlife. This made me wonder if we were privileged to have hazel dormice, one of the UK's most charismatic and distinctive native mammals?"

He continues "Hazel dormice were relatively common and widespread, found frequently in winter during hedgerow and woodland management operations. Unfortunately, the hazel dormouse has become extinct in several counties and is now seldom encountered, found living mainly in southern and western counties. It would be very worrying to lose the dormouse because they act as an 'umbrella' species. Where dormice flourish so do a host of other species inhabiting similar habitats. For example, the nightingale also needs scrub and coppiced woodland habitats."

Last summer, Ross undertook the 'presence or absence' survey for these elusive nocturnal mammals. The dormouse has extremely complex ecological requirements, including a diverse range of arboreal plants, trees and shrubs. They need a well-developed understory which is essential to their wellbeing, such as honeysuckle, bramble, oak, sycamore, and hazel. Ross opted for two different survey techniques, first using footprint tunnels, and second using nest tubes.



Unfortunately, the hazel dormouse has become extinct in several counties and is now seldom encountered, found living mainly in southern and western counties.

With the help of the Coppice Team at Westonbirt and a local ecologist, work started on installing the tunnels and tubes in the hazel coppice coupes* and semi-ancient natural woodlands. The tunnels and tubes were deployed in lines of 10, approximately 15 to 20 metres apart, to give the team the best chance of detecting dormice.

*A coupe [pronounced coop and sometimes spelled as coups] comes from the French 'couper' meaning to cut on rotation. It refers to growing and then harvesting the wood in sections.



The footprint tunnels use a natural 'ink' solution of charcoal and olive oil to capture small mammal tracks and offer insights into what is living there. These were left for a couple of weeks for any mammals to get used to them before being 'inked' at the start of August. Nest tubes on the other hand are installed to offer a credible alternative to natural nests, offering a dormouse a safe place to sleep during the day. These nests can be quickly checked for either a sleeping dormouse, or evidence that a dormouse has used it, such as droppings for example.

The tunnels and tubes were then checked, footprint cards replaced and re-inked every two weeks until the start of November. It rained frequently over this period which made the cards hard to read and also attracted plenty of slugs and snails that developed a taste for them. Unfortunately, no evidence of dormice was found in any of the four areas which were surveyed last year. Plenty of cards revealed wood mouse footprints, but sadly no dormouse with its distinct footprint.

The plan this summer is to carry out another presence or absence survey in four new areas which would support the dormouse requirements. Ross explains "I hope to recruit a volunteer dormouse survey group to carry out most of the survey work and to help us find if we have a dormice population. This process could take several years if we are to check all the diverse habitat that we have at Westonbirt. If we are fortunate enough to have hazel dormice at Westonbirt then a long-term program would begin using nest boxes to monitor age, sex and population numbers. We would also look to manage and improve the woodland to ensure the dormice have the best possible habitat they would need for future generations." 🌿

Under threat



Pollinating insects are vital to the health of our woodlands, but urbanisation, agriculture and climate change have put many species under threat.

Both the Butterfly Conservation Trust and Bumblebee Conservation Trust have declared national emergencies after startlingly low numbers have been reported in 2024. In fact, for both genera, this was the worst year since records began. Although the exact figures vary, that extends to all different kinds of bees, butterflies, and moths too.

Not only does this put staple fruits and vegetable supplies at risk, threatening food security and affordability in the future, it also endangers other animals that depend on the ecosystems they support.



Why is this happening?

The biggest threats to pollinators are: lack of habitat, lack of food, and exposure to pesticides. Another huge challenge is that climate change, which has resulted in less consistent seasonal changes, has left natural rhythms out of sync. Native plants and trees are blooming later or earlier than normal, leaving bees to wake up before enough pollen is present, and go into hibernation before it's finished. This is detrimental to their lifecycles.

Last year, consistent bad weather in spring led to further catastrophe; heavy rain and lingering storms washed away eggs, larvae, adult individuals, and mature nests, as well as nectar which they critically need to survive.

Pollinators at Westonbirt

With swathes of flowering shrubs, exotic trees that bloom in adverse conditions, and sunny south-facing meadows, Westonbirt boasts natural features and conscientiously managed land which make it a rich oasis for pollinators. By providing a variety of stable habitats which pollinators depend upon, The National Arboretum is a crucial landscape that helps maintain healthy pollinator communities. Despite this, volunteers at Westonbirt have reported the same downward trend, highlighting the severity of the crisis, even in well-maintained and protected environments.

Bumblebees: Last spring, plenty of queen bees were spotted, but many didn't have enough food present to establish their nests. Consequently, they couldn't lay or incubate their eggs, which is crucial for the survival of their colonies. Most common species were badly affected, such as the red-tail population which plummeted by a staggering 74% compared to previous years.

Butterflies: With the exception of 2024, Westonbirt had recorded a general upwards trend in many butterfly species in the area. This was contrary to the national averages, which showed mostly decline. This data reveals vulnerabilities to butterfly populations, even in their most stable strongholds.

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With swathes of flowering shrubs, exotic trees that bloom in adverse conditions, and sunny south-facing meadows, Westonbirt boasts natural features and conscientiously managed land which make it a rich oasis for pollinators.

What are we doing about it?

At Westonbirt, volunteers are working alongside site management teams to further improve their environments, to give this year's young queen bees and caterpillars the best chance of survival.

How do we know?

Volunteers on site have carefully selected routes, known as transects, which they walk several times a month. By counting the species they monitor, they maintain detailed records of its presence in the area. People from across the country participate in these walks, with their reports contributing to the National Biodiversity Atlas, helping to paint a picture of the health and distribution of species nationwide. You can read more about playing your part, by taking part in the Bioblitz on page 16.



Image credit: Dave Hughes

Join the Bioblitz

On 26 & 27 April, members can get stuck into the “Bioblitz” (see page 16 for event details), embracing citizen science to help identify and count the species we have here at Westonbirt Arboretum.

At the last Bioblitz in 2017, pollinator species were abundant, with participants and volunteers identifying several unique and rare species:

- The four spotted footman moth (*Lithosia quadra*) was found on site, despite few previous Gloucestershire recordings. Only the females have the spots which give the species its name. This species has since established itself at the arboretum!
- Spotting the clouded yellow butterfly (*Colias croceus*) was a Westonbirt first, and early in the year for local sightings. This butterfly migrates to the UK each year from Southern Europe, being usually unable to survive our winters.
- Despite historic abundance in Gloucestershire, the garden tiger moth (*Arctia caja*) had already seen a 90% fall in population over the previous 30 years. This species is now protected in the UK under the Biodiversity Action Plan.
- The Downland Villa Bee-fly (*Villa cingulata*) was previously believed to be extinct, but had been sighted a handful of times by 2017.

Since the Bioblitz, Westonbirt has also had its first sighting of the Clifden nonpareil or ‘blue underwing’ (*Catocala fraxini*) at the Propagation Unit. This year's Bioblitz is hoping to record more sightings of some of these rare species, as well as adding some new champions to the list. ✨



1



2

Conservation at home

If all of the gardens in England were amalgamated, the land surface area would be 459% larger than the National Nature Reserves combined.

While Westonbirt Arboretum offers vital habitat, there is so much that can and needs to be done in gardens. Populations can quickly recover with the right support and conditions, so why not pick up some wildlife-boosting favourites – all available at the Westonbirt Shop – to help nature thrive? 🌿



3



4



5

1 Bird house 2 Apple feeder green 3 RHS Birdwatching journal 4 Floreana insect house 5 Peanut butter for birds

Image credit: Paul Box

the friends
of Westonbirt
Arboretum

A powerful gift

Since 2019, gifts in Wills have added an incredible £140,000 to The Friends' fundraising efforts, helping us do more for the arboretum.

That's the equivalent of* five shuttle buses, or the next play zone, or almost three years of having a Tree Conservation Manager on site. With your legacy, we can do even more.

Gifts in Wills are powerful, which is why we're offering a free Will-writing service to supporters.

Whether you already have a Will that needs updating, or you haven't yet written one, The Goodwill Partnership offers you an at-home Will-writing service, provided for free by The Friends.

*These are example projects and costs. Funding from Wills helps us fund additional opportunities that are important to our mission.

“

I have been coming to Westonbirt Arboretum for many years, both as a Friend and a volunteer. I can honestly say that it is my favourite place in the UK. Whatever the season, it has so much to offer – fun, tranquillity, beauty.

Friends of Westonbirt Arboretum legacy supporter



Find out more
fowa.org.uk/free-will
01492 510 340

Making the most of your membership

As a member of The Friends, you have access to a canopy of tree-top quality benefits. Are you ready to make the most of it? Here are the best opportunities for you to maximise the season ahead.



Image credit: Johnny Hathaway

A spring in your step

As we enter spring, the season of revival, rejuvenation, and reinvigorating rhythms, the arboretum is awakening with new buds and shoots, and the air is fresh with promise. Get yourself here for a visit and soak up the early spring sunshine. Remember, you have unlimited entry!

Beautiful bluebells

In April and May, sections of Silk Wood will be blanketed in bluebells as part of this ancient woodland. Did you know, the UK is home to almost half the world's bluebells? Stick to the paths and be careful not to trample on them, as this causes lasting damage.

Kids go free

Make the most of weekends, half term and the school holidays with kids go free. Bring up to four of your children / grandchildren (aged 18 and under) and embrace the Holford Hollow and Branch Out natural play zones.

Free parking at Forest Live

Elbow, Sting, The Script, Snow Patrol, Paul Heaton and McFly are at Westonbirt in June. Members get free event parking for one car at each event, worth £10 per visit.

Take advantage of discounts

In the shop, your membership card gives you 10% off when you spend £10 per visit.

For an adventurous canopy-top climbing quest, enjoy 10% off at GoApe!

Top Tip

Your membership starts saving you money from your third weekend visit each year, and even less if you take advantage of the shop discounts, partner discounts and free parking. Not to mention the magazine and partner gardens. After that, you're enjoying entirely free visits for the other 361* days a year.

*Westonbirt is closed Christmas Day

Pick a partner

As if unlimited visits to Westonbirt Arboretum wasn't a big enough bonus of membership, don't forget, you can enjoy free or discounted visits to our partner gardens.*

Yorkshire Arboretum

Free entry for the cardholder(s)

As well as hosting a key breeding programme site for the elusive red squirrel, this 120-acre arboretum is a sanctuary for wildlife. The rewilded meadows are a must-see.

yorkshirearboretum.org

Batsford Arboretum

Free entry for the cardholder(s)

Particular highlights are the swathes of flowering bulbs and blossoming trees in spring, and the wildflowers and waterside walks in summer.

batsarb.co.uk

Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh

Free entry

Edinburgh has the largest cultivated collection of Vireya rhododendrons in the world. The Chinese Hillside is also a must visit as an exemplary collection.

rbge.org.uk

Birmingham Botanical Gardens

Free entry for the cardholder(s)

Look out for the magnolias and Rhododendrons in flower in March and April, Alliums in May and the Rose Garden in June.

birminghambotanicalgardens.org.uk

Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew

Two-for-one discount per cardholder

Make the most of spring with a walk through the Magnolia Glade and Cherry Walk to see the blossom at its peak. For summer, the Peony and Rose gardens are exceptional.

kew.org

National Botanic Gardens of Wales

Free entry for the cardholder(s)

The aptly named Springwoods is carpeted with primroses, snowdrops, daffodils and bluebells in the early part of the year. Meanwhile the Great Glasshouse features some of the most endangered plants on the planet.

botanicgarden.wales

Royal Botanic Gardens, Wakehurst

Two-for-one discount per cardholder

Sister garden to Kew, Wakehurst is home to the Millennium Seed Bank. The Iris Dell in spring has a fairy-like feel, while the Walled Garden in summer offers a secluded nook.

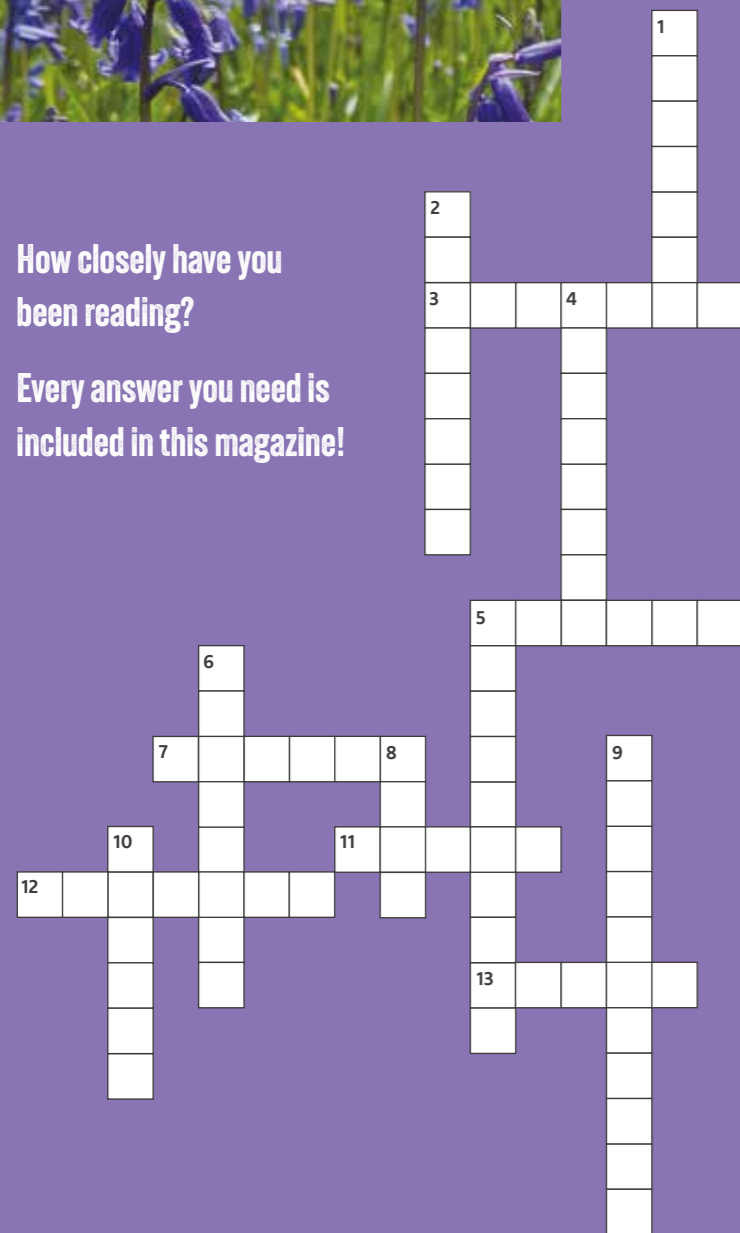
kew.org/wakehurst

*Benefit applies to the member / cardholder only, and does not include any children or grandchildren.

Crossword



How closely have you been reading?
Every answer you need is included in this magazine!



Across

3. The Julia _____ Trust supported the Silk Wood Community Planting Project with £190,000 grant (7).
5. Which stinky tree has beautiful yellow leaves in Spring? (6).
7. 40% of the UK's native tree species are threatened, and the at-risk species all fall into the _____ genus (6).
11. Which advertiser uses the tagline, one battery, many tools? (5)
12. These elusive nocturnal animals have extremely complex ecological requirements (7).
13. Which artist is performing at Westonbirt on Wednesday 18 June? (5).

Down

1. The _____ Catalogue, first published in 1927 (7).
2. This hidden gem is a great place to spot feathered friends and can be found in the Old Arboretum (4,4).
4. Which popular Julia Donaldson character has a trail in Westonbirt Arboretum starting in Spring 2025? (5,3).
5. At the National Botanic Gardens of Wales, the Great _____ features the most endangered plants on the planet (10).
6. The 48 hour attempt to identify as many plants and animals as possible is called a _____ (8).
8. A badger's home is called what? (4).
9. Bees and bumblebees are both types of _____ (11).
10. Where did Dan Crowley and Rosie Anderson visit on their seed collecting trip? (6).



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Across: 3. Rausing 5. Ginkgo 7. Sorbus 11. STIHL 12. Dormice 13. Sting
Down: 1. Jackson 2. Bird Hide 4. Stick Man 5. Glasshouse 6. Bioblitz 8. Sett 9. Pollinators 10. Greece

Answers

FOR THOSE FLYING THE NEST

GIVE A GIFT THAT GROUNDS THEM

Young Person Membership encourages those aged 18–25 to stay rooted in nature. For just £30 a year, enjoy a sanctuary to recharge, support mental health, and connect with the great outdoors.

Plant the seed and let the next generation share your love of Westonbirt, becoming conservation champions no matter where life takes them.



Image credit: Johnny Hathaway



Give a gift today fowa.org.uk/young-person