New Books

2. Continuous Cover Management of Woodlands - A brief introduction, by Rodney Helliwell
3. The Silviculture of Trees used in British Forestry (2nd edition), by Peter Savill

Woodland Management – A Practical Guide (Second edition)
by Chris Starr


This is a revised and full colour version of a book first published in 2005 which claims to be ‘an introductory text aimed at those with an interest in owning and caring for woodlands, whatever their particular objectives’ (p.6). It specifically states that it is not a book for the professional forester, but given the lack of introductory texts to forestry and forest management in Britain, this is probably a book that will be read and used by many students and others in their early years in the profession. The competitive price and attractive format and pictures will also make this a book that is likely to find its way onto many book shelves. The book is arranged into 12 chapters, starting with an overview of woodland history in Britain, followed by chapters covering tree physiology and woodland dynamics as well a presentation of the major broadleaved and conifer species. The main body of the book provides chapters on setting objectives for the woodland, on obtaining essential information about the woodland, about biodiversity and forest management, on regeneration and woodland creation, on woodland operations through the seasons, and on silviculture and stewardship. The two concluding chapters cover means of generating income from a woodland including consideration of non-timber forest products, and various considerations involved in buying and owning woodland. The closing pages contain a glossary, some suggestions for further reading, useful addresses, an index, and list of conversion factors. There are colour photographs and useful diagrams on most pages, while the text has a number of boxed case studies including two which involve the use of CCF, namely at Weasenham New Wood in Norfolk (p. 78-79) and at Knapp Coppice in Herefordshire (p. 152-153).

The mention of CCF as a sensible option for woodland management in various parts of the book is very welcome, but the suggestion that this approach can be ‘complex’ and ‘time-consuming’ (p. 32) might discourage a new woodland owner. Arguably, CCF is no more complex than the coppice or coppice-with-standards systems that are discussed in the following sections. The presentation of the Weasenham case study would have given an opportunity to dispel some of the concerns about the ‘difficulty’ of practicing CCF, but unfortunately there is little information given on the management practices used there, although it is clear that the author thinks that the group selection system has produced an outstandingly attractive woodland. More detail of CCF management is provided in the Knapp Coppice case study, but since here the approach has only been practiced for the last decade, the results are very preliminary. It would be
good if a future edition of the book was able to present a more detailed CCF case study, and sites like Faskally or Stourhead Western would make instructive examples. The presentation of thinning (pp 146-147), which is an operation of critical importance in delivering CCF, would have benefitted if it had been linked to the nice diagram of tree classes on p 28. The latter could be used to show how stand structure could be diversified over time through thinning.

Any book of this type has to cover a very wide range of topics and there will always be points where the reader disagrees with the author. My main criticisms related to some of the statements made about the management of upland conifer plantations and the markets for their timber. The impression is given on pages 69 and 151 that global market oversupply will always make selling British timber quite difficult, yet recent years have shown substantial increases in the rates of return on forestry investment quoted on the IPD Forestry Index. The impact of rising demand for timber in China and other developing nations has changed global market conditions and the widespread pessimism about the outlook for British timber that prevailed at the turn of the century is no longer justified. On page 31, the use of non-thin regimes is mentioned as an option where timber quality is not a priority, rather than as a sensible silvicultural means of maintaining stand stability and ensuring timber revenue on more exposed sites when first thinning has been delayed. The comments about uneconomic early thinnings on the same page seem to overlook the recent upturn in demand for small roundwood for fuelwood and biomass. The discussion of endemic and catastrophic windthrow on page 150 is far too deterministic and various examples such as Birkley Wood at Kielder show that it is not ‘almost inevitable’ that trees in upland Britain will blow down at heights of 20-25 m. Examples like these suggest that parts of the text were not fully revised between the first and second editions, an impression that is reinforced by reference to Forestry Commission grant schemes that have been closed for a few years (p. 179).

Given the current interest in species diversification in British forestry, the two chapters describing a comprehensive range of broadleaves and conifers are very welcome and this information is then used on pages 111-113 to provide helpful guidance on selecting species for different sites and soils. In most cases the guidance is sound, but from a CCF perspective the omission of any silver fir species from Table 8 (pp 56-57) which gives the characteristics of common British conifers is regrettable, since these generally shade tolerant species are likely to be of importance for owners interested in CCF. The preferred soils given for western hemlock (another species which could be used in CCF) in the same table are listed as ‘moist mineral soils in the west’ which then results in the species being recommended for use on upland gley soils (Table 20, p 113). The latter are not soils where the species should be planted since it requires a moist climate but freely draining soils like brown earths and podsoils. Other anomalies include the suggestion that lodgepole pine has ‘hollow’ roots (p. 60) while the discussion of Sitka spruce surprisingly makes no mention of the increasing availability of genetically improved material. Indeed, the latter would make a better example of the potential benefits from tree breeding than would the ‘Wildstar’ cherry referred to elsewhere in the book. The statement that sweet chestnut rarely sets fertile seed in Britain and that natural regeneration is uncommon (p. 43) is no longer since natural regeneration can be regularly found on suitable soils at least as far north as the English Midlands. The discussion of tree diseases (p 107-110) makes no mention of ash dieback, while the serious effects of Phytophthora ramorum on larches and of Dothistroma on all pines (not just Corsican pine in East Anglia) are not mentioned.

I think this book would be of considerable value to somebody who was becoming interested in forestry in Britain and wanted to know something about the various systems and procedures involved. The nice layout and attractive photographs complement the logical structure of the book which is well written and easy to follow. However, as the author indicates, it is not designed for a member of CCFG (or other professional forester) who already possesses good technical knowledge and skills.

Bill Mason
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Continuous Cover Management of Woodlands: a brief introduction
by Rodney Helliwell


Rodney Helliwell, a founding member of CCFG, self-published this booklet last year with support from Woodland Heritage. It covers similar ground to, and expands on, his earlier leaflets ‘Continuous Cover Forestry’ (2002) and ‘Fundamental Woodland Management’ (2006), and has been nicely produced as a slim book with coloured photographs.

In it he explains the principles of CCF and succinctly looks at the issues which should be addressed when managing, or considering managing, woodland in this way. Chapters include: objectives, site appraisal, commencing management, creating new woodland, management of growing stock, natural regeneration, daylight, costs and returns and appendices which include data from a sample plot at Schallenberg, Switzerland, and a simple series of diagrams showing woodland transformation. Whilst the book is aimed at woodland owners and foresters, it will also be an informative read for ecologists and any layman who is interested in how our forests are managed.

Rodney’s knowledge and enthusiasm for the subject come across in the text, and he concludes...

‘... the development of the woodland and the success of the enterprise will depend on these choices. You might see it as being rather like conducting an orchestra. You might have the best instrument players or trees in the world, but if you conduct the orchestra or woodland without empathy you will not make fantastic music or a successful uneven-aged woodland.’

The Silviculture of Trees Used in British Forestry
by Peter Savill

Published in March 2013 by CABI, Wallingford, Oxfordshire, Hardback, 288 pp, ISBN 9781780640266, £75

The second edition of ‘The Silviculture of Trees Used in British Forestry’ was published in 2013, with fully updated introduction and contents.

The main emphasis of the book is upon the silvicultural characteristics and requirements of trees commonly grown in the UK and their biological suitability to sites. It covers all the important native species and a selection of the most significant exotics. They are arranged alphabetically, by their scientific names, with information on the origin and introduction, climatic requirements, site and soil requirements, seed production and other characteristics of the tree. Detailed drawings of leaves and fruits are also provided to aid with identification.

“The first edition of this book was good, this revised second edition is better including more recent information in an accessible format with an improved index. This is a valuable compendium for anyone who wants or needs to know detailed information about the characteristics of individual tree species and would be a useful aid to selecting the right species for a site.” – Dr Ralph Harmer