Black Poplar planting at Ampleforth

Following a site visit to Ampleforth College in November 2010 we agreed to plant black poplars on wetlands located between the college and Gilling. The college particularly requested some cuttings from the Stonegrave tree. The two sites chosen flood at least once during the winter months replicating closely the natural habitat of northern Germany. The north of England is about the limit of this tree’s natural extent.

In March 2011 we sent off cuttings from our parent stock from the Stonegrave tree, together with cuttings from the Guisborough and Nosterfield tree, our aim being to increase the variation of genes in any future population of black poplars.

We successfully grew 12 cuttings into trees and set a date in February to plant them. The gang turned up, trees were lifted and all tools and stakes etc were gathered up and off we went. The day went very well and the trees planted with no real problems.

We jumped back in our cars and set off for Thirsk Garden Centre only to find the barriers giving us access had been closed. So a phone call was made to the college only to be told that the college was closed please call again after the half term. We found a teacher at a local house who told us that she had no idea who to contact as all such details were in the school. The local farmer said there was no way out other than going cross country to Gilling.

There was no option, we had to set off and managed to get through but as none of us have four by fours, all the cars took a hard knock or two. Steve unfortunately damaged a bearing and Susan and I had to send our vehicles to the car wash. Apart from the planting, the one additional benefit is that Mike now knows where the model railway is in Gilling! Albeit an hour later than planned, the day was finished in our usual way with lunch at the Garden Centre.

“Like us, (trees) are small and helpless when young. Like us, they take pride in their power when they come to maturity. And like us, they come to a tottering old age when they are once again dependent on others for survival.”

Alexander von Humboldt (Naturalist / Explorer) 1769 - 1859

Don’t forget the AGM on 18th October
“Celebritree” - a regular column in which a member or well known person in the community tells us about their favourite tree or woodland

“I have no idea if you are ‘into’ trees,” was the comment that accompanied the invitation to write for this publication.
“Not really,” was my first reaction. But then I remembered my four years, before moving to Sowerby, living and working in Edwinstowe in North Nottinghamshire. And just as Thirsk is famous for James Herriot, so Edwinstowe is famous for Robin Hood. And his tree – the Major Oak – was in our parish!

The school that my son attended was right next to Sherwood Forest. On one occasion the Duke of Gloucester came on a visit and a play about Robin Hood was prepared in his honour. On this rare occasion the children were allowed to perform right next to the Major Oak - inside the fenced area where visitors are not normally allowed. My son – clergywoman’s offspring – was given the role of Friar Tuck – with a very large pillow stuffed down his front!

The Major Oak (according to its website) is a Quercus Robur, the English or pendunculate oak. It is believed to be around 800 years old. Local legend has it that the hollow trunk was used as a hideout by Robin Hood and his men, although the same legend suggests that Robin was active in the 12th or 13th century, when the tree would only have been a sapling!

Today, the tree weighs an estimated 23 tonnes, its trunk circumference is 33 feet and its branches spread to over 92 feet. Because of its national importance, conservation measures to the tree have been carried out continually since 1908.

The Major Oak sits within the Sherwood Forest National Nature Reserve, which welcomes 350,000 visitors each year. Of course the Forest is also enjoyed by local residents, many of whom walk there every day of the year.

My lasting memory of the Forest, and the Forest Cemetery where I spent a lot of my time, is of beauty and peace and a sense of God’s presence.

Revd Nicky Carnell (Vicar of St Oswalds, Sowerby)

JUNIPER - A New Threat

A variation of the dreaded Phytophthora disease has been discovered, this time mainly infecting Juniper bushes. It is thought that there are as many as 100 different types of this pathogen, including the so-called Sudden Oak Death. In the last 3 years the Forestry Commission has accelerated its national programme of action to try and restrict, if not eradicate, the pathogen Phytophthora Ramorum (Pr) which is killing off Rhododendron, Viburnum, Camellia, Larch, Bilberry and other species. Phytophthora means “plant destroyer” in ancient greek.

Now the Forestry Commission has confirmed an outbreak of Phytophthora Austrocedrae (Pa) among Juniper bushes in Teesdale. Juniper is one of only three conifer species native to Britain and makes a huge contribution to nature conservation. It is a key food plant for birds and attracts rare insects, fungi and lichens so there is understandable concern about the disease affecting habitats and reducing biodiversity.

Pa causes dieback and rapid death of trees/shrubs but, so far, little is known about how easily it spreads. As a precaution the Commission has temporarily suspended any further planting of Juniper. Unlike Pr this is not legally notifiable but the Forestry Commission would welcome reports of possible sightings and can be contacted: by phone on 0131 4452176 or by email at ddas.nrs@forestry.gsi.gov.uk.
Technical Bits – Canopy Closure

Pearsons Wood has now been planted for up to ten years and in some areas we are starting to see canopy closure. But what does this mean?

Apart from the hollies all the trees and shrubs in our wood are deciduous and lose their leaves in winter. Come the spring the leaves return and at some point between 10 and 15 years after planting, depending on the initial spacing of the trees, we will find that the branches of one tree reach out and touch the branches of another. This then leads to shade appearing under the trees over a larger and larger area.

As the shade appears year after year the meadow rye grasses, creeping thistle, dock and other meadow and field margin plants that need the summer sun hours will die off. Nature hates an empty space and this will be filled by deciduous woodland herbaceous plants. These plants would normally arrive from seed carried by birds or on the wind.

We are looking at Pearsons Wood’s northern boundary as it has the Whitelass Beck running along its length. This beck forms a border between farms and consequently the boundary has a good selection of mature trees. Under these trees, in a strip no wider than 3 metres, are all the woodland plants we would expect to populate Pearsons Wood once we achieve canopy closure. This will include dogs mercury, lords and ladies, wild garlic, snow drops and bluebells, all of which will grow in the early spring, live through their annual cycle and return to dormancy before the leaves of the trees open.

In the same way as we have planted up Pearsons Wood with native species of trees, once canopy closure has occurred we will be able to collect seed from along the Whitelass Beck and scatter it about Pearsons Wood.

If a piece of land was to be left abandoned then a naturally occurring wood would take about 100 years to start to take shape. With our planting of trees, and later herbaceous plants, we should be able to see a similar wood after only 20 years after the initial planting.

Mike I’Anson

Pearsons Wood in winter

Let the Punishment fit the Crime

With Planning Laws, Tree Preservation Orders, extensive Forestry Commission and Woodland Trust ownership and registered Parks and Gardens we tend to take the protection of trees for granted. Enforcement of the law may sometimes be weak but at least the legal rules are in place and the penalties for contravention are known about. Trees and hedges can create all sorts of problems and disputes, especially in the vicinity of buildings, but generally we all know where we stand, with fines available as a last resort where negotiation fails. It was not always thus. How about the following punishment from about 1500 years ago ..............

Old Germanic Law was part of the “Leges Barbarorum” (Laws of the Barbarians). It was oral, not written, so relied heavily on memorisation of precedent by selected individuals in the community who acted as judges and who meted out justice ‘according to customary rote’. There were, for instance, stringent laws against cutting down fruit bearing trees - several North American Indian Tribes did the same. However the penalty for a person who peeled the bark off a standing tree was to have his/her navel cut out, nailed to the tree in question and then be driven round and round the tree until all entrails were wound round the trunk. We think of ducking stools and guillotines as old fashioned forms of rough justice but disembowelment for offences against trees perhaps shows how far environmental law has progressed! Did somebody say that we needed rules to protect Pearson’s Wood?
One member of TCWG quite alone, having arrived before any others, wandered down along the outside of the northern edge of the wood and, coming to the south-west corner, flushed out two roe deer who lazily loped away westwards up the hill from the thicket down by the stream. Distinct white rear end patches. Soon another TCWG member arrived and the two began to examine that corner from inside the wood. Suddenly a great bird with enormous wings rose up from the path ahead and flew eastwards – a buzzard had been down on the ground – what tit bits had he found below our trees?

The wood with its many aspens, willows and poplars must now have become attractive to the charmingly named Puss Moth (Cerura vinula) because we’ve found some of their extraordinary solid nut-like cocoons attached firmly to some of our trees, resembling wooden cockles on a rock. Lepidopterists prize them; they can be found on sale for £3.45pence each! We’re hoping ours will hatch out in early summer. They’re greyish white with marbled markings and black and white stripes on their abdomen, which is covered in an almost catlike fur, hence their name. Their eggs mature into strikingly handsome caterpillars. Their bodies are bright green becoming more purple as they age. Above their round black and red faces they have two black spots which give a fearsome owl-like impression enhanced by the modification of their back legs into two whip-like flagella which are harmless but threatening. However they shouldn’t be handled because in defence they can spray formic acid from a gland in their thorax.

So search and look but don’t touch or you could be burned.

Sonia Rose