

Category: RFS Multipurpose Woodlands
Duke of Cornwall Cup 2015

Name of Wood: Llewesog Estate,
Denbighshire, owned by Mr Bill Williams

Summary

This winning entry embraced all aspects of multipurpose forestry carried out consistently by the current owner over the past 50 years, showing how the most can be made of a site to enhance landscape and conserve amenity, provide a regular income (including from a shoot), build up a capital reserve, encourage wildlife, and to maintain public footpaths.

120 ha of woodlands in the foothills below Hiraethog were entered – an area that is hilly with soil mainly heavy clay over Silurian shales.

Background

The present owner took over the management more than 50 years ago. At that time the woods were in a fairly neglected state and comprised mainly hardwoods with some conifer blocks, both of which had been heavily and selectively felled in the two world wars.

There was no road access to any of the woods. A fairly intensive programme of felling and replanting the poorest areas was started and some four miles of access roads and tracks were constructed, using on-site sources of shale and gravel.



Fine cherry and oak mixture in a pheasant rearing pen

Because of the location, which is not close to major settlements, and has only limited public road access, there is little pressure for large-scale public access, with local dog-walkers and occasional parties of ramblers being the main users. This has advantages in that disturbance to wildlife, game-bird management and timber operations is minimal.



Charcoal kilns in operation

Composition of woodland areas

The general objective has been to develop within each woodland block a mixed combination of hardwoods and conifers of differing age groups.

This has provided very good conditions for wildlife, game cover and visual amenity, although it does reduce the scope for large-scale mechanised harvesting. Young crops are comprehensively brashed and in some areas crop designated trees are high-pruned to 6m, helping to ensure optimal final timber prices. Early thinnings are quite heavy in order to encourage ground and understorey vegetation.

Marketing

The recent emergence of a substantially increased and apparently sustainable firewood market at sensible prices has provided a very welcome base for Llewesog as for other estates with mixed

woodlands. Nearly a third of sales from this estate over the last five years have been for fuel.

In addition, estates like Llewesog with a wide variety of species and age-groups are in a position to cater for niche markets.

Examples from this estate are:

- a local miller who wants large conifer logs which are too big for the large-scale computerised saw-mills
- small deliveries of particular species to specialist markets (e.g. cherry, burr oak, western red cedar), ash butts for making Irish Hurley sticks, peeled rustic poles for a rustic furniture manufacturer.

In addition the estate also has access to the usual mass markets for conifer timber, bars and stake lengths.

Wildlife

The estate has several advantages in this area: varied habitats with streams and mixed woods, control of grey-squirrels, magpies and foxes due to the employment by the shooting tenant of a keeper, limited pressure for large-scale public access and therefore minimal disturbance.

A long-standing relationship with a nearby bird ringing group includes the management of a series of nest boxes throughout the woods, emphasis being placed on provision of suitable nesting sites for pied flycatchers and redstarts. An independent bird census in a 1 km square which included much of Llewesog revealed species diversity to match that of any similar area in Britain.

While the owner is particularly interested in the wild birds within his woods, there are several badger setts, occasional foxes (but not encouraged), and a small population of polecats. Deer have not yet been seen in the woods, but are not far away!

Employment

Until 20 years ago two full-time, Forestry Commission trained, woodmen were employed who could turn their hand to any forestry job. Upon their retirement it has been very difficult to



Owner: Mr Bill Williams

replace them with similarly well-skilled craftsmen and the estate now employs one part-time skilled forest worker, using a local contractor for other work. A head keeper and an under keeper are employed by the shooting tenant.

Financial results

Since the owners' main objective has been to build up a substantial reserve of capital they have always harvested considerably less than the annual increment. Nevertheless, it has been possible to produce a modest annual income.

Lessons learnt

It is encouraging that a woodland managed over a long period for multipurpose outputs has achieved its various objectives, including the development of a substantial capital reserve and a small annual profit, the latter being enhanced substantially recently by the emergence of a buoyant firewood market.

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Judges: Dr John Good & Philippe Morgan