

THE MAGAZINE OF THE FRIENDS OF WESTONBIRT ARBORETUM | SPRING—SUMMER 2026

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Westonbirt

Hidden in plain sight

Look behind the scenes, notice what's hidden in plain sight, and discover some of our best kept secrets.

Champion Trees in Focus  Expedition Life Unveiled  Insights into limes

In this issue

Keep an eye out for our icons throughout the magazine:



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CONSERVATION



EDUCATION



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Articles associated with the specific aims of The Friends.

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Tilia endochrysea

Image credit: Dan Crowley

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themselves about the authenticity of
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Ancient clues beneath the canopy

The spring flowers that hold the secrets to Westonbirt's ancient past.



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As we turn the page to a bright new season, we invite you to see what happens beyond the visitor trails and ticket gates, the committed work that keeps Westonbirt Arboretum thriving and ready for the future.

The team at Westonbirt is of course preserving a spectacular collection of trees, while also caring for living heritage, safeguarding biodiversity, and sustaining a sanctuary for nature, learning, and community.

This issue delves behind the scenes at the arboretum, offering a glimpse into the hidden efforts, from conservation and scientific research to community planting, education, and inclusive visitor experiences – all of which are not always visible, but always essential.

This season, our partnership with Forestry England is more important than ever. Thanks to the generosity and engagement of our members, the Friends of Westonbirt Arboretum will be able to support the arboretum team in delivering vital projects: nurturing ancient woodlands, expanding learning opportunities, enhancing visitor experiences, and championing tree science. Your membership, advocacy, and involvement make it possible for Westonbirt to grow stronger every year, supporting projects that benefit both people and the natural environment.

Emma Griffiths
CEO, Friends of Westonbirt Arboretum



Settling into 2026, I've been looking back on 2025 and am heartened by what we have achieved together at Westonbirt and excited for what's still to come.

By the end of last year, the Silk Wood Community Planting Project had seen almost 6,700 native and climate resilient trees planted across a three-hectare swathe of woodland affected by ash dieback. More than 900 volunteers from local schools, community groups, and families joined in, restoring a vital habitat and building a shared sense of ownership of our living landscape. In May, we celebrated Westonbirt's recognition as 2025's "Lifestyle Business of the Year" and "Cultural Venue of the Year," a testament to the arboretum's enduring appeal and the value of working in partnership.

Looking ahead to 2026, our ambition is to build on these successes. With the support of the Friends of Westonbirt Arboretum and you, our members, we will complete the Silk Wood Community Planting Project, finish further natural play area developments, and expand our community and wellbeing programmes. These projects reflect our commitment to keeping Westonbirt a vibrant, inclusive place for nature, learning, and the wider community. I extend my sincere thanks to all who give their time, energy, and support. Together, we are shaping a resilient future.

Andrew Smith
Arboretum Director, Forestry England

the friends
of Westonbirt
Arboretum

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You're invited to our 40th AGM!

Join us for a summer celebration and 40th Annual
General Meeting as we explore the impact your
membership makes.

Date for the diary: 10 June 2026 from 2pm to 4.30pm
Where: 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.

Image credit: Johnny Hathaway

In the limelight



Stroll down Lime Avenue in midsummer and you'll sense it before you see it; the soft hum of bees hidden among clouds of fragrant flowers.

They are part of a living story that stretches across millennia and continents, an impressive lineage of beauty and biodiversity tucked into the heart of Westonbirt. For those in the know, the intricacies of limes are one of the arboretum's best-kept secrets; these are trees that combine timeless elegance with ecological importance, waiting to be discovered by those who will look a little closer.

Lime Avenue in spring Image credit: Paul Groom

Limes in context

Limes, or basswoods (*Tilia*), is a genus celebrated for beauty and biodiversity. In the UK, two species are native: the small-leaved lime (*T. cordata*) and the broad-leaved lime (*T. platyphyllos*). These cross with one another to form the common lime, familiar in historic avenues and parks, with their asymmetrical heart-shaped leaves and clusters of scented flowers.

But Westonbirt's collection goes far beyond the familiar. From Japan's delicate *T. kiusiana* to China's striking *T. endochrysea* with its crimson spring foliage, the arboretum holds a living library of limes from across the globe. Their summer flowers are a magnet for pollinators, making them as vital for wildlife as they are beautiful for visitors.

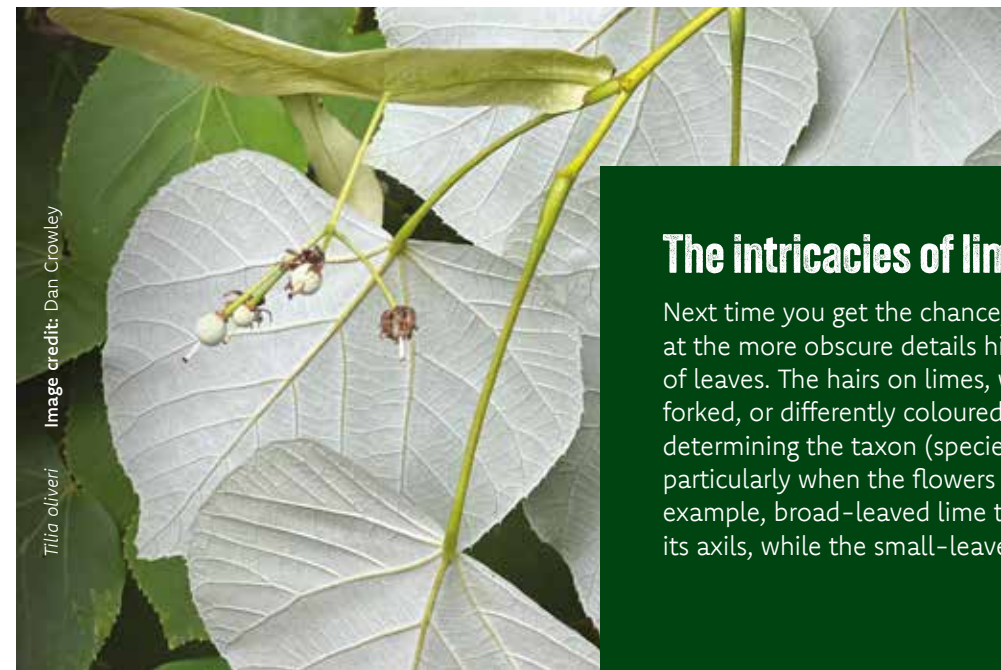
One of the most remarkable specimens is the ancient small-leaved lime in Silk Wood. Its coppice rotation, part of a system dating back centuries, lapsed for a time but is now back in management. Estimated at around 2,000 years old, it stands as a living link to Britain's woodland past.

“

One of the most remarkable specimens is the ancient small-leaved lime in Silk Wood.

Expeditions and discoveries

The past decade has seen Westonbirt increase its active role in global tree conservation. One memorable chapter was the 2017 expedition to southern Italy, during which the team also travelled to Sicily to make collections and verify reports of *T. platyphyllos* subsp. *corinthiaca*, a taxon previously recorded only in Greece. The documented but unverified locality proved to be completely treeless, but still worth the long, hot trek to reach it. Fortunately, a local host, Professor Spampinato, knew of another site where limes did occur and had taken the team there before the arduous walk to secure a negative verification. Thanks to his guidance, the presence of this rare subspecies was confirmed on Sicily and seed was collected for propagation. The trip secured new genetic material for Westonbirt and extended the species' known distribution, adding an important piece to the puzzle of lime diversity in Europe. Seeds of another subspecies were also brought back from that expedition. Material from more southerly provenances will become increasingly important as our climate warms. Recent droughts have highlighted the resilience of species such as *T. tomentosa*, whose silver-backed leaves cope well with heat and water stress.



Tilia oliveri Image credit: Dan Crowley

The intricacies of limes

Next time you get the chance, take a close-up look at the more obscure details hidden on the undersides of leaves. The hairs on limes, whether branched, forked, or differently coloured, are especially useful for determining the taxon (species, subspecies or variety), particularly when the flowers are out of reach. For example, broad-leaved lime typically has white hairs in its axils, while the small-leaved limes have ginger veins.



Tilia ‘Westonbirt Dainty’ Image credit: Dan Crowley

A happy accident: Westonbirt Dainty

Not all cultivars are planned, they often simply appear as seedlings. ‘Westonbirt Dainty’ is one such surprise. Discovered within the arboretum, this lime was first thought to be a pure small-leaved lime (*T. cordata*). Closer inspection suggests hybrid parentage, likely involving the Japanese lime (*T. japonica*).

What makes ‘Westonbirt Dainty’ special is its particularly small leaves, but also its exceptional floriferousness. In high summer, its branches are smothered in fragrant flowers, creating a feast for pollinators. Stand beneath it and you’ll hear the tree before you see it, the hum of bees is unmistakable. This spontaneous cultivar – now part of the National Collection, is a reminder of how nature writes its own stories, even in a curated landscape.

Visitors enjoying Lime Avenue Image credits: Johnny Hathaway

“

The National Collection is a reminder of how nature writes its own stories, even in a curated landscape.

Research for the future

Westonbirt’s limes continue to inspire science. A current PhD project at the University of the West of England, undertaken by Helene Kile, is investigating the health risks facing *Tilia* in the UK. Using microbiome analysis and disease monitoring, she is exploring how these trees interact with soil organisms and pathogens. Her findings will inform management strategies across the country, work that is increasingly urgent as climate change and emerging pests pose new challenges.



Tilia endochrysea Image credit: Dan Crowley



Champion *Tilia* Trees at Westonbirt

Tree number	Species name	Ht/m	Girth/cm	Planted	Champion status
08.0006	<i>T. dasystyla</i> subsp. <i>caucasica</i>	26	297		Height
12.0855	<i>T. japonica</i>	16	98	1995	Height
05.0014	<i>T. japonica</i> ‘Ernest Wilson’	20	157	1950	Height
05.0274	<i>T. kiusiana</i>	14	106		Height
24.0420	<i>T.</i> ‘Moltkei’	24	219	1977	Girth & height
16.0017	<i>T. oliveri</i>	25.2	232	1978	Girth & height
04.0339	<i>T.</i> ‘Westonbirt Dainty’	9.2	70	1978	Girth

Measurements taken in 2024

46 taxa*

at Westonbirt

* Taxa refers to species, subspecies, variety & cultivar



Tilia callidonta Image credit: Dan Crowley

Curator's Notes



BY DAN CROWLEY

Revisiting Limes in the Westonbirt magazine 13 years on provides an opportunity to look at the progress of our National Collection of Limes at Westonbirt. At that time, 2013, there was a focus on safeguarding material through propagation. This work and much of the development since has been influenced by the late Professor Donald Pigott (1928–2022).

A former Director of Cambridge University Botanic Garden, Donald was a world-leading authority on *Tilia*, publishing an ecological monograph on limes in 2012.

Donald verified the identity of many *Tilia* specimens in the Westonbirt collection in the summer of 2010. Among Donald's verifications were two young plants acquired from a specialist nursery. At the time he insisted we label them only as '*Tilia species nova*' (meaning new species). The plants in fact belong to *T. concinna*, a Chinese species that Donald had already described for the yet to be published monograph, but a name he was keen to keep under wraps. Their labels have since been updated!

Donald was responsible for the introduction of some of the rarer limes in cultivation, including the *T. endochrysea* (see article above). Plants propagated from Donald's original introduction have been established at Westonbirt in the last decade.

One of Donald's other introductions has proved very difficult to propagate. Typically *T. cordata* is used as a rootstock when grafting Limes. However in the case of *T. callidonta* grafting directly onto *T. cordata* repeatedly failed. To counter this, *T. chinensis* has been used as an inter-stock, with *T. callidonta* above and *T. cordata* below. Our sole individual of *T. callidonta*, on Mitchell Drive, was propagated this way by Brian Humphrey, who solved this propagation conundrum. The double-graft was buried when the tree was planted, hiding the evidence of its propagation history.

The impressive performance of individuals of *T. tomentosa* in recent drought years suggest that this tree, among other limes, will be important for the future. It is one of several on our minds as we make plans for this National Collection for the forthcoming decades. Renewed work on the group has already started, with material of some of our Champion limes shared for propagation this winter. We look forward to adding more plants to the collection that we hope will provide both succession and resilience in the Westonbirt landscape. 🌿



Tilia oliveri Image credit: Dan Crowley



Glasshouses at Westonbirt House



Behind the beauty

How Westonbirt's Conservation Management Plan quietly shapes everything you see

Every visit to Westonbirt, The National Arboretum, is an experience of sensory delight; the perfectly positioned blooms, the curve of a path that invites exploration, the sudden burst of colour in a glade. But behind this beauty lies a heritage framework: the Conservation Management Plan (CMP). Most visitors will never read it. Yet it informs nearly every decision made on site from where signs are placed to succession planting in the landscape.

This spring and summer, Westonbirt is lifting the lid on the CMP and the people who bring it to life. It's a chance to reveal the "why" behind the familiar: why some paths curve gently instead of running straight; why some trees carry certain types of labels; why certain areas are dog-free; and why play areas are tucked discreetly into the landscape. These choices aren't arbitrary, they're part of a long-term vision to protect Westonbirt's Grade I Registered Park and Garden status, as recognised on the National Heritage List for England by Historic England.

This is the third iteration of the CMP, a ten-year plan developed by Forestry England in consultation with Historic England. It balances heritage, conservation, access, and sustainability. It's not just about trees (though trees are at its heart). It's about the entire experience of Westonbirt: the landscape, the buildings, the wildlife, the people. It's a living document, updated to reflect new research, climate-influenced challenges and community needs.

For many, "conservation" might conjure images of rare plants or threatened species, and "heritage" might suggest old buildings. But at Westonbirt, these ideas stretch further, they embrace the designed landscape itself, the historic layout of paths and vistas, the cultural value of tree collections and the way people have interacted with this place for generations.

Sophie Nash, Programme Manager for Capital Development, who coordinated this iteration of the CMP, describes it as "a way of honouring the past while preparing for the future. It's about being good custodians of a landscape that's both historic and alive." 🌿

History unearthed; experience reimagined

The CMP is a planning tool, but it's also a lens through which Westonbirt's history comes into sharper focus. Recent archival research has revealed stories that deepen our understanding of the arboretum's origins and evolution.

Silk Wood, for example, was first recorded in 1292 as Selkwode, likely meaning “Seolca’s Wood.” It was managed for centuries under a medieval system of wood lots, and in the 1600s, three generations of local women, known as the Goodcheapes, held rights to coppice and graze animals there. Their names appear in handwritten lists from 1838, a quiet testament to a tradition of female stewardship in woodlands, long overlooked.

Elsewhere, the Dew Pond near the Downs, a modest, square-lined pool dating to 1734, may have once formed part of a medieval water system. Today, it's more than a historic feature; it's also a vital habitat for great-crested newts. When conservation work is considered, the pond presents a delicate balancing act: respecting its heritage value while safeguarding the ecological needs of its inhabitants. This is just one example of how the CMP navigates the intersection of past and present.



Spring at Westonbirt

The CMP also sheds light on the Holford family, whose legacy shaped the arboretum as we experience it today. While Robert Stayner Holford and his son Sir George are credited with its creation from 1829, the CMP reveals the influence of women like Susannah Holford, whose horticultural expertise was noted in her wedding announcement to Sir George, as “a match of two equals.”

These stories, along with anecdotes like the King’s inquiry about germinating an avocado seed during WWI, or the Portlocks family memories of trees arriving by train, add texture to Westonbirt’s past and inform its future.

And that future is shaped by the CMP in ways visitors might not immediately realise. Take the Treetop Walkway in Silk Wood: part of a long-term accessibility strategy, it was designed with slender balustrades to preserve historic views and follows the picturesque principle of obscuring the end point to encourage exploration. The placement of play areas? Carefully chosen to avoid interrupting key sightlines and the integrity of the historic landscape. Even the decision to keep Silk Wood dog-friendly, while maintaining the Old Arboretum as a dog-free zone, reflects a thoughtful balance between visitor experience and conservation priorities.

A landscape for everyone and for the future

The CMP preserves Westonbirt’s heritage and it also shapes the experience of every visitor.

Young families will notice that paths are safe for buggies, play areas are refreshed and thoughtfully located and the landscape remains engaging for children as well as adults. It’s why the café sits near the play area and why they both discreetly disappear into the landscape.

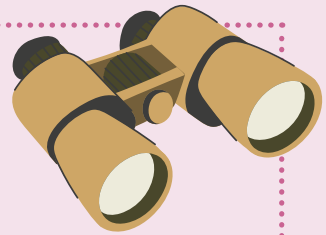
For dog walkers, the CMP protects familiar routes through Silk Wood, maintaining year-round access while safeguarding ancient woodland from overuse.

The CMP guides planting decisions using insights from the ‘Catalogue of the Trees and Shrubs at Westonbirt’, by Albert Bruce Jackson (often referred to as the ‘Jackson Catalogue’): a 1927 record of Westonbirt’s collection that still influences curatorial choices today.

“As well as informing what we plant, it also influences where we plant,” comments Dan Crowley, Curator. “Some of our best soil is out on the Downs, but of course we must be very careful not to over-plant there given the importance of the open setting, with views from inside the arboretum looking out, and from outside looking in.”

The CMP is the framework for balancing heritage with scientific advancement. It underpins Westonbirt’s role in international conservation networks and informs the propagation of original genotypes from historic trees.

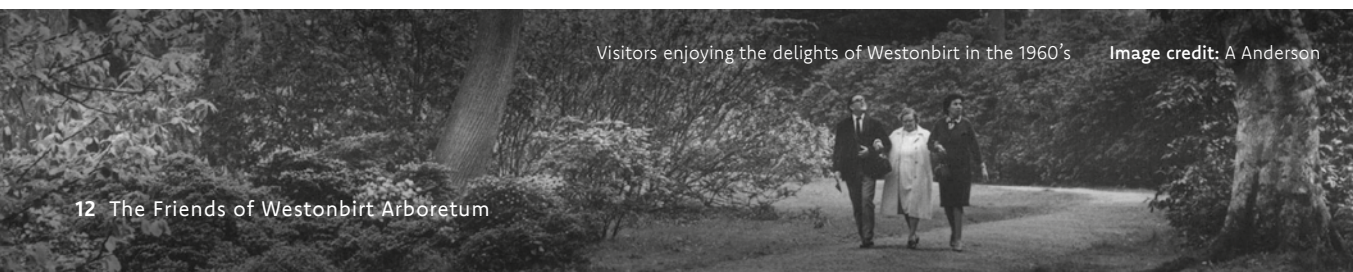
Looking ahead



Looking ahead, the CMP offers a guiding framework for how Westonbirt might evolve over the coming decade. It helps shape thinking around potential developments, from how built assets like shelters and learning spaces could support engagement, to how the tree collection might adapt to climate challenges. It also provides a priority list for heritage features requiring care and investment, including Keeper’s Cottage and the original entrance gates.

The CMP is a philosophy of care, one that ensures Westonbirt’s landscape continues to evolve with integrity, balancing the needs of visitors, wildlife, and heritage.

So, the next time you catch your breath at the sight of a vibrant maple perfectly framed at the end of a tree-lined view or find yourself wishing for a toilet stop deep in the far reaches of Silk Wood, know that these moments, both the awe and the inconvenience, are shaped by a carefully considered framework. One that protects the character of the landscape and helps ensure Westonbirt remains a place of wonder for generations to come. ✨



Visitors enjoying the delights of Westonbirt in the 1960's Image credit: A Anderson



Image credits: Johnny Hathaway

What makes a champion?

Uncovering Westonbirt's record-holding trees

At Westonbirt, certain trees have earned the title **Champion Tree**, meaning they're the largest or tallest examples of their species in Britain and Ireland.

How do they earn the title?

Trees are usually measured by the girth of their trunk at 1.5 metres above ground level. If a tree has the greatest girth, or sometimes the tallest height, of its species, it may be crowned a champion. Some species are natural skyscrapers, while others stay forever “fun-sized.”

At Westonbirt, there are an impressive 263 champion trees, all marked with a blue label (instead of a black one). They don't get medals or trophies, so it's perfectly possible to stroll right past them, which is why we're inviting you to become Westonbirt Tree Detectives, to seek out these important achievers and celebrate them.

Champion trees are officially recorded by The Tree Register. Registrar Owen Johnson has spent decades measuring and documenting Britain and Ireland's largest and rarest trees and aims to visit Westonbirt once a decade. He only travels by public transport and on foot to reach trees across the country, a true champion of sustainable exploration!

Trees are measured every 10 years; this allows time for growth while keeping records accurate. Westonbirt's last full measurement was in 2024, so the next will be in 2034 — how many more champions might we have by then?

Over the next pages, you'll find information about ten of Westonbirt's champions — five in the Old Arboretum and five in Silk Wood. If you'd like some digital back-up, the Arboretum Explorer app will guide you straight to each tree using its reference number in a six-digit format **without the dots**.

For proper explorer credentials, don't forget to collect a stamp from the self-inking station at each tree, recording your discoveries as you build your very own champion line-up.



Visit them all

Tick off each plant you spot around Westonbirt!
See activity on the next page.



Old Arboretum

Monarch birch

(Betula maximowicziana)

This rare tree was first introduced from Japan in 1893. Some of the team at Westonbirt collected seed from this species during a seed-collecting trip in 2008, and those young plants are now growing in the arboretum.

Did you know? Our monarch, King Charles III, planted a Monarch Birch at Westonbirt Arboretum in 2022 for his mother – then monarch, as part of The Queen’s Green Canopy.

This species has the largest leaves of all the birch family, with its heart shaped leaves growing up to 12cm in length.

Measurements: 22m height, 195cm girth
Tree number: 02.0250

Japanese lime

(Tilia japonica)

The Japanese lime ‘Ernest Wilson’ is a tree native to Japan and China, known for its fragrant, pale yellow flowers and resemblance to the small-leaved lime (Tilia cordata). Typically, it grows to about 20m tall and has toothed, rounded leaves that are dark green on top and blue-green underneath. The tree is valued for its aesthetic appeal, attracts pollinators, and has various uses for its wood and bark. See Limes in the Limelight, pp. 6–10.

Measurements: 23m height, 157cm girth
Tree number: 05.0014

Holford pine

(Pinus x holfordiana)

This tree is a hybrid conifer between the Mexican white pine and the Himalayan pine, two trees from different hemispheres, brought together at Westonbirt. Its cones are up to 30cm in length! The Holford pine is one of the few plants named for the Holford family, who established Westonbirt Arboretum.

Measurements: 34.3m height, 285cm girth
Tree number: 11.0083

Lobel’s maple

(Acer lobelii)

This interesting and distinctive individual tree has a vase shaped canopy and grows in a fastigiate form. This means that its branches are more or less parallel to the main stem. Did you know this tree is actually a clone? Other, younger plants in our collection were grown from seeds the team collected on a special expedition – because they felt it was hugely important to learn more about how variable this tree can be. After all, just like people, trees can have their own unique look and character!

Measurements: 27.7m height, 313cm girth
Tree number: 16.0206

Magnolia ‘Westonbirt Diva’

(Magnolia sprengerii ‘Westonbirt Diva’)

This tree is a direct descendant of a tree grown from seeds brought back from China in 1900 by the plant hunter Ernest Wilson. That original tree was named ‘Diva’ because of its beautiful pink flowers. This one was grown from a seed collected from ‘Diva,’ so you could say it’s ‘Diva’s’ daughter! And just to keep it in the family, we also have ‘Diva’s’ granddaughter growing elsewhere in the arboretum. Magnolias are ancient trees and are amongst the first flowering plants to evolve. The beautiful pink flowers can come before the leaf in the spring.

Measurements: 24m height, 173cm girth
Tree number: 24.0065



Silk Wood

Weeping Pyrenean oak

(Quercus pyrenaica ‘Pendula’)

Oak flowers, borne in catkins, are usually overlooked. However, in June the golden male catkins of the Pyrenean oak hang down from the tree and are worth looking out for!

This species is designated as one of the arboretum’s ‘signature species’ and is a frequent feature in the landscape at Westonbirt.

Measurements: 25m height, 27cm girth
Tree number: 31.0871

Cheng fir

(Abies chengii)

Interestingly, this tree once stood at an impressive 23m tall, but after storm damage in 2024, it lost its top and its height was reduced to just 11.7m – losing its champion status. Yet it’s now growing a new upright leader (a vertical branch), which could help it reclaim its title in the future. Watch this space!

This species was first described in the 1980s from a single specimen at Westonbirt. It’s thought to have originated from seed collected in 1930 by the Scottish plant hunter George Forrest and has been grown in collections under various names ever since.

Measurements: (previously) 23m height, 223cm girth
Tree number: 33.0001

Syrian pear

(Pyrus syriaca)

The Syrian pear features reddish-brown to grey branches marked by small lenticels, and it has white five-petalled flowers that appear in loose clusters during late April to early May. Its fruits are greenish-yellow but these are better used to make jams and for cooking, rather than eating raw like the pears we get in the UK!

Measurements: 17m height, 217cm girth
Tree number: 36.0340

Bristol whitebeam

(Sorbus bristoliensis)

This local tree is categorised as Endangered on the IUCN Red List. It was first discovered in Leigh Woods in Bristol in 1852, and it grows wild in the Avon Gorge and nowhere else in the world! At Westonbirt, some of our important work includes conservation of our threatened native trees.

Measurements: 15m height, 171cm girth
Tree number: 38.0149

Hybrid tulip tree

(Liriodendron x sinoamericanum ‘Chapel Hill’)

This is a vigorous hybrid tulip tree, resulting from a cross between a tulip species in N. America and one in China. It is known for its spade-like leaves and stunning tulip shaped flowers. The leaves also put on a beautiful display of colour in the autumn! See Seasonal Highlights, pg. 25.

Measurements: 18m height, 125cm girth
Tree number: 56.0664



Champion Tree Walks at Westonbirt

Westonbirt is running family activity walks for younger children to discover more about the champion trees that call the arboretum home. suitable for ages 9–14.



To reserve your place visit the website
forestryengland.uk/westonbirt

Field notes

Introducing the unpredictable side of carefully planned conservation expeditions.

As part of our best kept secrets issue, some of the team shared with us real, human snapshots of what happens when dedicated professionals find themselves adapting, laughing and occasionally improvising in the face of the unpredictable realities of fieldwork.

Fieldwork is among the most meticulously organised work the Westonbirt team undertakes. Months, sometimes years, go into securing permits, planning survey routes and ensuring every step complies with international biosecurity and plant-movement protocols. Each trip is planned with local experts and botanic colleagues; their knowledge of local landscapes and species is essential for a successful trip. The shared expertise, knowledge and relationships formed on these trips are essential to successful cross border collaboration.

And yet, even with extraordinary preparation, the world has a habit of rewriting the script. Weather shifts, wildlife surprises, vehicles falter and unexpected moments appear where you least expect them.

A handful of our favourite stories from the field.

FROM CONVERSATIONS WITH
Dan Crowley, Westonbirt Curator, Rosie Anderson, Tree Conservation Manager, Penny Jones, Propagator and Susanna Bayliss, Interpretation Officer.



A cheesy transaction

On a *Sorbus* conservation trip to Cheddar, some of some of the team found themselves parked in a farmyard car park that accepted only cash, something they didn't have. The attendant made an unexpected suggestion:

"Bring back £5 worth of local cheddar instead."

Slightly unsure whether this was a joke, they returned later with an impressively sized block of cheese. A perfectly legitimate local economy it seems, just not one covered in their expense policy.

Penny's royal encounter

Not quite fieldwork, but worth a mention. In 2012, during a visit from our Royal Patron, now Her Majesty the Queen, the Westonbirt team was determined to embody composure. Penny, however, unintentionally delivered slapstick instead of serenity.

As HRH The Duchess of Cornwall entered, Penny stepped back, caught her heel on something from the propagation display, and toppled spectacularly. In a heroic attempt to avoid damaging the plants (caring more for their well-being than her own dignity), her legs ended up in the air.

The Duchess glided past, serene and unfazed. The security team, on the other hand, briefly debated whether this enthusiastic horticulturist represented a new kind of threat.

Dark dog days



Breaking down in rural Greece is inconvenient. Learning that the road to the nearest village is patrolled by formerly working sheepdogs, now roaming in large, protective packs, is another matter entirely.

On the way back from collecting seeds from a magnificent Montpellier maple (*Acer monspessulanum*), the team was driving through rugged terrain, scouting for more seed-bearing maples. Suddenly, the car broke down. Stranded and waiting for help, they joked about which of them looked most appetising for the pack dogs potentially circling nearby.

Relief came in the form of a local farmer sent from a nearby village to pick them up, except the farmer, behind the wheel of a sturdy 4x4, turned out also to be a forestry professor and passionate tree enthusiast. Thrilled to meet a group dedicated to tree conservation, he immediately reassigned himself from rescuer to impromptu botanical tour.

Instead of being confined to the team's hastily arranged accommodation for the rest of the day, the professor whisked the team off to explore botanically rich landscapes, revealing impressive mountain maples and ancient junipers.

One vivid memory was dropping in on his mountain dog, an enormous creature which turned out to be nursing a nasty wound. The dog was part wild, and its wounds looked like something only a wolf could inflict.

Thanks to this serendipitous encounter, the team collected valuable seeds from trees they wouldn't have otherwise reached. The day remains one of their most productive and memorable.

The murderous yew

Cleaning yew (*Taxus*) fruit is a messy business. The fleshy arils must be stripped away before the seeds can be dried, a task that looks harmless until plumbing gets involved.

In one Italian B&B, the team opted for what is usually the cleanest method: disposing of the pulp down the sink. The pipes, however, staged a dramatic protest. Instead of disappearing, the fruit clogged the system and created a scene alarmingly reminiscent of a low-budget crime drama. The owner, understandably concerned, delivered the team a pointed reprimand.

Relations were patched up before the end of the stay. But the curse of the yew wasn't finished.

Vietnamese fieldwork: plan versus mountain

During a spring expedition to Vietnam, the team were documenting the region's woody flora; maples, in particular, were Dan's area of focus. The plan for the day was solid, take the newly completed cable car to the summit of Fansipan, the region's highest peak, then descend on foot to survey as much ground as possible.

As they ascended, the warm morning air vanished. Frost rimmed the ridgelines; the summit station platform had frozen into a solid sheet of ice. Tourists slid across it in disbelief.

Even with extensive preparation, the mountain had delivered conditions no one could have predicted. Without winter gear, the team hastily reassessed and adapted, shifting the start point lower down the slope where conditions were safe and workable.

Not the panoramic summit survey they'd hoped for, but still a productive day and a reminder that nature, not botanists, sets the terms.



Vietnamese landscape
Image credit: Dan Crowley

Toilet chronicles: a brief international survey

Over the years, more toilet-related stories have accumulated than reasonably should. A small sample:

Mexico:
When meeting local communities who were conserving magnolias, they encountered a bathroom containing two toilets side by side. The etiquette was unclear; they opted for a very British “one at a time” system.

Taiwan:
On a seed collection trip in November 2023, the team recall lavatories with so many digital controls they feared pressing the wrong button might launch something.

Midwest Missouri:
While collecting seeds of hickories with colleagues from Missouri Botanical Garden, the team didn’t have a toilet issue strictly speaking, more an issue with consuming two straight weeks of exclusively meat-based cuisine.

Italy:
Penny remembers a particularly traumatic afternoon to do with signage. After a long day, she encountered a notice (in Italian) explaining that the toilet door must not be locked. Unfortunately, Penny doesn’t speak Italian and didn’t understand the sign. What she did have was a very long wait for help, and a team who found the situation hilarious.



Mexico double toilet
Image credit: Dan Crowley,



Image credit: Dan Crowley

Rosie and colleague in the field

Conservationists under fire

Another unexpected challenge of seed collecting? Looking suspicious. A group of earnest conservationists rummaging in woodland can, at first glance, resemble people doing something less legitimate.

Collecting nutmeg hickory (*Carya myristiciformis*), the rarest hickory in North America, took the team to its only known population in Georgia. They found the tree, but it happened to be near the property of a woman who had recently experienced what locals called “trouble.”

Unaware, they were happily collecting in the undergrowth when she called the police. Moments later, an out-of-breath officer appeared, gun drawn, and ordered them to put our hands up. When asked if we had weapons, Rich (Tree Team Supervisor) replied: “All we’ve got is a set of pole pruners and some secateurs!”

The situation became a little hairy when Dan reached to his pocket for his ID, but the officer in the end believed the story and radioed to cancel backup. Everyone saw the funny side eventually.

Wildlife for a wild-life

Fieldwork means encountering whatever the landscape presents. The team have had a few interesting moments:

Missouri:
Susanna narrowly avoided stepping on a tarantula the size of a small pastry.

Japan:
Penny discovered leeches that climb upwards, determinedly and in great numbers.

Taiwan:
A peaceful moment with macaques suddenly soured when the snacks ran out. A slow-closing hydraulic van door has never felt so suspenseful.

Missouri again:
After being told the state has the highest number of tick-borne diseases, Susanna applied so much insect repellent she can still smell it on her walking trousers today.

Greece:
Back in an urban setting after a day collecting, some overly charming dogs in the local village square were insistent at getting involved with the sorting of their herbarium specimens!



Image credit: Rosie Anderson
Rosie & Dan taking measurements

Why they keep going

With all the unpredictability the natural world can throw at them, it’s fair to wonder why anyone volunteers for these trips. The answer is simple, because they matter.

“These expeditions strengthen international partnerships, improve our understanding of tree species, and bring home seed that becomes part of living conservation efforts.” says Dan Crowley. “Maples grown from seeds collected in Taiwan are now planted out as part of collection at Westonbirt, thanks to the work of the propagation team. Standing beside a young tree at Westonbirt planted from a seed we brought home from a remote mountainside is a special feeling and a real privilege. It makes it all worthwhile”

Importantly, these journeys reaffirm why conservation is a global, collaborative effort. The landscapes sound remarkable, the people generous and even the most unexpected moments appear part of what makes this work so rewarding. 🌿



Greek village dog Image credit: Rosie Anderson

Signs of Life

From “Beware of Grizzlies” to “Watch for Snakes” and the ever popular “Beware Huff and Puff Walking,” field signage can confuse, alarm or bring a smile to a weary face. It’s all part of navigating landscapes where nature, happily, still calls the shots.

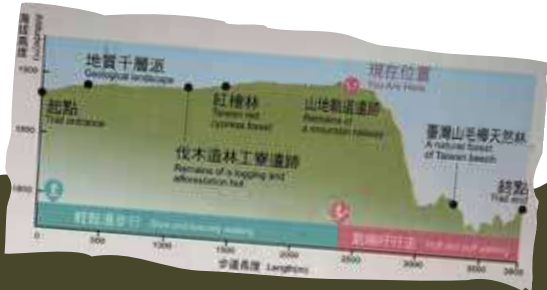


Image credit: Rosie Anderson



One of a kind

AN EXPEDITION TO SUPPORT A RARE *SORBUS*

On a damp September afternoon, a small team stepped onto Ross Island in Killarney National Park, a quiet, wooded outcrop in southwest Ireland. To the untrained eye nothing about the landscape announced itself as extraordinary, and yet, tucked into this unassuming corner grows one of the world's rarest trees: Scannell's whitebeam (*Sorbus scannelliana*).

Only one mature individual is known to exist on Earth. Unsurprisingly assessed as Critically Endangered for the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, it is also poorly represented in *ex situ* collections. Making this no ordinary field trip but a mission to meet a tree that most people will never hear of, let alone see, and to gather if possible the precious seeds that could help support its survival.

What is *Sorbus*?

Whitebeams, rowans, and service trees all belong to a group of species that botanists mostly (!) refer to as *Sorbus*. Their genetics are famously complex (enough to fill an entire article on its own). To keep things simple, we'll refer to *Sorbus* as a genus (a group of closely related species that share common characteristics). To many, they are trees noticed in a front garden or passed on a country walk with clusters of red or orange fruits. But behind that familiarity lies a fascinating and complicated world.

Sorbus species are notorious for forming tiny, hyper-localised populations, sometimes comprising just a handful of trees clinging to a cliff or valley. They're both common and mysteriously rare, with native rowans being easy to find while some *Sorbus* species exist in only one wild location which is why whitebeams and their relatives are now a priority group for conservation.

For decades, Westonbirt has been a home for *Sorbus* diversity. The familiar cultivar 'John Mitchell,' once presumed to be a selection of the Tibetan whitebeam, *S. thibetica*, is now considered to be a hybrid likely involving the Himalayan *S. vestita* and a form of our native whitebeam, *S. aria*. Grown as a garden plant and sometimes encountered in urban environments, it was named in honour of William John Mitchell, a former Westonbirt Curator.

Recent plantings to complement Westonbirt's UK and Irish Champion *S. bristoliensis* highlight the fragility of this species, found wild only in the Avon Gorge and represented there by around 200 trees. It stands as a living reminder of just how tightly some whitebeams cling to the landscapes that shaped them. Today, Westonbirt plays a lead role as the institutional Lead in the Global Conservation Consortium for Whitebeams, Rowans and Service Trees, helping safeguard species that could slip into extinction almost unnoticed.

It's that responsibility that brought the Westonbirt team to Ross Island.

Saving rare species begins long before anyone steps into the field. Close coordination with Irish colleagues, from the National Parks and Wildlife Service, the National Botanic Gardens, Glasnevin, and the National Seed Bank, ensured the team arrived with the right permissions, the right timing, and a carefully defined goal: to learn as much as possible about the one remaining mature tree and any offspring, and if feasible, collect a small number of seeds for conservation.

As always, biosecurity comes first. Rare ecosystems are fragile, and even a speck of contaminated soil on a boot could introduce harmful pathogens. Before setting foot on Ross Island, the team thoroughly scrubbed and disinfected their footwear and tools.

Finding the tree relied on both historical records and knowledge of the island's habitats. Guided by this expertise, the team made their way through shaded woodland until the lone mature *S. scannelliana* came into view. Named in honour of leading Irish botanist Maura Scannell, who worked at the Irish National Herbarium, the species has three recorded saplings nearby (reduced from a previous four).

Up close, the tree was modest, not a giant, its branches held around forty ripening fruits. Conservation guidelines are clear: never take more than 10% of available seed from a threatened



species, to give wild regeneration its best chance. In this case, that meant just four fruits. Each fruit carries two or three seeds, and just one seedling germinating and growing at Westonbirt would represent an important success.

Carefully, the team collected the permitted fruits, labelled and sealed them and prepared them for transfer to *ex situ* conservation facilities.

Ross Island held more diversity to uncover. While in Killarney, the team also collected fruit from *S. anglica*, found both in Ireland and in parts of England and Wales, but still considered Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List.

Back at Westonbirt and partner institutions, the seeds from Ross Island were cleaned, documented and nurtured in carefully controlled conditions. With luck and a bit of patience young plants will grow, ready to join conservation collections that act as lifeboats for species at risk.

With thanks to you, our members and supporters, who help us to continue supporting the ongoing mission to protect the world's hidden arboreal treasures. ✨



BASED ON INSIGHTS SHARED BY

Dan Crowley, Westonbirt Curator and Rosie Anderson, Tree Conservation Manager

Nature through a scientific lens

Westonbirt volunteer Andrea Archer, a former biologist, biochemist, and teacher who once ran schools in the USA, now works with the learning team to help children and teenagers connect with nature.

“Many children enjoy the arboretum without really understanding what’s around them,” she says. “As the Learning Team, we offer an exciting chance to look a little closer.”

While Andrea doesn’t claim to be a tree identifier, her scientific background brings a different kind of insight. To Andrea, Westonbirt is a living science lab. She loves encouraging children to ask deeper questions: “Why do leaves change colour in autumn? Why is blossom so brightly coloured?” all while engaging in the fun activities offered by the Learning Centre.



Her favourite place to teach is Silk Wood Barn. Nestled among the trees, it’s open, welcoming, and full of possibility. “It’s perfect,” she says. “Children can get messy, explore freely, and parents with dogs can stay nearby. People walking past often stop and join in – it’s a space that invites curiosity.”

Andrea is passionate about Westonbirt’s efforts to make learning accessible to all. She speaks warmly of sessions designed using sensory bags filled with textures and scents to bring the forest to life. “The team always finds a way to connect,” she says.

“No programme is one-size-fits-all, because Westonbirt is for everyone.”

She also loves working with school groups, especially those from urban areas. “The scale of Westonbirt is a real treat,” she says. “They jump right in, and we use game-based learning among the trees to connect children with nature through science.”

When she’s not volunteering, Andrea enjoys walking deep into Silk Wood with her dog, checking in on the planting projects her husband Paul helps with. “He signed up as a volunteer as well, after seeing how much fun I was having,” she smiles. “Now he’s part of it too.”

And when friends visit, she always takes them to the Old Arboretum. “They’re fascinated by the history: where the trees came from and how it all began.”



INTERVIEW

Andrea Archer, Westonbirt volunteer

Want to explore Westonbirt through a different lens? Visit the Learning Centre to see what’s on.

Ancient clues beneath the canopy

The spring flowers that hold the secrets to Westonbirt’s ancient past

Each spring, Silk Wood at Westonbirt bursts into bloom. Bluebells, Wild Garlic and Wood Anemones aren’t just seasonal beauties, they’re clues. These plants are ancient woodland indicators: species that spread slowly and only thrive in woods undisturbed for centuries.

Their presence reveals that parts of Silk Wood are not just old, but ancient, possibly dating back thousands of years. These blooms are living evidence of Westonbirt’s deep-rooted past, whispering secrets of ecological memory, resilience, and a woodland that has endured through generations. 🌸

Please turn over for our map



Arboretum Explorer

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

Your explorer's map

Find the trees you've read about

The trees you are reading about in this issue are waiting to be found. Track down the 10 champion trees, seasonal highlights, and the other hidden gems.

Champion Trees pg. 14 – 17

1. Monarch birch (*Betula maximowicziana*)
2. Japanese lime (*Tilia japonica*)
3. Holford pine (*Pinus × holfordiana*)
4. Lobel's maple (*Acer lobelii*)
5. *Magnolia sprengeri* 'Westonbirt Diva'
6. Weeping Pyrenean oak (*Quercus pyrenaica* 'Pendula')
7. Cheng fir (*Abies chengii*)
8. Syrian pear (*Pyrus syriaca*)
9. Bristol whitebeam (*Sorbus bristoliensis*)
10. Hybrid tulip tree (*Liriodendron × sinoamericanum* 'Chapel Hill')



Arboretum Explorer

Scan the QR code to explore even more on the Westonbirt Arboretum Explorer website.

Play

In the last year, play areas have been improved next to the Pantry and in Silk Wood giving even more places to play.



Spring & Summer Highlights pg. 28

- a. Japanese maple 'Shin-deshōjō' – *Acer* (Corallinum Group) 'Shin-deshōjō'
- b. Campbell's magnolia (*Magnolia campbellii*)
- c. Caucasian bladdernut (*Staphylea colchica*)
- d. Chinese fringetree (*Chionanthus retusus*)
- e. Chinese wonder tree (*Idesia polycarpa*)
- f. Holly-leaved sweet spire (*Itea ilicifolia*)
- g. Taiwanese snowbell tree (*Styrax formosanus*)

See the Arboretum Explorer website for more locations

Articles:

- a. After the ash pg. 30–31
- b. A hidden haven pg. 32–33

Play

Room on the Broom Trail invites families to join the Witch on an enchanting adventure through the arboretum.



Spring

Acer (Corallinum Group)
‘Shin-deshōjō’
Japanese maple
‘Shin-deshōjō’



Japanese maples belonging to this group display pink growth in spring. ‘Shin-deshōjō’ is one of the best in this regard, its leaves first a vibrant, deep pink before becoming greener and somewhat variegated as the season progresses. This cultivar is related to an earlier selection ‘Deshōjō’, which Westonbirt also grows.

Magnolia campbellii
Campbell’s Magnolia



Few trees rival the sight of a mature Campbell’s magnolia in full flower in early spring, though vulnerability to frost means that such is far from guaranteed. Its huge flowers colour variously from white to deep pink, though white-flowered forms are reportedly those more typical in the Himalayas, where it occurs wild. The species is also a parent of ‘Westonbirt Hope’.

Staphylea colchica
Caucasian bladdernut



Part of the Plant Heritage National Collection of Staphylea, S. colchica bears white panicles against fresh green foliage in spring. A large, suckering shrub, it is one of several species native to the Caucasus that spread via root suckers.

Chionanthus retusus
Chinese Fringetree



A lesser-known member of the olive family (Oleaceae) native to parts of eastern Asia, the Chinese fringetree is often more of a shrub. In late spring it displays panicles of white, delicate-petalled flowers and at its best can be quite spectacular. Its spring performance can be somewhat inconsistent, however, though the prospect of seeing it at its best makes it a must to seek out.

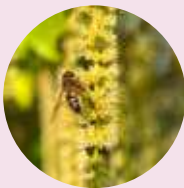
Summer

Idesia polycarpa
Chinese wonder tree



Notable for its large leaves with stems exhibiting extra-floral nectaries, Chinese wonder tree also produces long inflorescences that are popular with bees in summer. With a broad range across parts of eastern Asia, plants grown from seed gathered on a 2023 Taiwan expedition have recently (Nov 2025) been added to the collection. The species is dioecious and the mature plants have proved all to be male, and thus we are yet to enjoy a fruiting display later in the year. Perhaps the arboretum’s Taiwanese collections might change this. Watch this space!

Itea ilicifolia
Holly-leaved sweet spire

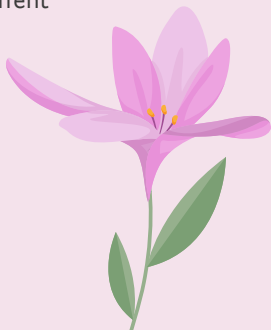


A bushy shrub somewhat inconspicuous for large parts of the year, Itea has holly-like foliage and in mid to late summer, produces long, pendulous inflorescences bearing small, white, honey-scented flowers. Another plant enjoyed by bees and other flying insects, it was once considered suitable only for growth in protected areas, though young plants have flowered well at Westonbirt for the last few years.

Styrax formosanus
Taiwanese snowbell tree



Flowering as spring turns to summer, Taiwanese snowbell tree produces jasmine-scented blooms in abundance alongside its small, deep green leaves. Differing only in subtle detail to Styrax japonicus, S. formosanus is endemic to Taiwan, and the sole plant at Westonbirt was collected as seed from that island in 1992, since when it has grown to become the current UK Champion for the species, last measured at 8.5 m tall in spring 2024.



Future focus

A bold new chapter has begun at Westonbirt Arboretum. Launch of the new Youth Forum marks an evolution in how the arboretum engages with young people, not just as visitors, but as collaborators, creators, and future leaders.

This initiative grew from a major insights study commissioned by Forestry England and supported by the Friends of Westonbirt Arboretum. The research revealed a clear need: young people want to be involved in shaping the spaces and decisions that affect their lives and the planet. This is very exciting, and the Youth Forum is the response, a space for 17–25 year olds to connect, contribute, and co-create.

The first cohort will meet regularly through a combination of online discussions and onsite activity days, with mentoring and training

integrated throughout. The forum is designed to be flexible, inclusive, and youth-led, giving them opportunities to input on everything from new programmes to future facilities – helping to ensure Westonbirt remains an evolving space for all generations.

But the vision goes deeper. The Youth Forum supports young people on their journey to becoming environmentally and socially responsible adults. It aims to help them feel welcome, become environmentally literate, stay mentally and emotionally healthy and take action for nature.

For our members, this is a chance to see Westonbirt through fresh eyes and to know that your support is helping build a more inclusive, sustainable future. ✨

The Youth Forum is a new initiative for a new perspective.

Image credit: Johnny Hathaway





Funded by
The Friends

After the ash

From ash die back to new natives, a part of Silk Wood has been transformed. As the community replanting project draws to a close, we reflect on the unexpected outcomes of this important project.

Tucked away in the heart of Silk Wood, the Community Planting Project has been busy completing the final season of tree planting. Creating a resilient woodland, resistant to changes in climate, developed in response to the impact caused by Chalara ash dieback. Since the felling and clearance of infected ash trees back in 2021, over 3,000 volunteers and participants from visiting community groups, schools, mental health support groups, youth clubs, SEND schools, youth climate groups, colleges and more have planted over 9,000 trees.

Through the project community groups have replanted five hectares of land with native species including English oak (*Quercus robur*), wild service (*Sorbus torminalis*), and field maple (*Acer campestre*).

It has also provided opportunities to get involved in creative workshops, tree care, wellbeing sessions, woodland design and work experience for a diverse array of visitors.

So much has been achieved in only a few short years! Over 90% of saplings have survived, despite a summer of droughts, damage from animals and disruptive storms. The commendable efforts of volunteers and participants battling the rain and the thistles have been invaluable. Tree maintenance and care work including weeding, mulching, and watering has been an essential part of the whole process.

The woodland is recovering well, floral surveys have identified over 80 plant species including the presence of ancient woodland indicators, such as meadow saffron (*Colchicum autumnale*) and common bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*). The community planting site has also hosted a variety of non-human visitors. Through observations and camera traps, tawny owls, toads, red foxes, badgers, and hares have all been spotted.

Accessibility and inclusion have been a priority from the start, ensuring all visiting groups could participate in tree planting and care activities. By adapting workshops, supplying outdoor clothing and equipment, providing transport support, and installing over 350 metres of accessible path around the site, many participants have been able to visit Westonbirt Arboretum for the first time.

As this community planting project was the first of its kind at Westonbirt Arboretum, it provided lots of unexpected discoveries and new insights! Ongoing trials of biodegradable tree tubes has helped to prevent browsing and animal damage, along with different weed control methods. Climate scientists from Forest Research installed a tree growth monitoring station measuring the stem growth of saplings throughout the seasons. Researchers from the University of the West of England explored the eco-acoustics of soils. Using contact microphones, sounds from the earth were recorded, including the scratching of moles, swaying of grasses and many mysterious noises. Different planting techniques have been used to create diversity and promote strong tree growth. Conventional planting of mixed species with 2m spacing has been used along with nest planting, where a group of individual species is planted in a tight arrangement.

over **3000** participants
from 50 + groups

over **9000** trees planted,
20+ species

over **90%** sapling survival rate
(industry standard is 85%)



Explore Silk Wood Community
woodland and its impact



“

I have a whole new sense of purpose and belonging helping people experience the joys of tree planting.

It's not just about planting trees!

Throughout the project, workshops, tree planting and care sessions have evolved to include elements that focus on wellbeing and connections to nature. Visiting groups have shared how taking part has been the highlight of their year, with many expressing a sense of calm, connection, and community when taking part. Over 80% of groups have made repeated visits, which is a testament to the positive impact of spending time in nature.

The involvement of volunteers has been essential to the success of the project, through their hard work and support, they have shared their passion and knowledge with participants. “I have a whole new sense of purpose and belonging and have acquired a huge amount of knowledge” a volunteer explains, “most importantly, I’ve had the opportunity to share this knowledge with the community groups, helping people experience the joys of tree planting and tree care. Witnessing their pride in accomplishing this, is priceless.”

Although this planting project is drawing to a close, the saplings will remain under ongoing care, and community engagement in woodland management will continue. A special thanks to the funders of this project, including the Friends of Westonbirt Arboretum, for their invaluable support which has nurtured new life in Silk Wood. This generosity has helped secure a flourishing legacy for generations to come. ✨



Hidden haven



Westonbirt's bird hide offers a front-row seat to more than 37 species of woodland bird

Tucked away in the Old Arboretum, Westonbirt's bird hide is one of the arboretum's best-kept secrets. Nestled among mature trees and woven hazel fencing (coppiced on site), it's a peaceful corner where visitors can enjoy the seasonal spectacle of woodland birds in full swing.

Spring is a particularly rewarding time to visit. Birds are at their busiest – nesting, feeding young and filling the arboretum with song. The feeders near the hide attract a flurry of activity, offering rare close-up views of species that usually remain hidden in the canopy.

Among the regular visitors to the hide are nuthatches, chaffinches, robins, goldcrests, blue tits, great tits, coal tits, and long-tailed tits – whose antics on the feeders have prompted visitors to comment, “Always a joy to see a flock of long-tailed tits acrobatically feeding on the fat balls!”

The beautifully marked and charismatic great spotted woodpeckers are another highlight, often considered the real prize by many visitors. The resident community of ravens, the largest members of the crow family, are also frequently seen from the hide, their sudden appearances often met with audible gasps of excitement.

Last year, a few lucky people were delighted when a hawfinch (the UK's largest finch and a species of high conservation concern) was spotted.



Robin

With its powerful bill and chunky silhouette, the hawfinch is elusive and shy, often staying high in the trees. Its brief visit gave visitors, staff, and volunteers the rare chance to witness this stunning bird as it paused to feed during migration.

“I regularly take groups to the hide as part of our Westonbirt Wellbeing sessions. Sitting in the hide, watching the birds feed whilst listening to birdsong floating in from the trees outside is such a lovely, mindful activity. Research shows that bird watching can help foster a deeper connection with nature, making us healthier and happier.” – Mandy Leivers, Community Coordinator.

The hide itself was lovingly restored by Westonbirt's Estate Volunteers in 2021 as part of a John Muir Award project. They replaced fencing, refreshed the structure, and improved the surrounding habitat to further support wildlife and enhance the visitor experience. Inside, you'll find benches, a bird ID chart, and a view framed by trees 🌳



Eurasian blue tit Image credits: Ally Whaley

Spring Birdwatching Tips

Arrive early: mornings are when birds are most active and vocal.

Bring binoculars: even common species reveal fascinating details when magnified.

Look beyond the feeders: many birds forage on the ground, in the bushes and tree canopy.

Use a bird app: there are fantastic tools that can help identify calls and songs.

Festival of Archaeology

Westonbirt Arboretum will host the national launch of the Festival of Archaeology on Saturday 18 July 2026.

This two-week celebration will mark the festival's 35th anniversary, and with a theme of Nature, Westonbirt is the perfect backdrop for this exciting event.

The Festival of Archaeology is a nationwide celebration that brings history to life through activities for all ages. It is organised by the Council for British Archaeology (CBA), a UK-wide educational charity dedicated to championing archaeology and encouraging public participation. The CBA runs the popular Young Archaeologists' Club for 8–16-year-olds and leads the annual festival to inspire people to explore the places and landscapes around them and uncover the stories they hold. Through hands-on experiences, guided walks, and creative events, the festival invites everyone to connect with the past in meaningful and accessible ways.

The Westonbirt team is excited to host the launch event this year, the day will feature opportunities to explore Westonbirt's rich heritage alongside its stunning natural landscape.

Highlights:

- Discover Westonbirt's history on guided walks
- Explore ancient coppicing techniques and uses
- Learn how tree rings reveal secrets of the past
- Speak to professional and experimental archaeologists

Entry will be free on the launch day so invite a friend, we anticipate a lively and engaging event for members and new visitors alike. It will be a wonderful opportunity to celebrate Westonbirt's history and share it with a broader audience. ✨



Mark 18 July 2026 in your diary and look out for more details in newsletters and on our socials.



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Trail

Join Witch on a magical adventure at Westonbirt, The National Arboretum!

Help find the lost hat, bow and wand, and collect special spell ingredients along the way.

Pick up a trail pack

Only
£4

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What's on

Forest Live

Experience live music amongst the trees and reconnect with nature.

Wed 24 Jun: Fatboy Slim

Thur 25 Jun: Deacon Blue

Fri 26 Jun: UB40

Sat 27 Jun: Rick Astley

Sun 28 Jun: Richard Ashcroft



Don't miss



Canix

Experience the ultimate blend of nature, fitness and Canines at the Canix Westonbirt event.

Sat 21 Mar – Sun 22 Mar
7:30am



The Festival of Archaeology

The Festival of Archaeology launches at Westonbirt Arboretum with a day of discovery among nature.

Fri 31 Jul – Sun 02 Aug



Westonbirt 10K

Perfect for those looking for a challenge, or veteran runners looking to achieve a new personal best.

Wed 29 Apr
6:00pm



Outdoor Cinema

Soak in the sunset while enjoying your favourite film.

Fri 31 Jul – Sun 02 Aug

GUIDED WALK & TOURS

Westonbirt Guided Walk ⑥

Explore the seasonal highlights of the Old Arboretum.

Mar: Daily, 11:00am

Apr – Aug: Daily,
11:00am & 2:00pm

Discovery Walks ⑥

Take the path less travelled and delve a little deeper into Westonbirt's captivating trees.

Every Thu, 11:30am

Wildflower Guided Walk ⑥

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 ⑥

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

Every Fri, 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,
10:00am – 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, in a small group of like minded people, crafting and weaving a sculpture for your garden.

Sat 14 Mar, Sat 18 Apr, Sat
9 May, Sat 13 Jun, Sat 4 Jul,
10:00am – 4:00pm

Price: £110

Kintsugi Ceramics Repair

Join Clara to spend a relaxed few hours to learn the Japanese art of kintsugi repair for broken ceramics. Suitable for beginners.

Fri 27 Mar, Sat 28 Mar, Fri 24 Apr,
Sat 25 Apr, Fri 22 May, Sat 23
May, Sat 20 Jun, Fri 17 Jul, Thur
27 Aug, 3 hours, with morning
and afternoon options

Price: £50



Planning Garden Borders

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

Sat 11 Apr, 10:00am – 4:00pm
Price: £155

Understanding Woodlands and Woodland Management

A Lantra accredited two-day course focussing on small mixed or broadleaf woodland management, based outside in Silk Wood.

Sat 25 Apr & Sun 26 Apr,
9:30am – 5:30pm
Price: £350

⑥ Activities marked with this symbol are free for members





Slow-Stitching

A peaceful crafting session, with a selection of stitch and collage projects, using colours and materials inspired by the arboretum's natural seasonal showcase.

**Fri 1 May, Fri 3 Jul,
10:00am – 1:00pm
Price: £45**

Oak bench making

Make your very own, beautiful, cleft oak garden bench.

**Wed 6 May – Sun 10 May &
Mon 6 Jul – Fri 10 Jul
Price: £575**

Creating Garden Plans

Spend a day learning how professional garden designers create a well thought out garden.

**Sat 16 May, 10:00am – 4:00pm
Price: £155**

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 30 May, Sat 25 Jul,
9:50am – 4:00pm
Price: £155**



Flower Arranging Taster

Learn the steps to make a lovely hand-tied floral arrangement using roses and make your own bouquet to take home.

**Sun 31 May, Sat 4 Jul,
10:30am – 12:30pm
Price: £49**

Natural Fizzy Bath Bombs for Adults and Kids

Get hands on with fizz, fun, and fragrance in this family friendly, plant-based bath bomb workshop designed for adults and children to enjoy together.

**Sat 20 Jun, 10:30am – 12:00pm
Price: £24**

Oak gate making

Make a beautiful oak gate that will last a lifetime.

**Tue 23 Jun – Fri 26 Jun,
9:30am – 4:30pm
Price: £450**

Natural Beekeeping workshop

Join the Natural Beekeeping Trust and Simon Kellam from Just Bee Eco Hives for an inspiring workshop dedicated to natural, bee-centred beekeeping.

**Sat 15 Aug, 10:00am – 4:00pm
Price: £50**



FOR CHILDREN & 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 & 12.30–2pm

Price: Check website

Wild Westonbirt ⑥

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

Champion Tree Walks

Activity walks for 9–14 year olds, exploring and measuring some of our champion trees.

**Tues 31 Mar – Thur 2 Apr,
morning and afternoon walks
Booking essential
Price: £1**

The Secret World of Flowers ⑥

Book a family nature journalling workshop with illustrator Katherine O'Shea or drop in throughout the day to discover some of the hidden wonders of flowers.

**Tue 7 Apr – Thur 9 Apr,
10:30am – 3:30pm**

Spring awakenings ⑥

Celebrate the spring woodland bursting into life and make some crafts.

Sat 18 Apr, 10:30am – 3:30pm

Tree Pollinators ⑥

Explore tree pollination and making pollinator crafts to take home.

Sat 16 May, 10:30am – 3:30pm



The Hidden Power of Trees ⑥

Explore tree superpowers through discovery activities and crafts.

**Tue 26 – Thur 28 May,
10:30am – 3:30pm**

Creature Conversations ⑥

Discover how animals communicate through sound and try our woodpecker challenge.

Sat 20 Jun, 10:30am – 3:30pm

If Trees Could Talk? ⑥

Uncover the life story of a tree through reading tree rings and other signs.

Sat 18 Jul, 10:30am – 3:30pm

Nature's Soundtrack ⑥

Use natural materials to create your own soundtrack.

**Tue 4 Aug – Thur 6 Aug,
10:30am – 3:30pm**

Extra workshops are taking place, with Jason Singh: nature beatboxing and plant music walks, booking essential.

Wed 5 Aug, 10:30am – 3:30pm

In Tune with Wellbeing ⑥

Drop in throughout the day to relax with mindful activities in the arboretum.

**Tue 11 Aug – Thur 13 Aug,
10:30am – 3:30pm**



Wild About Bees ⑥

Join Simon Kellam from the Natural Beekeeping Trust and the Westonbirt team for a day celebrating wild bees.

Sun 16 Aug, 10:30am – 3:30pm

Woodland Orchestra ⑥

Become a music-maker, constructing your own instrument from woodland materials.

**Tue 18 Aug – Thur 20 Aug,
10:30am – 3:30pm**

Sensory Woodland Walks ⑥

Come for a family activity walk of seasonal games and challenges for children age 4–9.

**Tue 25 Aug – Thur 27 Aug,
morning and afternoon walks
Booking essential**

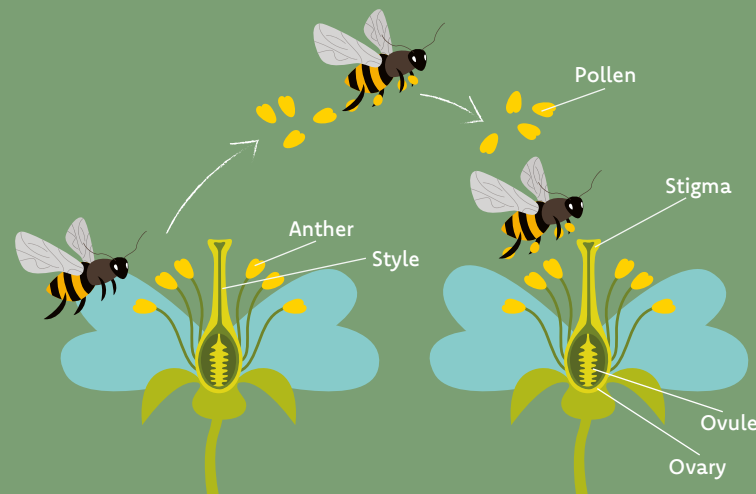


⑥ Activities marked with this symbol are free for members

How do trees reproduce?

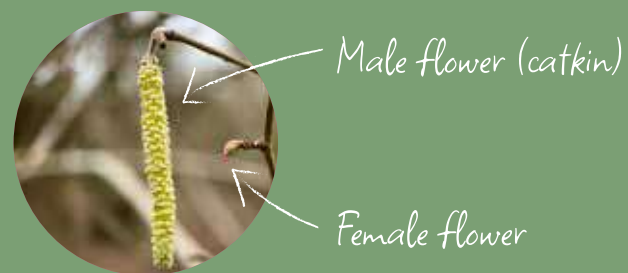
It usually starts with a process called pollination!

This happens when pollen from the male part of a flower (the anther) is transferred to the female part (the stigma). Once this happens, a seed can develop, which may grow into a new tree. Pollination can be carried out by insects, like bees, moving pollen between flowers, or even by the wind.



Look a little closer

Hazel's male and female flowers usually mature at different times to avoid self-pollinating.



A match made in heaven!

Magnolia trees are some of the largest and most striking flowering trees at Westonbirt! Magnolias evolved long before modern pollinators like bees existed, so they relied on beetles for pollination. Magnolias trap beetles inside their flower at night by closing their stigma and letting beetles become covered in pollen by the anthers. In the morning, they open and the beetles fly out and carry the pollen to another flower.

There are plenty of Magnolias in the Old Arboretum – have an explore and see if you can spot any beetle visitors moving between the flowers.

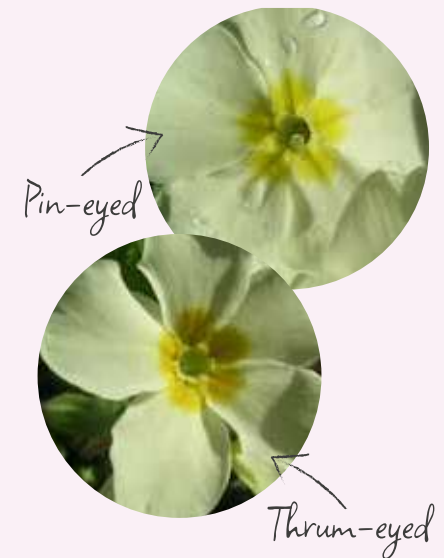
Did you know?

Many wind-pollinated trees, such as birch and hazel, have catkins that contain pollen. These catkins dangle from the branches so that pollen can be easily shaken loose and carried by the wind.

Fabulous flowers

Wildflowers need pollinating too, and primroses are among the first to bloom in spring. Primroses are unusual because they have two almost identical but slightly different types of flowers. The two types are “pin-eyed” and “thrum-eyed”. Each type has a different arrangement of their male (anther) and female (stigma) parts, which are positioned at different heights. Have you noticed this before? This helps prevent self-pollination.

Next time you're outside, see how many primroses you can spot. Are the flowers pin-eyed or thrum-eyed?



Make your own magnolia flower!

Petal template

You will need:

- Large rectangle of white felt/card
- Small rectangle of pink felt/card
- A length of twine
- Rectangle of green card

1. Copy the template above to make your own template and cut this out to create your petal shape.
2. Draw around the template four times on the white felt/card and cut them out.
3. Make a ring shape from the green card and stick with tape.



4. Arrange the petals carefully.

5. To make the pink centre of the magnolia, cut a fringe along one edge and roll it up tightly.

6. Place the pink centre in the middle of the petals, gather the petals around the centre and use the twine to tie together tightly.

7. Now gently push your magnolia flower into the green ring to hold it in place.

Westonbirt Wags

Some say Silk Wood's most enthusiastic explorers are its four-legged visitors, Westonbirt's muddy-pawed adventurers who know every scent trail and every splash-worthy puddle.

Introducing some of these spirited companions who bring their own joy to the arboretum.

If you'd like to feature in a future issue of the magazine, please ask your paw parent to send us your story to magazine@fowa.org.uk – we'd love to hear from you!



Wilbyr

Breed: Nova Scotia Duck Tolling Retriever

Size: Medium

Energy Level: Very high

Temperament: Intelligent, playful, affectionate

Special Traits: Running, jumping, hiding.

.....
Hello, my name is Wilbyr,

Some people say I'm a Nova Scotia Duck Toller Retriever, but I don't think I am, I think I'm a dog.

I came to live here from Portugal when I was 6 months old. I thought it was just for a holiday, but I'm nearly 5 now and I'm still here. But I don't mind because I've got my humans properly trained and so I've decided to stay forever.

I love going to the arboretum.

My favourite things are running and jumping over logs and hiding behind trees and sloshing through puddles and meeting other dogs and barking at squirrels who are hiding in trees and rolling in crunchy leaves and eating ice cream in the shade of a tree.

My unfavourite thing is going home.



Beryl

Breed: Chihuahua

Size: Very small

Energy Level: Moderate

Temperament: Bold, loyal, alert, sassy

Special Traits: Fiercely devoted, thinks they're much bigger, sensitive to cold and wet weather, sociable and spirited.

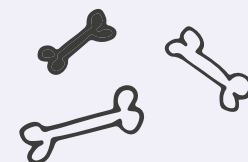
.....
Hi, I'm Beryl,

I live in Bristol with my devoted pawrents and have just celebrated my third birthday. I spend my days balancing two great loves: snuggling and adventure. Some say I have the heart of a lion in a Chihuahua's body and I quite agree.

I'm a quintessential summer girl and adore warm days spent sunbathing like the lady of luxury I am. When I'm not busy with my very important lounging duties, I love nothing more than heading out for long walks at Westonbirt.

I'm at my happiest when I'm free to roam and make new friends. Being small doesn't hold me back, I'm currently working on outrunning some cheeky greyhounds – and while I perfect my technique, I'm quite content bounding about with my Newfoundland cousins.

I consider myself a joyful, loving girl – unless, of course, it's raining. That, I find very dissatisfactory. If you'd like to follow my adventures find me [@berylthechi](https://www.instagram.com/berylthechi) on Instagram. ✨



Introducing Westonbirt's signature gin

Capturing the spirit of the arboretum

In December 2025, we unveiled a signature gin inspired by the character of Westonbirt Arboretum. Many of the scents encountered on a walk here originate from our trees, making a spirit a fitting way to reflect the landscape in a thoughtful and distinctive keepsake.

To bring this vision to life, we partnered with local distiller Hannah from Still Sisters. Working alongside our Technical Arborist, Chrissie Dow, she spent time exploring the arboretum and foraging botanicals under the guidance of our arborist team, whose knowledge of the collection helped shape the selection.

The result is our Signature Gin – Arboreal Spirit, created in honour of Westonbirt's world-class tree collection and the expertise that cares for it.

A gin rooted in place

Arboreal Spirit is a small-batch gin made with botanicals foraged from Westonbirt Arboretum.

At its heart lies the champion Magnolia, Westonbirt Diva, offering a gentle lemony lift. Douglas fir adds bright citrus freshness, while maple and walnut leaves bring herbal depth and structure. Bladdernut introduces a soft floral elegance, resulting in a gin that is uniquely balanced, expressive and unmistakably Westonbirt.

Distilled in small batches by Still Sisters, an artisan distiller, Arboreal Spirit marries local expertise with the arboretum's living landscape.

Tasting notes

Bright citrus with a gentle floral grace; layered herbal depth. Smooth, balanced, and luxuriously aromatic.

A limited release

Following the popularity of the first batch, our members now have exclusive access to the second release, anticipated to arrive in June 2026. Produced in small quantities, each batch is shaped by the seasons – we wait for certain trees to come back into leaf before botanicals can be carefully foraged, making every release a distinctive expression of the arboretum.

Each purchase directly supports the ongoing care and conservation of this remarkable landscape.



Our 70cl bottles are priced at £44.99. To reserve a bottle, please email retail@fowa.org.uk or enquire in the shop. Each purchase supports the ongoing stewardship of Westonbirt Arboretum and its world-class tree collection.

2026 forestlive

FATBOY SLIM

Wednesday 24 June

DEACON BLUE

with very special guest **Lightning Seeds**

Thursday 25 June

**UB40 FEAT.
ALI CAMPBELL**

Friday 26 June

RICK ASTLEY

Saturday 27 June

**RICHARD
ASHCROFT**

Sunday 28 June

WESTONBIRT ARBORETUM
Gloucestershire

forestlive.com



Celebrating
25
YEARS

Members
of The
Friends get
free parking
(usually £11)

We plant over
7 million
trees
in England
each year



Forestry England

In partnership with:

LIVE NATION

CUFFE TAYLOR

Storyteller among the trees

Sharon Bonson has been a member of The Friends for years, but it wasn't until 2019 (part-retired and curious) that she answered a call for volunteers. Initially drawn to driving the shuttle bus, she was encouraged to train as a guide too. That decision opened up a whole new world. "I'd never been on a guided walk before," she laughs, "but now I lead them!"

She trained with a lively group of twelve, who dubbed themselves the Westonbirt TreeBores. They still meet fortnightly for coffee, sharing sightings, stories and their enduring love for the arboretum.

On a walk through the Old Arboretum, Sharon's passion is infectious.

She stops at the *Magnolia Spengari* 'Westonbirt Diva', a springtime showstopper with deep pink petals and a blue tag denoting its champion status. "Absolutely fabulous," she beams. She explains how a seam of acidic soil running from Chipping Campden to the south coast, allows for camellias and magnolias to thrive – an insight from Holford's original planting vision.

Sharon's favourite trees are as varied as the seasons. She admires the oriental planes for their pollution-absorbing bark, the Persian ironwoods for their small spring flowers and traffic-light autumn colours, and a favourite Scots pine planted in 1829 (along with others). She's also enchanted by the folklore of the Douglas fir: "Its pinecones are said to hide mice who sought shelter in a storm – people love that story!"

Guided walks, she says, reveal the arboretum's hidden layers. "Even if you think you know the place, the stories behind the trees add richness. We take you off-path, up close to things you'd otherwise miss."

The arboretum influences Sharon's own garden choices, she planted a spindle after seeing one here and rehomed an Indian cedar after realising how incredibly large the one near the Great Oak Hall grow! She's proud of Westonbirt's rare specimens, like the dawn redwood, once thought extinct, and delights in quirky finds like the Rudolph Acer, named for a uniquely positioned knot in its trunk.

Whether it's the golden Indian bean tree glowing in summer, or the quiet glades where families picnic, Sharon finds magic in every corner. "There's always something new," she says, "and always something worth sharing." 🌸



INTERVIEW
Sharon Bonson
Westonbirt volunteer



Guided walks by volunteers like Sharon run at 11am and 2pm daily.

Check the website for discovery or other themed walks.

Making the most of your membership

As a member of The Friends, your membership opens the door to an array of fantastic benefits. Ready to embrace everything on offer? Here's how to get the most out of the months ahead.

Welcome the new season

Spring brings a fresh energy, and the arboretum is coming alive with beautiful buds and a sense of renewal. The atmosphere is filled with seasonal promise. Pop in for a visit and enjoy the early spring sunshine. Remember, you can come as often as you like with unlimited entry!

Kids go free

Take full advantage of weekends, half-term breaks, and school holidays with complimentary entry for children. Bring up to four of your children or grandchildren (18 and under) and explore the nature-inspired play zones all around the arboretum.

Free parking at Forest Live and Christmas at Westonbirt

Members receive free parking for one car at Forest Live concerts and Christmas at Westonbirt – an £11 saving per event.

Bluebell walks

Did you know, nearly half the world's bluebells grow in the UK and there's an enviable display here at Westonbirt? During April and May, the arboretum is transformed with a carpet of bluebells, a spectacular feature of this historic woodland. Please stay on the designated paths to help protect these delicate flowers from crush damage.

Member discounts

Your membership card entitles you to 10% off in the shop when you spend over £10. Books, souvenirs, tasty treats and much more await. Don't forget, you can also enjoy 10% off a thrilling treetop adventure with our partner activity, GoApe using the code GAARB26.

Top Tip

Your membership pays for itself after just three weekend visits each year or even sooner when you include shop savings, partner discounts, kids go free, and complimentary event parking. Plus, there's the magazine and access to partner gardens too. After that, you're enjoying unlimited free entry for the remaining 361* days of the year.

*Westonbirt is closed Christmas Day

Image credit: Johnny Hathaway

Discover art in nature this spring: Cotswold Sculpture Park

As spring arrives and Westonbirt Arboretum bursts into life, it's the perfect time to extend your love of outdoor spaces by taking advantage of our partnership with Cotswold Sculpture Park at Westonbirt.

About Cotswold Sculpture Park

Located near Cirencester in the heart of Gloucestershire, Cotswold Sculpture Park is set in ten acres of landscaped gardens, woodland, and wildflower meadows, displaying over 170 sculptures from established and emerging artists.

Plan your visit

The Park is open to the public from April through to September, Thursday to Monday, 10:30am to 5:00pm (last entry at 4:00pm). No advance booking is required, and the grounds are fully self-guided, allowing you to explore at your own pace.

Free parking

Parking is free, and while much of the terrain is natural and may not be fully wheelchair-accessible, mobility scooters are available if required.

Events and activities

The site hosts a variety of events throughout the season, including regular art classes and "golden hour" late opening. There are also performances in the stone amphitheatre, which is an intimate setting for live music, theatre, and other activities. For more information about the latest events, please visit their website.

cotswoldsculpturepark.co.uk

Exclusive 2-for-1 offer

As a member you can enjoy 2-for-1 entry to Cotswold Sculpture Park. Simply present your valid Friends' membership card upon arrival. It's a great way to explore this stunning park and its remarkable art collection at a reduced cost.

Art to enjoy at home

Did you know that you can purchase any of the sculptures you see at the park? Many more works are also available to view on their website, making it possible to bring a piece of this inspiring collection into your own home or garden.



Crossword

How closely have you been reading?

Every answer you need is included in this magazine!



Across

- 4. Colour of the Champion Tree Labels [4]
- 6. 90's artist at this year's Forest Live [6,4]
- 7. The place where the team collected fruit from *Sorbus anglica* [4,6]
- 12. Genus that Lime trees belong to [6]
- 13. Chinese _____. A lesser-known member of the olive family. [10]

Down

- 1. The tree that lost its top – and champion status – to storm damage [5,3]
- 2. A Champion Tree with beautiful pink flowers, _____ *sperengi*, 'Westonbirt Diva'
- 3. You'll find these dangling from trees so pollen can be shaken loose by the wind [6]
- 4. A botanical offering soft floral notes to Westonbirt gin [10]
- 5. *Tilia* _____. A small-leaved lime with pale yellow flowers [8]
- 8. The summit where surveying maples was thwarted by sheet ice [8]
- 9. The measurement used to tell if a tree is the largest of its kind [5]
- 10. The type of cheese used to pay for parking on a field trip [7]
- 11. First recorded name for Silk Wood [8]

Across: 4. Blue 6. Fatboy Slim 7. Ross Island 12. *Tilia* 13. Fringetree
Down: 1. Cheng Fir 2. Magnolia 3. Catkin 4. Bladdernut 5. *Japonica* 8. Fansipan 9. Girth 10. Cheddar 11. Selkwode

Answers

STIHL

100
YEARS

Scan to visit the
STIHL GB
YouTube Channel



CREATE YOUR
HAPPY PLACE,
WITH STIHL

ONE BATTERY. MANY TOOLS.

At STIHL, we're proud that our professional battery tools are being used to maintain the amazing collection of trees looked after by the Westonbirt Tree Team. Our range of quiet, lightweight and easy to use tools for home gardeners can help you look after your own beautiful trees and landscapes.

And if you want to see more of STIHL's tools in action, visit the STIHL GB YouTube channel.

FIND OUT MORE AT [STIHL.CO.UK](https://www.stihl.co.uk)

Official Partner to the Tree Team at
Westonbirt, The National Arboretum

Trees teach us to think beyond our lifetime... ...so can your legacy.

However you choose to shape your legacy, a gift in your Will helps advance pioneering tree conservation, widen access to nature, and support learning that deepens our understanding of the world around us – ensuring this vital work continues for generations to come.

To learn more, please contact legacies@fowa.org.uk for a confidential conversation – whether you would like guidance on how your gift could make a difference, or to access our free Will writing service. We would be delighted to help you consider what feels right for you, at your own pace.



Please remember Westonbirt Arboretum in your Will. Your gift will support conservation, education and participation for generations to come.