I would like to start by wishing all our members a Happy New Year and I welcome you to the first of two newsletters to be published in 2019. We hope that you will enjoy reading the contributions in this issue which include reports from a number of events that took place during 2018 as well as information on the development of CCF in countries as different as China and Finland. Our thanks go to everybody who has prepared material for this issue and to Mandy Clinch for her tireless work in setting up this issue. We would also like to thank various woodland owners and managers for agreeing to host our field meetings in 2018 and to the foresters who acted as the groups’ guides on the sites.

During 2018 I was able to attend two of these meetings at Wykeham and at Tavistock, as well as participating in the ProSilva meeting in Germany in late June. All of these events are fully described elsewhere in this newsletter. However, for me, one important point brought out at all the field meetings I attended was how important it is to ensure that browsing pressure is kept under control to achieve successful natural regeneration of a range of species. Natural regeneration is generally key to delivering the financial benefits of CCF and apparent regeneration failure is often a consequence of failure to control deer numbers. It will be interesting to follow the results coming from the BioWild project recently started in Germany looking at the effect of more intensive deer management upon regeneration.

Success of natural regeneration can also be influenced by thinning and the sensitive manipulation of the light climate within a stand: this point is well illustrated in the photographs provided as Figures 3-5 in the report of the visit to Wykeham. It is interesting to see that a similar point is made in the article by two Chinese colleagues who discuss the use of a CCF style approach to create uneven-aged mixed stands from single species larch plantations. They report that successful regeneration of high quality broadleaves in these larch stands depends on creating an appropriate gap size combined with careful thinning.

A further international perspective is provided by Sauli Valkonen from Finland who explains how interest in CCF is increasing in that country following a recent change in forestry legislation, and that provided regeneration is successful, CCF is financially attractive to private owners. However, one implication of his paper is that changing legislation is only a first step, and that further measures are needed to ensure successful uptake of CCF, including training of forestry professionals to accept an alternative way of working. Such alternative measures can include the need to provide supportive grant regimes, and it is intriguing to hear about the very recent announcement in Ireland of a pilot grant scheme to support the introduction of CCF (see the Bits and Pieces section of this newsletter). It will be interesting to see if this scheme can avoid some of the inflexibility and complexity that seemingly has been a problem with grant schemes devised to support CCF in Britain (see a short article on this aspect in the 2016 newsletter).
The CCFG committee is preparing a full suite of CCF related field meetings for members and guests to attend during summer and autumn 2019. Details of the first meeting, to be held in the Lake District in May, have just gone live on our website. One of the features of this meeting will be discussing how to implement CCF on steep ground, which has been a topic that has been of interest to members for a few years. With that in mind, we are in the process of trying to arrange a trip to the Italian Alps in early June to see operational aspects of managing forests through CCF in that mountainous region. This trip will be hosted by ProSilva Italy and held in conjunction with colleagues from ProSilva Ireland (as was our trip to Poland in 2015). We hope to have final details available early in February. These foreign trips are a unique opportunity to see different possibilities for managing forests and to pick up ideas that can be applied in forests back in Britain. For instance, the experiments on CCF at Wykeham that are described on page 2 of the report of the visit in May last year were stimulated by a CCFG trip to Erdmanshausen in Germany in 1995 (see the February 1996 newsletter) which showed how first rotation conifer stands can be diversified through natural regeneration and underplanting – a point also evident from the visit to Weasenham in Norfolk in 2016.

On your behalf I would like to thank all the members of the committee for their support during the year, including Jim Ralph for his careful oversight of our finances. A particular vote of thanks is due to Mandy Clinch for her excellent work in support of the group and the committee – we are very grateful for all she has done and continues to do for the CCFG. Finally, I should remind members that I hope to step down as your Chairman by the 2019 AGM at the latest and I would be delighted to hear from anybody interested in taking on this interesting and enjoyable role.