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FREE to members

Westonbirt



Surprise species in the spotlight

Discover the rare species spotted during the BioBlitz,
with many identified at Westonbirt for the very first time!

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Funded through your membership and our fundraising efforts.



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Bountiful BioBlitz!

At the BioBlitz earlier this year, more than 400 species were recorded, including several rare finds.



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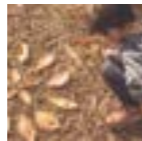
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Connect with us



Credits

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Friends of Westonbirt Arboretum, Tetbury, Glos GL8 8QS
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In particular, readers should satisfy themselves about the authenticity of products advertised.

Let us know what you think!

We'd love to hear feedback about our magazine and if there are any new features you'd like to see. Email us at magazine@fowa.org.uk



Gaining momentum in an international community



Our partnership with Forestry England and the contribution of The Friends has never been more vital to the arboretum. As we progress through our 40th year, it is a partnership that has already helped shape the landscape here at Westonbirt, and which will continue to play a pivotal role in its future.

It is an exciting time for the arboretum, with Dan Crowley settled in as Curator, and Rosie Anderson taking on the role of Tree Conservation Manager (see her interview on page 16). The arboretum continues to gain regard and momentum in the international botanical community as an essential collection for research, conservation, and education, and the initiatives shared in this edition are testament to the knowledge and skill of the team that Westonbirt employs.

The future looks bright for the arboretum, but it is not without its challenges. Climate change; funding cuts; and pests & diseases are just some of the threats that will shape the future of Westonbirt. We are proud that The Friends continue to stand shoulder to shoulder with the Westonbirt team to help the arboretum continue to flourish.

Emma Griffiths
CEO, Friends of Westonbirt Arboretum

Developing our future leaders



In our 10-year vision for the arboretum, Forestry England and The Friends committed to collaborating with others to develop and communicate useful research about trees and their value to society.

I was delighted that as part of this, The Friends was able to provide funding to enable a PhD studentship with the University of the West of England at Bristol to better understand lime tree diseases. This work is ongoing and led to a further collaboration described in this magazine (see page 36), where artificial intelligence is being used to seek out pests and diseases.

In doing this work we are helping to develop future leaders, in this case in the field of tree health. Hopefully, some of the young people who enjoyed our BioBlitz earlier in the year will have been inspired to pursue careers that are relevant to how we can manage the arboretum and our wider environment for decades to come.

Andrew Smith
Arboretum Director, Forestry England



LET'S KEEP WESTONBIRT THRIVING

CELEBRATING 40 YEARS OF CARE AND COLLABORATION

As you wander the trails, marvel at the seasonal displays and connect with nature, it is easy to forget the intricate web of care, collaboration, and commitment that allows Westonbirt to thrive. And, at the heart of this thriving ecosystem is you.

Soaring above the canopy, we get a bird's-eye view of Westonbirt as a diverse, rich, and unrivalled landscape: home to a world-class tree collection, managed by a first-rate team, with growing contributions to international conservation. It's somewhat of an oasis; a haven for wildlife amid wide swathes of agricultural land, a home to some of the UK's rarest species.

Westonbirt is known, loved, and cherished by the people who come here, but much of what is adored would look very different without the collaborative relationships that help Westonbirt thrive. There's the Forestry England team that actively work to help Westonbirt succeed; the 300+ volunteers whose time, passion, and generosity underpin so much of what makes Westonbirt special; the visitors who fall in love with the landscape and encourage Westonbirt to strive for more; and of course, you, our members, who play a vital role in championing this unique landscape and providing vital funds that enable so many projects. Every one a part of the arboretum's living structure.

The rich tapestry that you're sustaining

There's a sense of timelessness at Westonbirt; as if the landscape has always been here and will always be here. It's up to us, the Westonbirt community, to continue to care and nurture the arboretum for generations to come.

We are grateful for your continued support. It is because of you that so many projects have taken root and flourished. Together, we make Westonbirt not only spectacular to behold, but meaningful in its reach and purpose. From the careful conservation of this remarkable site and its historic tree collection to inclusive learning programmes, championing accessibility, and enabling experiences that support wellbeing and connection with nature.

Just as a tree must build strength year after year to weather the changing seasons, Westonbirt must also look to the future with resilience. Fundraising is playing an increasingly important role in supporting this vision. While the needs of a growing and evolving National Arboretum are many, the generosity and dedication of The Friends ensures that Westonbirt can continue to flourish. The support of The Friends is crucial, not only in helping Westonbirt reach more people, but also in safeguarding and nurturing the unique landscapes and collections that make it so special.

We know many of you already give generously – your time, your voice, your resources – and we are truly thankful. It is through your ongoing commitment that Westonbirt continues to be a place of beauty, welcome, and wonder. ✨

Can you give a one-off gift of £40 – a symbolic pound for each of the 40 years The Friends have supported Westonbirt?

Your donation will make sure Westonbirt remains not only a place of natural wonder, but one of purpose, learning and hope. **Thank you**



HOW WE THRIVE TOGETHER

1 Roots

Like the roots of a great tree, a remarkable team of Forestry England staff and more than 300 dedicated volunteers provide the essential day-to-day functions that keep the arboretum thriving. We're proud of The Friends' contributions to support this team, funding many vital staff members and projects.



2 Soil

Every great tree depends on healthy, fertile soil, and Westonbirt's growth has always been rooted in a strong foundation – the dedication of the Holford Estate, the stewardship of Forestry England and the contribution of The Friends.



3 Trunk

This is where you, our members, stand tall. The membership and donations from the Friends of Westonbirt Arboretum are a vital stream of financial support, forming the strong, supportive trunk that holds everything together.



4 Leaves

Every striking leaf display is more than just beautiful; they reflect the depth and diversity of what Westonbirt offers to its visitors, its communities, and the wider world. Each canopy, turning path, and falling leaf reminds us of the creativity, care, and collaboration at the heart of this special place.





Bountiful BioBlitz!

Photos: 1. Pipistrelle bat 2. Great crested newt 3. Bumblebee 4. Dwarf pug moth 5. *Seifertia azaleae* 6. *Agrocybe praecox*



What is a BioBlitz?

A BioBlitz is a survey to identify and record as many species of plants, animals, fungi and other organisms as possible in a short timeframe. From wildflowers to newts, lichen to bats, all wildlife counts. It embraces citizen science and public volunteers to provide valuable data for scientific research, conservation and an understanding of our ecosystem, while also raising awareness about the importance of biodiversity.

During the weekend of the 26-27 April, Westonbirt held a BioBlitz event. The Westonbirt team worked in partnership with Bristol and Gloucestershire Naturalist's Society, alongside other recording groups, and a great turnout of visitors. More than 400 species were recorded, from the very familiar such as robins, earthworms and rabbits to some rare, unique finds covered in this article.

Rarities including a dwarf pug moth which was last seen at Westonbirt 20 years ago! Two rare species of fungi were also found on site, the *Fibroporia gossypium*, a first Gloucestershire record, and *Mollisia ulicis*, the second record in the UK.

Let's take a closer look at the findings:

FUNGI – 20 SPECIES

Fungi are one of the most diverse organisms on earth with an estimated 3.8 million fungi existing worldwide. Many fungi and trees have a symbiotic relationship where trees obtain nutrients that the fungi acquire from the soil and in return, the fungi receive carbon-rich sugar from the tree's roots. During the BioBlitz a rare type of fungi was discovered – *Mollisia ulicis*. *Mollisia* is a small cup-shaped fungi found on decaying wood, leaves, and other plant debris in moist environments. A fascinating aspect of *Mollisia ulicis* is its role in breaking down plant material, helping to recycle nutrients back into the soil.

BATS – 7 SPECIES

The BioBlitz identified seven of the 18 species of bat that live in the UK. One – the common pipistrelle bat – is the most common bat species in the country. You'll most likely find them near rivers, lakes, and woodland edges. The noctule bat, also spotted at Westonbirt, is Britain's largest bat. This species is a tree dweller that flies above the tree canopy. It produces high-pitched chirping calls that can be heard by humans.

NEWTs – 3 SPECIES

The UK has three native species of newt – the smooth newt, the great crested newt, and the palmate newt. The smooth newt is the most common, however the great crested newt is rare and protected in the UK. It's one of Britain's largest newts and an impressive sight. We're lucky enough to have spotted all three species during the BioBlitz.

MOTHS – 17 SPECIES

Moths are indicator species, meaning their numbers can tell scientists how well an ecosystem or habitat is doing. They are important pollinators of many wild plants and a vital part of the food chain – a huge source of food for birds and bats. A real highlight of the weekend was the spotting of the dwarf pug moth which hasn't been seen at Westonbirt for nearly 20 years!

BEES – 9 SPECIES

Bumblebees play a crucial role in our ecosystems and are some of the most efficient pollinators on earth. Sadly, due to modern farming practices and habitat loss they are in rapid decline. There are 24 different species of bumblebees in the UK and they are grouped according to their tail colour: white/buff, red/orange and ginger/yellow. One of the smallest bumblebees, the early bumblebees, have a bright orange tail and lemon-yellow bands on their body. The early bumblebee gets its nectar from more than 140 different species of plant.

WILDFLOWERS – 117 SPECIES

Wildflowers are incredibly important for our native wildlife, providing hunting and feeding grounds for many birds and mammals. 117 species of wildflower were identified, including Early Purple Orchid, Common Spotted Orchid, and Cuckooflower. Did you know that a single healthy meadow can be home to more than 100 species of wildflower? They provide bees, butterflies and other pollinators with food throughout the year. Sadly, since the 1930s we've lost 97% of our wildflower meadows in the UK.

BRYOPHYTES (MOSESSES AND LIVERWORTS)

– 53 SPECIES

Bryophytes are a group of plants that include mosses, liverworts, and hornworts. They are among the earliest plant lineages. Because of their unassuming stature, bryophytes are often overlooked, but their complexity and beauty under a microscope reveals intricate structures that puts them in the same league as their higher plant relatives.

BIRDS – 30 SPECIES

From nuthatch to tawny owl, redwing to treecreeper, the recent BioBlitz revealed more than 30 different bird species that call Westonbirt home. The arboretum’s diverse tree collection provides a haven for them – from nesting sites in oaks to food sources in exotic conifers.

LICHEN – 83 SPECIES

The BioBlitz recorded 83 species of lichens. This level of variety is an indicator that Westonbirt has many different trees of various ages and species, with different levels of moisture. The high number of lichens indicates the quality of air, since lichens are sensitive to air pollution.

OTHER INSECTS – 23 SPECIES

In addition to the 17 moth species and 9 bumblebee species identified (see page 9), there were an additional 23 insect species discovered at Westonbirt. This included 12 different varieties of hoverfly. The UK is home to a rich diversity of insects. They are often overlooked but play a crucial role in maintaining the health of ecosystems and supporting human survival. These tiny minibeasts are essential pollinators, decomposers, and a food source for many animals. Without them, the balance of nature would be disrupted, having significant effects on food production, biodiversity, and even climate regulation.

Photos: 7. Tawny owl 8. Robin 9. Stag beetle
10. *Mollisia ulicis* 11. *Xylodon nesporei*
12. Liverwort 13. Bee being identified 14. Cowslip



Image credits: Helen Chick, Peter Martin, Johnny Hathaway



Global gathering

Seed collecting expeditions

Since the Holfords began planting trees at Westonbirt, the arboretum has evolved from a family passion project to a multi-faceted modern botanic garden, contributing to conservation of some of the world's rarest trees.

Although the Holford family sourced plants for the Westonbirt collection from far and wide, they were never directly involved with any seed collecting expeditions. They were however subscribers to material gathered by collectors at a time of great plant exploration in both the eastern and western hemispheres. Westonbirt's direct participation in expeditions commenced in 2005, nearly 50 years after the arboretum had been passed to the Forestry Commission. Since then, the arboretum has embarked on a programme of collecting work in collaboration with botanic institutes, nationally and internationally, to continue to develop the collection and increase its value to science, research and conservation. Here is a snapshot of Westonbirt's expedition work since 2005, highlighting key collections and partnerships.

Midwestern and southeastern USA 2014

Collaborating with Wakehurst as well as numerous US institutions, this expedition aimed to introduce known-origin material of several of the North American hickories (*Carya* species).



Image credit: Dan Crowley

Western United States 2015

Westonbirt staff joined colleagues from the University of Oxford Harcourt Arboretum and Bedgebury National Pinetum targeting many of the conifers from the rich forests of the US west coast.



Image credit: Andy Blyce

Chile 2009

Led by Millenium Seed Bank colleagues, this expedition targeted seed of numerous plants for long term storage as well as for living collections. Large collections were made of monkey puzzle (*Araucaria araucana*), as well as less familiar South American taxa such as Olivillo (*Aextoxicon punctatum*).



Image credit: Dan Crowley

Taiwan 2023

Rare and endemic tree species were targeted on this expedition to this hyper-diverse east Asian island. Several globally threatened conifers were gathered, including the Taiwan Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga sinensis* var. *wilsoniana*) and Taiwan fir (*Abies kawakamii*), along with snakebark maples *Acer kawakamii*, *A. rubescens* and an apparent hybrid between the two.



Image credit: Dan Crowley

Turkey 2005

This five-week expedition, led by the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, focused on training Turkish colleagues in seed collection, processing and propagation.



Image credit: Penny Jones

Japan 2008 and 2011

Numerous maples and other species noted for autumn colour were collected on Westonbirt's first expedition to Japan. The second trip to Japan saw more maples and their associated species collected, including the blunt-lobed spicebush (*Lindera obtusiloba*) which colours vibrantly in autumn.



Image credit: Dan Crowley

Greece 2024

Westonbirt's most recent expedition focused on introducing more material of familiar maples from more southerly provenances, as well as targeting some of Europe's rarest members of the genus.



Image credit: Rosie Anderson

Italy 2016 and 2017

Westonbirt led two expeditions focused on National Collection taxa and others from warmer provenances. Collections included sessile oak (*Quercus petraea* subsp. *austrotyrrhenica*), multiple collections of Italian maple (*Acer opalus*) and Lobel's maple (*A. lobelii*), increasing the genetic representation of this species in UK cultivation and gathering data to inform IUCN Red List assessments.



Image credit: Dan Crowley

Much of Westonbirt's collecting work since 2005 has been supported by The Friends, who continue to fundraise towards Westonbirt's vision to be a world leader in trees through conservation, education and participation.



A spoonful of sugar...

A long Main Drive in the Old Arboretum, an *Acer pentaphyllum*, commonly known as the five-fingered maple, had begun to show worrying signs of decline. It is a rare and threatened species, represented by less than 500 individuals in the wilds of southwestern China.

Faced with a tree that appeared to be dying, the Westonbirt team decided to try something unconventional: feeding the tree with sugar water. The technique involves watering the root zone with a dilute sugar solution. While used only under carefully controlled conditions, it is advocated for use to support tree establishment or recovery from stress.

It provides an easily accessible energy source that can help roots function better and give the plant a short-term metabolic boost.

With little to lose, it was deemed a worthy experiment. The sugar solution was applied two years ago, and the results have been positively remarkable. By the end of summer 2024, the ailing *Acer pentaphyllum* had undergone an impressive transformation and more than doubled in size.

The level of success of the treatment was both encouraging and instructive. Although this example offers exciting insights, the team at Westonbirt caution that sugar feeding is not a general fix.

“This was a very specific case under tightly managed conditions,” explains Dan Crowley, Curator. Sugar in the soil feeds everything, not just the tree you’re trying to boost, and overuse can upset the delicate balance of soil microbes and fungi, potentially causing undesired effects to other associated organisms.”

The experiment highlights Westonbirt’s role as a centre for research and conservation. Carefully monitored trials like this contribute valuable knowledge to the wider horticultural and botanical community. 🌿



2023



2024



2025

Image credit: Dan Crowley

Fresh air!



Earlier this year, you might have spotted the decompaction work taking place in Acer Glade, one of the arboretum’s most popular and heavily visited areas.

The work is intended to improve soil health after years of footfall and machinery use in the area has led to compaction.

Soil compaction reduces the amount of air space between soil particles, which in turn limits the movement of water, nutrients, and oxygen: all essential elements for healthy root growth and microbial activity.

To address this, the Tree Team used a technique involving the injection of high-pressure air into the soil. This process, known as pneumatic soil decompaction, introduces bursts of compressed air deep into the ground to create air pockets and loosen the compacted layers. In addition to this, specially formulated granular materials were added during the treatment. These granules help maintain the improved soil structure over time by preventing the soil from settling back into a compacted state too quickly. This work benefits both the mature trees already in place and the next generation of plantings. With improved aeration and water movement, tree roots can grow more freely, and the microbial nutrient cycle can thrive. Through this combination of modern arboriculture techniques and sensitive landscape management, the Tree Team is ensuring that Acer Glade remains a vibrant and healthy part of Westonbirt Arboretum’s world-renowned tree collection. 🌿

Trees are amazing!



Image credit: Johnny Hathaway

Funded by The Friends

Trees are amazing!" begins newly appointed Tree Conservation Manager, Rosie Anderson. "We are just so lucky to have Westonbirt as a resource and I feel fortunate to be able to work here and help people to connect with trees."

Originally from south east London, Rosie's professional life started in landscaping, working with a very different scale of garden. Her passion drove her to pursue a degree in Landscape Management at Greenwich University, with special emphasis on native plant conservation. From there, traineeships helped forge Rosie's deep links with botanic gardens and her fascination with taxonomy, first at Cambridge University Botanic Gardens, and then at Longwood Gardens in Pennsylvania.

Rosie specialised via a *Plant and Fungal Taxonomy, Diversity and Conservation Masters* at The Royal Botanic Gardens Kew and Queen Mary University, London. The degree was launched specifically to address industry shortages of taxonomists, combining many of Rosie's passions. The hands-on fieldwork proved particularly engaging, and those skills have since benefitted Westonbirt's international seed collecting expeditions. "It's really satisfying to look back across all my learning and know I am using so many of the skills gained through my degrees" Rosie comments.

In May 2022, Rosie joined Westonbirt as Dendrologist, verifying the identification of plants within the arboretum. "Verification of the collection is key to the arboretum's usefulness as a resource for science and conservation," explains Rosie. "There have been thousands of plant name changes in the last few decades alone, and it is important we keep up with developments to function as a conservation collection, and remain beneficial to the wider botanic garden community."

Now, Rosie steps into the role of Tree Conservation Manager; a role made possible by fundraising from The Friends. Here, Rosie's main priority is furthering the aims of the Global Consortium for Whitebeams, Rowans & Service Trees. "I'm focused on building the network, engaging the right people, and facilitating the Consortium work", Rosie explains. "A key aspect is establishing current threats and conservation actions for threatened whitebeams in the UK. This work will go on to inform how best to target conservation efforts, first in the UK, but with scope as a blueprint for expansion further afield." 🌿

 To support conservation projects please make a donation to The Friends

SILK WOOD SURVEY

Forest in focus

The Silk Wood Community Planting Project is helping to regenerate an area of the arboretum felled as a result of Chalara ash dieback. The project brings together volunteers and community groups to plant, manage and care for native tree saplings, and will incorporate more than 9,000 new trees when completed.



Funded by The Friends

The story to date:



Work continued over the summer with community groups returning to help care for the trees and take part in scientific monitoring activities. 🌿

 Find out more about Westonbirt's Silk Wood Community Planting Project and how you can get involved

Generational echoes

As a young girl, Mandy Leivers was inspired by an amazing teacher who connected her to nature. Now, it's her turn to inspire the next generation as she connects young people with the wonderful world of Westonbirt.

For many of the people Mandy meets, their visit to Westonbirt will be their very first foray into nature and certainly their first hands-on experience of a landscape like this one. For Mandy, this role has been a lifelong dream.

Mandy is the Community Coordinator for Westonbirt Arboretum, which means it's her responsibility to work with young people and community groups, enabling participants to access the healing and wellbeing potential of nature. It's a role made possible by The Friends' fundraising activities to help foster the "education" and "participation" aspects of Westonbirt's 10-year vision.

"I grew up in Amberley, near Stroud" Mandy says "where I had an amazing teacher that was really into nature. She regularly took us to Amberley churchyard where there is an incredible tree

collection including redwoods and cedars. We used to draw them, engage with them, and it was here that I first felt a deep connection to nature."

That connection deepened when Mandy participated in a campaign to save the cowslips on Minchinhampton Common. People picking and uprooting them meant their numbers were dwindling, so Mandy's class created an awareness campaign. The group also collected seeds, grew them on and replanted them. It was her first experience of conservation, and it reinforced her deep love of nature.

"Naturally," Mandy continues "Westonbirt was a place I spent a lot of time in growing up. A beautiful space, not far from home. I dreamt of working here but my career certainly took a winding path. I started out in conservation, before I then segued into education securing my PCGE. For 21 years, I worked for the Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project and then did a short stint at Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust. But I always had my eye to Westonbirt.

Now, I have landed on my feet here, combining my practical skills in education with my connection to nature and conservation, into a role that shares this incredible place with people who have never experienced its like. It's a joy."



ABOVE: Mandy with some of the young people visiting Westonbirt.

The community programme is centred on using the arboretum for therapeutic benefit, to improve participants' wellbeing. It uses a framework based on the NHS-approved Five Ways to Wellbeing, and the University of Derby's Five Pathways to Nature Connection. It is evidence based, focused on learning new skills and taking part in conservation work, while facilitating personal growth.

Primarily, Mandy (supported by her fantastic team of skilled and knowledgeable volunteers) works with under-served communities such as those with medical conditions or additional needs, or who come from a socio-economic background that prevents access. These groups are typically isolated from nature. The priority is to create long-lasting relationships and to forge connection through repeat visits. This also allows Mandy's team to track the results over time, and to see first-hand the change that is wrought in people by connecting with nature.

There are few groups that convey Mandy's pride more than her work with Malmesbury School. Her voice gains a lightness and momentum speaking of the young people who were finding school and life challenging. While connection to nature is always at the heart of every programme, her work here with a group of 14-year-old boys had a keener edge; a need to excite them about learning,

re-engage them with education, and teach them new skills, help them to build relationships with others, and nurture their confidence and support network.

Mandy explains "Their visits here included experiences with coppicing, woodworking, and deep, restorative time in nature. They've gone on to thrive in school, to be better connected with their peers, and to continue to connect in nature."

Any group that comes to the arboretum for a programme of visits is invited to take part in a pre-evaluation, reflection session and there is a final evaluation, including filling in an end of programme 'wellbeing tree' questionnaire. "The participants co-create the programme based on their needs and interests and there is a continuous process of evaluation so that participants can see how they are progressing." Mandy explains.

"While not a direct priority of the programmes, one of the best things to see is a new understanding that there are careers in nature and forestry. For many of our participants nature itself is not on their radar, let alone knowing that it could be a fulfilling career for them" Mandy explains. "What I like even more is sharing with participants that the pathway to a career here doesn't have to be a straight one. My own journey came the long way round, but there's also Charles who made his career as a builder and set-builder for Glastonbury, then worked at Westonbirt in the Visitor Services Team, before becoming the Civil Engineering and Estates Works Supervisor, as well as Jon, Westonbirt's 2024 trainee arborist, who started out as a GP, and many of us who found our way here after careers elsewhere."

“

They've gone on to thrive in school, to be better connected with their peers, and to continue to connect in nature.

Mandy's role is not the only aspect funded by The Friends. Westonbirt is in the middle of the Gloucestershire countryside, and for many of the groups that means it is more difficult for them to access. Here, The Friends' Community Access Grants come to the fore, funding transportation to the arboretum to ensure no one is left behind. ✨

What's on

Christmas at Westonbirt

Get ready for an unforgettable Christmas evening at Westonbirt, The National Arboretum. This magical after-dark trail returns for 2025 with brand-new lights, spectacular installations, and festive fun for the whole family!

Created by the award-winning producers behind Christmas at Kew, this is an absolute must-see this festive season.

Free car parking for one car for members

Fri 28 Nov – Wed 31 Dec
(open on selected evenings)

Price: From £19



GUIDED WALKS & TOURS

Westonbirt Guided Walk ^F

Explore the seasonal highlights of the Old Arboretum. Check Forestry England's website for days & times during autumn & winter

Discovery Walks ^F

Take the path less travelled and delve a little deeper into Westonbirt's captivating trees. Every Thu, 10:30am

WORKSHOPS & COURSES

Nordic Walking 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

Willow Sculpture Workshop

Spend a relaxing day crafting and weaving your own willow design. Sat 10 Oct, Sat 25 Oct, Sat 15 Nov, Sat 13 Dec, 10:00am – 4:00pm

Price: £95

Creating Garden Plans

Spend a day learning how professional garden designers create a well thought out garden. Sun 12 Oct, 10:00am – 4:00pm
Price: £145



Introduction to the Japanese Art of Kintsugi Ceramics Repair

Learn the Japanese art of kintsugi repair for broken ceramics using traditional natural Japanese Urushi (tree sap) lacquer.

Mon 13 Oct, Sat 08 Nov, Fri 14 Nov, Mon 24 Nov, Fri 12 Dec, Mon 22 Dec, 10:00am – 1:00pm
Price: £50

Needle Felt Workshop

Learn the skills to needle felt a woodland animal, making the core shape before adding highlights and detail.

Fri 03 Oct, Fri 07 Nov, Sat 29 Nov, Fri 05 Dec, 9:30am – 12:30pm
Price: £45



Beech Wood and Seagrass Footstool Weaving

Spend a day weaving your footstool with a view of the trees, taught by Felicity Tran, traditional upholsterer and seat weaver.

Sat 04 Oct, Sat 31 Jan, 9:50am – 4:00pm
Price: £115

Planning Garden Borders

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

Sat 18 Oct, 10:00am – 4:00pm
Price: £145

Botanical Monoprinting

Join Luke and Sonja of Blue Roll Press on an introduction to printmaking. Use an etching press and hand printing techniques with foraged materials.

Sat 18 Oct, Sun 19 Oct, 10:30am – 1:00pm
Price: £60



Christmas Wreath Making

Make your wreath as wild and natural as you dare.

Sun 30 Nov, Wed 3 Dec, Sun 07 Dec, 10:00am – 12:30pm
Price: £85

Peace & Craft Seasonal Textiles

Create unique handcrafted decorations including tiny trees and miniature wreaths to adorn tables, trees, cards or gifts.

Fri 05 Dec, 10:00am – 1:00pm
Price: £50

Relish Running

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

Sat 07 Feb, 6:00pm & Sun 08 Feb, 9:00am
Price: Half: £42, 10km: £29, 5km: £24, 1-mile fun run: £7.50



FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Tots & Twigs Forest School

Forest School for preschool aged children (2–4 year olds).

Term time, Mon & Thu 10:15 – 11:45am, Fri 10:15 – 11:45am & 12:30 – 2:00pm

Price: Check Forestry England website

Wild Westonbirt

Leave the well-trodden paths and explore the wilder side of the arboretum, aimed at young adults aged 14–18.

Every third Saturday of the month, 10:00am – 4:00pm
Booking essential

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 06 Nov, 10:00am – 12:00pm
Price: £6 per child age 7–11, £4 for siblings, two adults free per family

Fabulous Fungi Discovery Day

Find out about Westonbirt Arboretum's fungi, visit the fungi nature table and try some fungi art.

Sat 18 Oct, 10:30am – 3:30pm



Autumn Walks

Activity walks with autumn challenges, discovery and games, exploring seasonal change for trees, fungi and wildlife.

Mon 27 Oct, Fri 31 Oct
11:00am – 12:30pm for 6–10 year olds with family
1:30 – 3:00pm for 11–14 year olds with or without parents
Booking essential

Autumn Wonders Family Event

Add to the autumn nature table, and collect fallen leaves to design your own leaf crown and autumn mobile.

Tue 28 Oct, Wed 29 Oct, Thu 30 Oct, 10:30am – 3:30pm

Christmas Crafts Family Event

Try the winter tree quiz challenge to enter Westonbirt's Christmas prize draw. Use cones and evergreen leaves to make a range of festive decorations to take home.

Sat 06 Dec, Sun 07 Dec, 10:30am – 3:30pm

Beautiful Bark

Explore the amazing variety of bark within the tree collection, try the bark challenge, make a bark clay tile and other crafts to take home.

Tue 17, Wed 18, Thu 19 Feb, 10:30am – 3:30pm



What's on

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

GIVE A GIFT FOR ALL SEASONS

Surprise someone special with a gift that lasts beyond Christmas. From just £32 a year, gift them radiant spring flowers, hazy summer days, vibrant autumn colours, and crisp winter mornings at Westonbirt Arboretum.

Share your love of Westonbirt, while protecting the collection and nurturing a greener future.



Give a gift today fowa.org.uk/gift

OUR SEASONAL HIGHLIGHTS THIS AUTUMN & WINTER

Autumn colours countdown

The countdown is on to the must-visit season for the arboretum, autumn colours, when the trees are ablaze with reds, oranges, and yellows, creating a new sensory delight.

In autumn, the sights and smells change and for eight glorious weeks the arboretum is wearing its party frock, ready to be your date for the day.

Did you know, this arresting array of colour marks the end of each tree's chlorophyll production for the year. As temperatures cool and daylight shortens, production stops and any remaining green pigment breaks down. This reveals the underlying pigments produced in the leaf as sugars accumulate,

such as xanthophylls (yellow pigments), carotenoids (primarily orange pigments but can be yellow or red) and anthocyanins (red pigments).

Don't forget, the Today board and Window on Westonbirt Map outside the Welcome Building offer daily and weekly highlights. 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 autumn and winter at the arboretum, including plenty to do with the kids!

Look out for...

-  Best spots to see autumn colours
-  Wild bird viewing area
-  Shop

Play at Westonbirt

-  Holford Hollow & Troll Bridge
-  Branch Out
-  Gruffalo sculptures
-  Exploratree
-  Play spaces. Look out for the clock, felled giant, the tipi town, the tyre tunnel and many more!

 Stick Man trail/Stick Man Christmas trail



Play

If you haven't spotted it already, the newly revamped play area next to the Pantry opened over the summer. Great for toddlers and young children.



Our Shop

Stock up on all your Christmas presents in the shop. Enjoy 10% off when you spend £10 or more with your membership. Stock arriving throughout autumn. See more on page 48.



Stick Man Trail

Enjoy a festive Christmas trail from 05 November 2025 until early January 2026.

Autumn

Acer (Amoenum Group)
'Westonbirt Red'

Westonbirt red Japanese maple

One of Westonbirt's very own cultivars of Japanese maple, 'Westonbirt Red' was selected by staff in collaboration with colleagues at Esveld nursery in The Netherlands. Celebrated for its brilliant red autumn foliage, the original tree can be seen on The Link from late October to early November – an unmissable highlight of the season.



Image credit: Rosalee Anderson

Liriodendron tulipifera

Tulip tree

The four-lobed leaves of this eastern North American tree are notable in that they do not taper to a point, causing botanists to describe the tip of the leaf as being 'chopped off'. In autumn these distinctive leaves turn a delightful butter yellow.



Image credit: Ally Whaley

Neoshirakia japonica

Japanese tallow tree

The Japanese tallow tree offers some of our most vivid autumn colour, its leaves blazing vibrant red and orange in October. Though rarely seen in UK gardens, it also produces striking fruits in autumn adding to its seasonal appeal. As the name suggests, it is native to Japan but also grows in South Korea and China.



Image credit: Ally Whaley

Arbutus unedo

Strawberry tree

Despite its name referencing the popular fruit, the strawberry tree was known to the Romans as unedo, translated as "I eat one" a nod to its (usually) unpleasant taste. Unusually, in autumn you can see both flowers and ripe fruit on the tree at the same time.



Image credit: Dan Crowley

Winter

Hamamelis species
Witch hazel

Hailing from North America and eastern Asia, Westonbirt grows four species of witch hazel (*H. vernalis*, *H. virginiana*, *H. mollis*, *H. japonica*), and the hybrid *H. x intermedia*, along with several cultivars. Flowering time varies by species and selection, but January is a brilliant time to seek out their spidery, scented flowers throughout the collection.



Image credit: Dan Crowley

Cedrus deodara

Deodar

Deodar, with its elegant, pendulous foliage, is an iconic sight out on the Downs here at Westonbirt. Native to the Himalayas, it holds great cultural significance – its Sanskrit name, *devadāru*, means 'wood of the gods'. It can be distinguished from other true cedars by its drooping branch tips and the subtle ridges on its cone scales.



Image credit: Dan Crowley

Fitzroya cupressoides

Alerce

This impressive evergreen conifer, native to Argentina and Chile, is the longest-lived tree in the Southern Hemisphere, reaching over 3,600 years. It grows to more than 50m in its native range but for Westonbirt it is a small tree of graceful habit. Now threatened in the wild, it has been protected in Chile since 1976, when it was declared a Natural Monument.

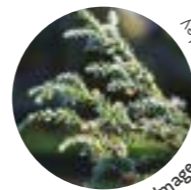


Image credit: Ally Whaley



Arboretum Explorer

The arboretum's digital map with species insight.

Open for all



Funded by
The Friends

Research consistently shows that time spent in nature boosts happiness, health, and overall wellbeing. Yet in the UK, access to green spaces remains a challenge for poorer communities and ethnic minorities.

Studies reveal that 18% of children in the most deprived areas never spend time in nature. Meanwhile, a recent survey found that 70% of individuals with mobility challenges face difficulties accessing green spaces. These stark statistics highlight the need for us all to champion inclusivity and accessibility.

Barriers to accessing nature include disability, cultural norms, financial hardship, and lack of reliable public transport connections. Connecting people with nature is a vital part of The Friends' role and we continue to champion inclusion and access at Westonbirt. We work alongside Forestry England to help ensure more people, no matter their background, can enjoy the mental and physical benefits of being in nature. This includes supporting transport for community groups as well as enabling discounted entry options to open up Westonbirt to a wider range of visitors.

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It's also about creating inclusive experiences that invite everyone to connect with nature.

It's not just financial barriers that we help to tackle. Much of the work we support is to make the arboretum more accessible. Forestry England has invested in easy-access trails, designed for wheelchairs, mobility scooters and anyone needing extra support, as well as adding a Changing Places toilet to the facilities. Meanwhile, The Friends has provided funding for several accessibility initiatives, including the on-site mobility scooters that are available to visitors free of charge, the electric shuttle bus that brings visitors deeper into the arboretum, and the wheelchair accessible play zones at Holford Hollow and Exploratree.

But accessibility goes beyond physical infrastructure. It's also about creating inclusive experiences that invite everyone to connect with nature in meaningful ways. That's why The Friends is proud to have fundraised for projects like the Silk Wood Community Planting Project. Here, Forestry England saw an opportunity to involve diverse community groups in planting and caring for the trees, creating a meaningful and shared experience. This project has offered the opportunity for people to take an active role in restoring and reimagining the landscape, helping to deepen their sense of belonging and connection to the natural world.

Although we've made significant progress, we know there's still more to be done. With your continued support through membership and beyond, we can strengthen our partnerships with community groups, enhance accessibility, and help more people experience the wonderful benefits of connecting with nature. 🌿

Wander wildly



Funded by
The Friends

Aside from being uniquely sad, this lack of time outdoors and loss of connection to nature is having a profound effect on this generation's mental health, their levels of stress and anxiety, their approach to risk, and even their cognitive and physical functions. Yet it's not the result of laziness, or even lack of intention; more it is the result of parental fear of risk outside the home, combined with lack of straightforward access to safe and secure environments to play.

It is this that makes Westonbirt a profoundly critical space for young children to explore, stomping, jumping, running, climbing, whooping, engaged in free-range play with little limit. The joyful sounds of a childhood well spent echoing through the trees that have quietly observed countless generations.

Research consistently shows that outdoor, nature-based play offers profound benefits for children's development. Time spent exploring safe outdoor spaces reduces parental fear and provides scope for children to improve physical and mental health. Studies have found that children are 42% more physically active outdoors compared to indoors, and that nature play specifically also supports mental health by lowering stress levels and enhancing mood. Free-range, unstructured play builds creativity, problem-solving abilities, and social skills like cooperation and leadership.

Every year, more than 90,000 young visitors come to Westonbirt embracing this natural playground with discovery around every corner. Off-path play is encouraged and even the structured play zones blend seamlessly between the trees here.

The Friends is committed to nurturing this play: supporting more inclusive and engaging outdoor play experiences for every child.

In 2024 we fundraised for the creation of Holford Hollow and the revamp of Branch Out, and this year we've fundraised for the redevelopment of the play area next to the Westonbirt Shop, Exploratree, and an area in Silk Wood too. Holford Hollow alone enabled 30,000 hours of invaluable play in its first six months, contributing significantly to the emotional, social, and physical development of countless children.



Our commitment to play is all about ensuring today's children and future generations can experience the joy, creativity, and connection that outdoor play provides. The recent research only serves to focus our minds even more on the importance of play for children, particularly outdoor play. Through fundraising, The Friends aims to support the expansion and enhancement of play opportunities across the arboretum, helping to create environments that encourage exploration and learning in nature.

FIONA PHELPS, HEAD OF INCOME GENERATION AND ENGAGEMENT

But our work isn't done. Natural play areas evolve, and ongoing support is crucial to maintain and enhance these vital spaces. We are working to ensure that today's children and future generations continue to experience the joy, creativity, and connection that outdoor play at Westonbirt provides, just as the *State of Play 2025* research suggests.

Not only do we believe that this strategy is essential to the wellbeing of children, but we know that it is essential to the future of the site too. Early positive experiences in nature foster a deep, lasting connection to the environment, encouraging future stewardship. Today's children are tomorrow's conservationists; passionate about nature and committed to nurturing it. 🌿

The call of the wild is in our bones, but it's not as strong for our children as it was for our grandparents.

New research published this year by The Raising the Nation Play Commission, *The State of Play*, has found that time spent outdoors has halved in one generation, and that the distance children are allowed to roam from home has shrunk from six miles to just 300 yards over the last four generations. What that means is that the average UK child under 10 spends less than four hours per week outdoors (excluding PE lessons) and 20% rarely spend any time outdoors at all. This is why The Friends' commitment to fostering free-range play is such a vital campaign for our future.

Read more
in the *State of Play*
2025 Interim Report



If you haven't already, bring your children or grandchildren to visit the new play areas. You can bring up to four under-18s with your membership.



Family fun

Muddy masterpieces: are you ready to get stuck in?

Thick, oozy, runny, squishy, grainy, smooth, and squelchy are all great ways to describe mud, but did you know its texture is affected by the weather and the type of soil? That's what makes it so fun to play with, and why it's perfect for making a mud pie. But have you thought about painting with it?

Ask your grown up to help you collect:

- A container (optional – if you want to paint in nature)
- A scoop (optional – you can use your hands)
- Some pieces of paper
- A paintbrush (optional – you can make marks with what you collect)
- A bottle of water (in case it's thick)

A note for grown-ups

While mud feels very messy, it has lots of unexpected health benefits. Playing with it is great for physical development, developing fine motor skills, cognitive development and emotional wellbeing. Certain microbes in mud also promote serotonin production and can also reduce the risk of developing allergies while promoting a healthy immune system.

How to make your painting:

- 1 Go to your local park or woodland and find your favourite muddy patch. The best one you can.
- 2 Along the way, collect leaves, sticks, pinecones, and anything textured that you can use as a "paintbrush". Remember to only collect from the woodland floor: if it's attached to a tree, the tree still needs it.
- 3 Scoop up some mud into your container (or use it straight from the ground). Add some water if you need to. Remember not to disturb any wildlife, including molehills.
- 4 Start painting!

Your painting can be a pattern or anything you'd like, making marks with what you've collected. You could paint a mud face or a creature, and you can even paint a memory of your trip. Mud is a great alternative to paint!

Other ideas

Mud can make a great organic paint to use in potato printing at home too!

You can paint it onto rocks as a reusable canvas. Paint it on, let it dry, and it'll flake off ready to use again.

Fun Fact

Many cave paintings were made using mud as a natural pigment. You can look up the earliest known artworks in Lascaux, France, or paintings made by Aboriginal Australians and Native American tribes.

Did you know?

Some special mud is different! It's like a superhero mud! This mud is super, super 'clean'. Because it's so 'clean', people use it to help their skin feel better, like when you put a plaster on a cut. It can make their skin feel soft and smooth, like when you use lotion.

Mud is a great building material!

In some places it is used as a building material to make houses and shelters, and sometimes mud is dried and used to make musical instruments like drums and flutes.

Shiny Spheres

In Japan, there is an ancient craft called Hikaru Dorodango. It takes a long time but it's the art of turning ordinary mud into shiny spheres. It's very cool, so ask your grown up to help you find a video on the internet. ✨



MANDALA MAGIC

When it comes to nature and art there's something quite magical about turning found objects, such as leaves, twigs and stones into works of art. This hands-on activity is a wonderful way to unleash your creativity and make something fun and unique.

An ancient art

“Mandala” means “circle” in the ancient language of Sanskrit, and they were first created by Buddhist monks 2,000 years ago. For many religions, these special patterns are symbols of the universe, or a spiritual journey. Each mandala is unique, and has its own meaning given to it by its artists.

What does it look like?

Mandalas are circular in design and organised around a central point that radiates out symmetrically from its centre.

Making a mandala is a great way to explore your creativity. You can do it anytime of the year and create different art with every new season. It's also a brilliant way to slow down, connect and learn more about nature.



Have a go at making your nature mandala

- 1** Gather lots of natural objects, like fallen leaves, twigs, pebbles, bark, pine cones or anything else you can find – just be careful not to disturb any living thing or pick anything that is still growing.
- 2** Find a clear space for your mandala on the ground outside.
- 3** Starting with the centre, arrange your natural materials in a pattern radiating outward so it forms a circle.
- 4** Once you've finished, take a step back and admire your amazing nature mandala, and give it your own special meaning.
- 5** When you have finished and enjoyed admiring your creation, it's time to leave it behind as a gift to nature, and a reminder that not everything has to be kept forever.



WHERE TO GET CREATIVE

You can create a mandala in your local park, woods, the beach or even your own garden. All are fantastic places to collect natural objects for your nature mandala.

Benefits to making a mandala

A bit like drawing or painting, making a mandala allows you to slow down and relax. During the process of collecting items, think about the design, and while you are actually making it, you can switch off from the usual things racing through your mind.

Nature's very own mandalas

The next time you go for a walk, why don't you try and look out for other symmetrical patterns in nature. You won't need to look too far, from the petals of a flower to a spider's web, they are awe-inspiring and make you feel closer to the natural world. ✨

Tree tech

When disease is threatening, identifying and preserving healthy trees is essential, safeguarding a genetically diverse population for future propagation. But when you're facing a forest, how can you find the right wood among the trees?

That's the challenge for University of West of England PhD researchers Scarlet Maguire and Tahira Batool, who're on the hunt for trees resistant to Chalara ash dieback. The aim of their research is to develop a hyperspectral remote sensing technique that can be used to detect healthy ash trees.

Chalara ash dieback has significantly impacted tree populations in the UK, leaving behind a small number of genetically resistant trees. It is essential that these trees are identified, securing seed sources for future propagation and planting. Finding these trees is not easy, however; healthy ash trees are scattered throughout the wider landscape and identifying individual trees within mixed-species woodlands is particularly difficult.

Scarlet's specialism is remote sensing which uses satellites and drones to collect images of the landscape, with the potential for locating ash trees. In theory, healthy trees can be located this way, but in particularly dense woodland patches spotting individual trees is more than a little challenging. What's more the current imaging technology presents challenges for distinguishing between species. It's certainly not a quick process.

Instead, Scarlet is hoping to create a hyperspectral remote sensing technique using drones to take a more detailed and accurate picture of the canopy. While current techniques use RGB formats which show Red, Green, and Blue light only, hyperspectral imaging incorporates additional parts of the light spectrum including ultra-violet, infrared, and short-wave infrared.

This approach allows significantly better differentiation between species, because while many species share very similar RGB profiles, the variance for other parts of the light spectrum is much bigger. An added advantage of this approach is that healthy trees all reflect high levels of green light, but the intensity of this green light varies per species, and this variance is also detectable through hyperspectral imaging.

Tahira's specialism meanwhile is data analysis, and she's currently testing the application of artificial intelligence to analyse these data sets. Between them, Scarlet and Tahira are investigating whether complex hyperspectral imagery can be used in the fight against ash dieback.

Research at Westonbirt

While great in theory, to apply this process reliably, scientists must first have a "hyperspectral spectral signature": the equivalent of a fingerprint in light that is unique to each tree species. The foliage of each tree species reflects light differently and it is this pattern that can be captured as a "spectral signature". This is where Westonbirt comes in.

Last summer, Scarlet and Tahira visited Westonbirt to capture these unique spectral signatures. They collected hyperspectral data of the foliage of ash, as well as the six species which commonly co-occur with it – oak, beech, alder, field maple, sycamore and rowan. They used a hand-held spectroradiometer that's specially designed to measure the light reflectance of foliage.



ABOVE: Scarlet uses a hand-held spectroradiometer to measure foliage light reflectance BELOW: a close up of the hand-held spectroradiometer

The aim of their research and analysis is to establish which wavelength of light differs the most between each species. In turn, this can be applied to dense woodland areas to help differentiate between species, and by doing so, will improve the accuracy and relevance of applied drone imaging for tree disease management. What's more, their analysis will help to establish best practice for hyperspectral imaging, creating a blueprint for which subsets of hyperspectral imaging are most useful to this application. Ultimately, their research could prove a powerful tool in identifying resistant ash trees scattered throughout the landscape, especially those hidden in mixed-species woodlands. 🌿

“

Access to the trees at Westonbirt has been essential to this research. Not only do we need to capture unique signatures for each species, but the data for all species must be collected within just a few hours.

SCARLET MAGUIRE



Image credits: Jo Murray





Wild encounters

Are you wildlife aware on your dog walks?

Woodlands are a sensory sensation for your four-legged friend, and the care-free wonderland of Silk Wood is the best place for an off-lead wander. It's a wild place though, and for a dog with an excitable temperament or a high prey-drive, encounters with wildlife need to be carefully managed.

Image credits: Bailey taken by his owner Rich Garner

Five ways to ensure a respectful visit:

1

Learn what lives here

Westonbirt provides a range of habitats for wildlife, which can wander unimpeded into the arboretum. This means you might meet badgers, deer, squirrels, foxes, hedgehogs, plenty of bird species, and much more besides. It's important to think about where you'll see them, how your dog might react, and whether it is easy for wildlife to get away, or if your dog can follow them. Unfortunately, every year dog-related wildlife incidents are rising at the arboretum, which is unfair on the animals that call Westonbirt home. It is your responsibility to make sure your dog is not part of the problem.

Good recall is a must, and ensuring your dog is well-trained is expected.

2

Consider the natural rhythms

The wildlife you'll encounter naturally varies with the season and your time of visit, so you might want to plan your walks around these. Hibernation makes autumn and winter a naturally quieter time for wildlife, but the darker mornings and evenings may give you unexpected encounters with nocturnal animals. Come spring, it's also essential to consider where nests and dens might be located to prevent them being disturbed, although many animals here do breed all year round.

Plan the timings of your visit to avoid peak times for wildlife and consider seasonal behaviours that might stimulate your dog.

3

Refresh your breed knowledge

Different breeds have different behavioural patterns and it's essential you know how to manage yours. For some, a high prey-drive will cause your dog to chase, while for others scent obsession will see them disappear off through the undergrowth.

Practise the skills you need for your breed, identifying how you can halt any unwanted or unexpected behaviour. Your dog must be in sight at all times while you are here.

4

Train key commands

Dogs have instincts and even the best planning on your part can't avoid the unexpected. The three key skills you need to practice are recall so that your dog returns on command, always; leave, drop or a similar command in case of wildlife capture; and calmness around distractions. These will help them focus on you and equip you with commands that can handle the unexpected.

Training, training, and more training is the only way you can ensure you're ready for any wild encounter. The Westonbirt Dog Policy highlights that dogs must be trained if they are let off-lead.

5

Be prepared

Invest in equipment and aids that help you manage your dog and be a responsible dog owner. Bright gear and bells or other sound makers can alert wildlife before you reach them, plenty of treats can entice your dog to come back to you, and of course you can't forget the trusty dog poo bags.

Bring everything you need for your visit, walk responsibly, and importantly, enjoy it!

Don't forget the people!

Wildlife incidents are serious, but they're not the only concern. Dog-related complaints are rising each year, with concerns around behaviour, recall, and direct attacks. Not every dog or person likes to be approached, and it is essential that Westonbirt remains a welcoming place for all. Please do your part to help.



View the Westonbirt Arboretum Dog Policy



Friend and foe



Though a familiar sight across much of Britain, the grey squirrel is not a native species but a naturalised one. It's cute, fluffy appearance belies a darker influence on the British landscape, challenging native species and wreaking havoc in delicately balanced ecosystems. But what does that mean at Westonbirt?

The grey squirrel was first introduced from North America in the late 1800s, thriving in the country's verdant landscapes and spreading rapidly to colonise most of England. While some find them adorable and a pleasure to watch, its naturalisation hasn't been all positive, delivering an oft detrimental outcome for our native wildlife.

“

The grey squirrels bring a lot of joy... but they are not without their challenges.

The Westonbirt landscape

The grey squirrel has been a familiar sight at Westonbirt for as long as most people can remember. It has adapted exceptionally well thanks to the arboretum's diverse assortment of trees and an abundant, varied diet. A litter of three to four kittens are typically born in March, and further litters arrive later in the year if females have abundant food. Westonbirt's Wildlife and Conservation Ranger, Ross Martin, monitors their impact and makes sure everything stays in balance at the arboretum.

Ross comments “The grey squirrels bring a lot of joy to visitors here at the arboretum, but they are not without their challenges. They're quite a destructive species, and they don't have many natural predators locally. We have a responsibility to the tree collection to ensure it can continue to thrive. Indeed, when the Holfords were planting trees, I don't think they would have ever imagined the devastating effect the grey squirrel would have on their magnificent creation.”

Squirrel damage on Westonbirt's trees:



Japanese maple (*Acer palmatum*)



Japanese maple cultivar *Acer* (Matsumurae Group) 'Elegans'



Dogwood (*Cornus*)

He continues “Grey squirrels have a sweet tooth it seems, and last spring was an exceptional year for tree damage; they strip the bark to get at the sugary sap that runs through the trees' vascular system. Not only were many maples badly damaged, but there was also notable squirrel damage in the ancient semi-natural woodland and hazel coppice coupes in Silk Wood.”

Bark stripping is the most obvious sign of squirrel impact, but they also eat songbird chicks and eggs, compete for nest sites, and displace some species which use large cavities in trees such as the tawny owl. They also create competition for food, consuming large quantities of seeds and buds that may otherwise feed other birds and mammals.

Grey squirrels are largely safe at Westonbirt, with no real predators apart from the fox. An occasional goshawk does offer some natural predation, but not enough to restrict numbers or prevent squirrel damage. The site team is hoping for pine martens to naturally move into the arboretum as they're also a natural predator of the grey squirrel.

The reality is, however, that grey squirrel numbers do need careful management on site to balance the needs of the species with the needs of the trees. This means that Ross has to intervene sometimes, to help keep numbers in check. He explains “To help manage the numbers of squirrels I adopt several methods. These methods are considered as humane as possible and help ensure we don't impact other species. Best practice is applied at all times with these control measures, taking the overall welfare of the grey squirrels into consideration. Wider grey squirrel management schemes are also being considered in the UK, such as fertility control and gene editing, which could provide a non-lethal method of control to reduce populations. However, for now I will continue to do my best at controlling grey squirrel numbers to help nature recovery and to maintain our woodland habitat biodiversity ensuring that our amazing arboretum thrives for future generations to enjoy.” 🌿



WORDS
ROSS MARTIN
WILDLIFE AND CONSERVATION RANGER



Your membership with us includes free entry to Yorkshire Arboretum where they have native red squirrels, as well as a breeding and reintroduction programme. Well worth a visit!



Westonbirt is more than a tree collection. It offers a deep connection to nature and creates a memory-making sense of place. You've shared your favourite memories of being in the arboretum.

"Running through the coloured leaves to chat to the Gruffalo and friends has brought so much joy to all three of my children over the years and we look forward to making many more memories at Westonbirt through the seasons."

Charlie Broughman



Coming to Westonbirt for the first time to see the autumn colours, truly breathtaking.

DANIELLE BROOKER



"About six years ago I made an amazing friend. A Robin! It took a lot of patience and a lots of live food, mealworms, wax grub larva and of course the normal robin mix, to secure a friend I treasured so much. As we grew closer he flew straight to my hand and waited for his reward! Oh what a joy!"

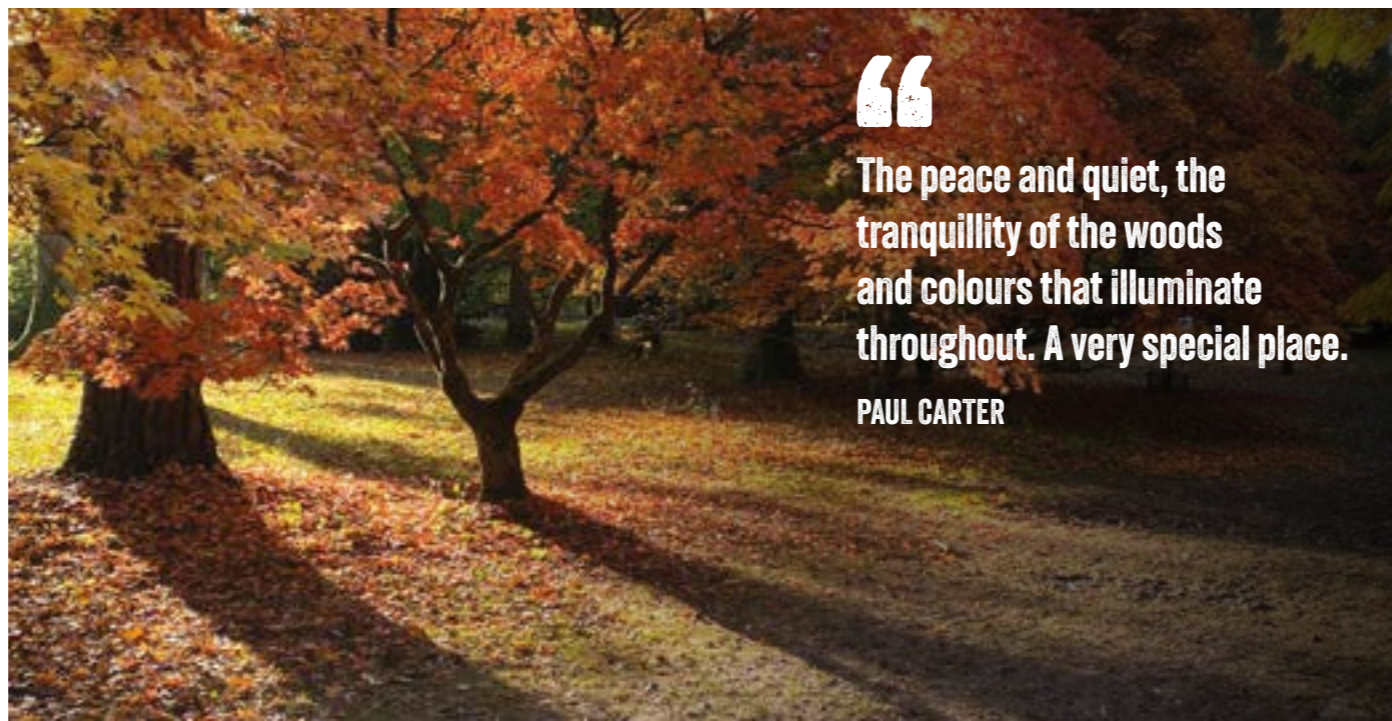
Jacque Bailey



Kicking up leaves in the autumn.

ANN BUTLER

Ourbo retum



The peace and quiet, the tranquillity of the woods and colours that illuminate throughout. A very special place.

PAUL CARTER



"When my best friend was told her cancer had returned we came to Westonbirt for the day. We played like children, took pictures and made a memory. She has now died but I can still close my eyes and picture that day like it was yesterday; the beautiful colours and trees."

Jules Reading

"We have been bringing our girls since they were babies. They are now 7 and 5 and they love to run around the trees, making dens with the sticks and using their imaginations. It is magical seeing our family grow up in the arboretum and enjoy everything it has to offer from trails, walking, bike rides, the gruffalo trail and our favourite at the moment is the hot chocolate from the cafe."

Michelle Payne



Supporting Westonbirt in 2024

Overview of finances*

Each year, The Friends generates an income through membership, fundraising, and the gift shop surplus. In turn, these funds are given as grants to support developments at the arboretum. In 2024:

£1,528,000

generated in membership income including Gift Aid

£292,000

was generated in additional fundraising

£257,000

was committed in new grants in 2024

78%

of memberships were eligible for Gift Aid

£335,000

was paid out in fulfillment of completed grants

New tree plinths

In 2024, we collaborated with Forestry England to complete a project to install 40 stunning new tree plinths and updated signage near the Welcome Building. Use them to discover the fascinating the fascinating history and ecological significance of this world-renowned tree collection!

A vital research project

We're proud to be part-funding a 4-year PhD project with University of the West of England, delving into critical threats facing UK *Tilia* (Lime) trees. This vital research strengthens our academic partnerships and safeguards important parkland species.

A further **£762,000** was contributed to the arboretum via the Arboretum Access Rights Payment (AARP), which gives members unlimited access to the site, while contributing to the running and maintenance of the site.

Vital roles

We continue to fund the arboretum's Tree Conservation Manager role, contributing to the value of Westonbirt as a conservation collection. We also fund the associated research and seed collecting trips to further the conservation knowledge and the collection.

Westonbirt's Trainee Arborist programme continues, equipping new talent with essential skills for tree conservation and landscape management. This vital role ensures Westonbirt's living collection remains vibrant for years to come.

The Coppice Apprentice role, supported since January 2023, has been instrumental in restoring Westonbirt's unique coppice woodlands. This programme not only preserves a traditional craft but also educates visitors on sustainable woodland management.

Westonbirt's Community Engagement Programme continued its incredible work in 2024, empowering diverse community groups, schools, and young people to connect with trees and participate in conservation efforts. We committed funds in support of the vital role of the Community Coordinator.

Transforming play

Phase one of Westonbirt Wilder Play was completed in August 2024, enhancing the play provision for families. We believe in the power of outdoor play for healthy minds and bodies and are fundraising to expand these exciting spaces!

Staff training

In 2024, we funded the comprehensive diversity and inclusion training to over 60 staff, with new video resources coming soon. Our goal: to ensure every visitor feels welcomed, understood, and connected to the wonders of Westonbirt.

Community grants

In 2024, our Community Grant Giving Fund supported two amazing groups – The Friendship Cafe and Avon Needs Trees – enabling individuals who might otherwise struggle to access Westonbirt for education, exploration, and tree planting.



If you'd like to learn more please read our Annual Report which can be found here



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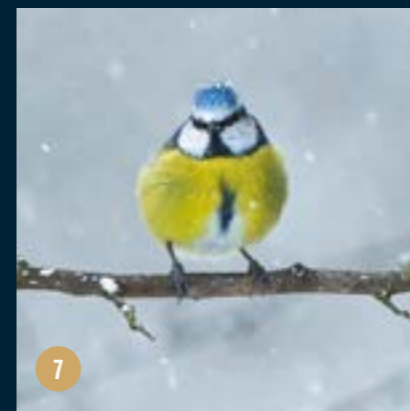


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Our Christmas shopping guide



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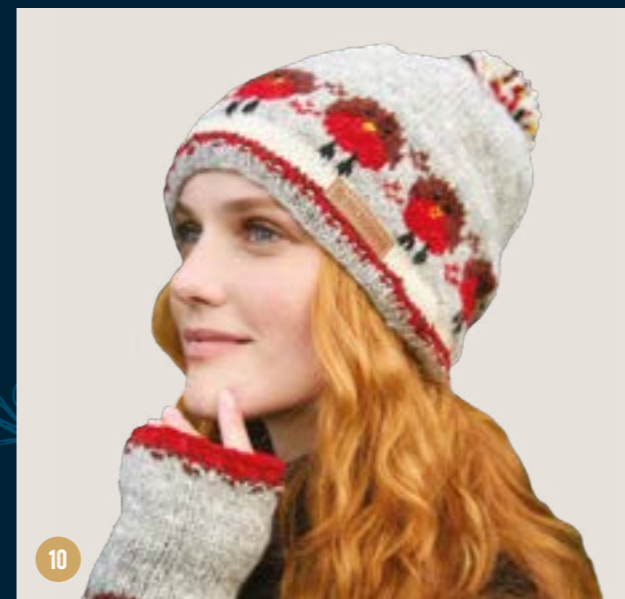
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3



4



10



11

- 1 Westonbirt Arboretum calendar
- 2 Shoeless Joe festive robin wreath ornament
- 3 Shoeless Joe sledding cat ornament
- 4 Shoeless Joe cats christmas ornament
- 5 Amica Accessories christmas highland cow
- 6 Pachamama knitwear elf
- 7 Westonbirt Arboretum christmas cards
- 8 Alison Gardiner jigsaw
- 9 Alison Gardiner calendar
- 10 Pachamama knitwear robbob
- 11 Amica Accessories fox terrier with mistletoe

MEMBER DISCOUNT

Christmas essentials arriving throughout autumn. Don't forget to take advantage of your 10% discount (minimum £10 spend).

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 making the most of it?

Here are the best opportunities for you to maximise the seasons ahead:

Image credit: Paul Box

Don't miss!



Autumn colours (October–November)

Riveting reds, outstanding oranges, and yearful yellows create an autumn arboretum that's ablaze with colour. This not-to-be-missed botanical season is one of the most visually enticing at Westonbirt, offering a spectacular backdrop for photos, and giving the perfect opportunity to connect with nature. *To guarantee your entry, we strongly advise pre-booking a time slot.*



Member Tuesdays

From 18 November 2025 to 31 March 2026 inclusive, you can bring a family member with you for FREE every Tuesday.

Your membership includes:

- Your own entry
- Free entry for four of your children/grandchildren (aged 18 or under)
- An extra relative on Tuesdays this winter

That's a total of 8 people per joint membership. Incredible value!



Christmas at Westonbirt

With illuminated trees, this festive event is a truly magical, must-see experience. With a Christmas Village and Father Christmas too, there is something for all the family. Your membership gives you free event parking for one car per booking, worth £10.



Stock your Christmas and birthday gifts

The shop is a perfect pitstop for locally sourced, artisanal products and handcrafted gifts that make the perfect Christmas presents. Take advantage with your 10% discount (minimum £10 spend). Stock starts arriving from late September so you can get organised.



Guided walks

Westonbirt's daily guided walks and weekly discovery walks are a great way to learn something new about the arboretum, and 72% of visitors say it gives them a deeper understanding of the collection. Until the end of September there are two daily guided walks at 11am and 2pm. Walks in January, February and March leave at 11am only. Discovery Walks happen on Thursdays and have a unique theme.

Top Tip

Your membership starts saving you money from your third weekend visit each year, and even quicker if you bring children with you or take advantage of the shop discounts and free event 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



Divinity Trees

Bringing the tree collection to life, this walk will open your eyes to the religious connections of many of the species here at Westonbirt.

Thursday 11 September (11:00am)

Native Trees

The collection has over 2,000 different types of trees, but only around 90 of those are considered native to Britain. See them for yourself.

Thursday 18 September (11:00am)

Magic of Maples

Come and see nature's firework display, but also learn about the number of different species, where they come from, and why there are so many colours.

Thursday 25 September (11:00am)

Thursday 09 October (11:45am)

Thursday 30 October (11:45am)

Myths & Legends

Explore the magical stories and folklore associated with many of the arboretum's trees. A great walk to bring children with you too.

Thursday 02 October (11:45am)

Silk Wood

Take the path less travelled to discover the wonders of Westonbirt's ancient woodland.

Thursday 04 September (11:00am)

Thursday 23 October (11:45am)

Thursday 20 November (11:00am)

Thursday 18 December (11:00am)

Tasting

A chance to taste some of the fruits & berries from Westonbirt's trees and shrubs in the Old Arboretum. Remember to only taste what your guide shows you while being supervised.

Thursday 16 October (11:45am)

Thursday 06 November (11:45am)

Champion Trees

Introductions to the majestic champion trees, which are individual trees recognised for being exceptional examples of their species due to height and girth.

Thursday 13 November (11:45am)

Evergreens

Your guide will take you through Silk Wood to explore the often-overlooked variety of evergreen trees, and those which have special significance at this time of the year.

Thursday 27 November (11:00am)

Mystic Midwinter

This guided walk in Silk Wood will demonstrate how trees and shrubs would help through the dark and cold months of winter before the festivals of light.

Thursday 04 December (11:00am)

Bark

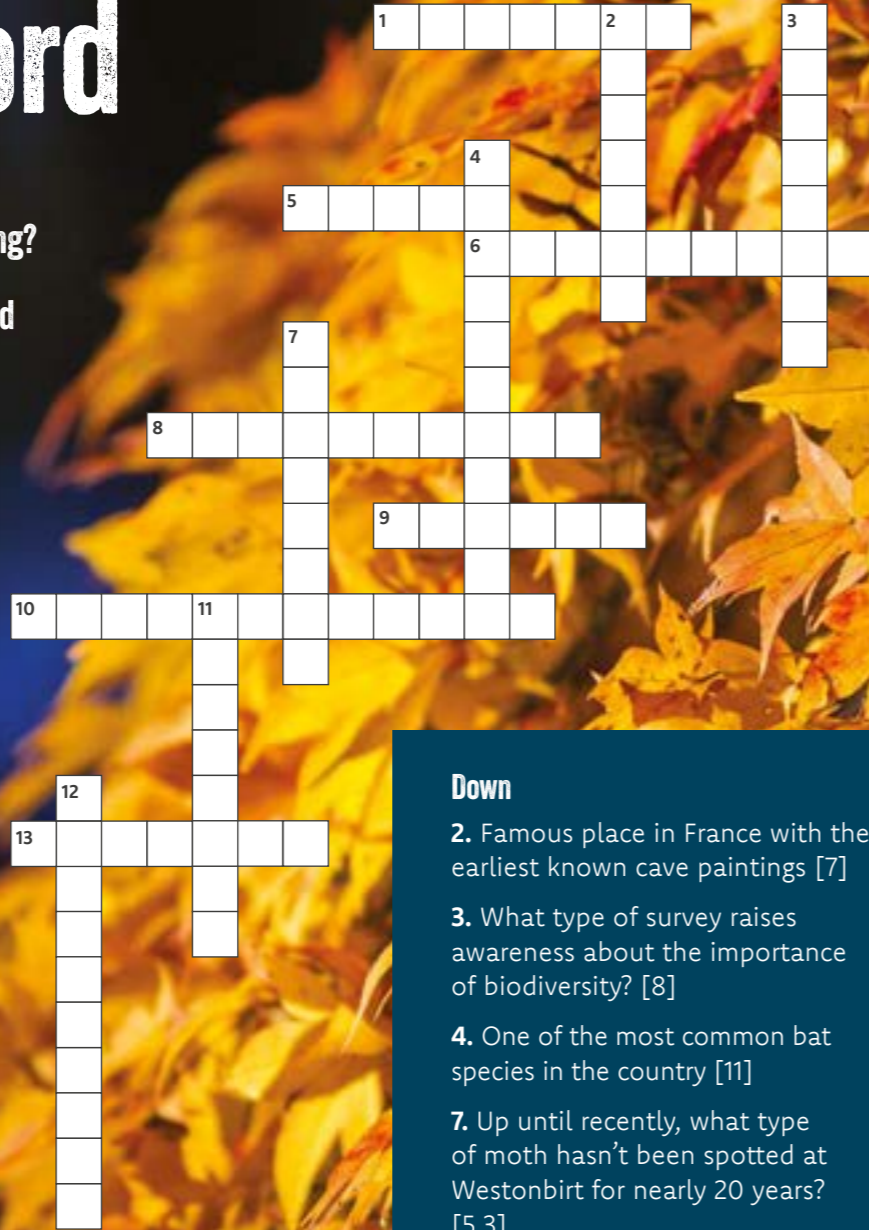
A chance to get close and look at the bark, what it does, and how the bark of some trees help improve air quality.

Thursday 11 December (11:00am)

Crossword

How closely have you been reading?

Every answer you need is included in this magazine!



Across

- 1. A special pattern, meaning “circle” in the ancient language of Sanskrit [7]
- 5. One of the most diverse organisms on earth [5]
- 6. A technique involving the injection of high-pressure air into the soil [9]
- 8. A type of tree, known to the Romans as unedo, translated as “I eat one” [10]
- 9. The Japanesetree offers some of our most vivid autumn colours at Westonbirt [6]
- 10. A non-native animal first introduced to England from North America in the late 1800s. [4, 8]
- 13. In 2024 we fundraised for the creation of Hollow, a natural play area [7]

Down

- 2. Famous place in France with the earliest known cave paintings [7]
- 3. What type of survey raises awareness about the importance of biodiversity? [8]
- 4. One of the most common bat species in the country [11]
- 7. Up until recently, what type of moth hasn't been spotted at Westonbirt for nearly 20 years? [5,3]
- 11. The Community Planting Project is helping regenerate a part of the arboretum affected by Chalara ash dieback [4,4]
- 12. During a 2023 seed collecting expedition to Taiwan, several globally threatened conifers were gathered, including the..... [7,3]

Image credit: Johnny Hathaway

Across: 1. Mandala, 5. Fungi, 6. Pneumatic, 8. Strawberry, 9. Tallow, 10. Grey Squirrel, 13. Holford
Down: 2. Lascaux, 3. Bioblitz, 4. Pipistrelle, 7. Dwarf Pug, 11. Silk Wood, 12. Douglas Fir

Answers

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NEW LIGHTS FOR 2025



CHRISTMAS AT WESTONBIRT

A magical after-dark trail for everyone

28 November – 31 December

forestryengland.uk/westonbirt/christmas

