

The Tree Council

Annual Review 2009





The year saw us continuing the drive to raise public awareness through our community action programme and to increase the numbers of networks in which our volunteer force of Tree Wardens are supported, to improve the environment in town and country. The financial climate continues to be harsh and we have had some setbacks, but we have made progress nonetheless, largely as a result of the dedication and hard work of our enthusiastic staff and volunteers, to whom we are extremely indebted. Even during these straightened times for small charities, they have continued to make a difference and their work in this year is a tribute to their dedication and tirelessness.

The number of organisations in membership of The Tree Council is steadily climbing, and we are pleased that so many bodies feel that being part of a national campaign to make trees matter to everyone and see more trees, of the right kind, in the right places planted and cared for across town and country is important. We are also indebted to the trusts, grant funds and individuals whose contributions have allowed us to continue our work: without them, our mission would have been made much more challenging.

One of the high-impact initiatives that we have been able to develop has been made possible through the second year of our collaboration with the Good Gifts Catalogue, for which we are particularly grateful. By channelling the funds raised for sowing wild flowers, regenerating bluebell woodlands and planting oak saplings through to our member organisations and Tree Warden networks, we have been able to reach grassroots projects in parts of the UK that would not otherwise have been able to access these funds. This builds on what we have been doing with our tree planting grants for many years now and has led to interest from other would-be funders who want to feel that the reach of their planting ideas is extended beyond what is possible with a single organisation. We hope that this aspect of our work, as a central clearing house for resources, will be able to continue since it is changing the landscape and of huge benefit to communities.

Our magazine, Tree News, has enjoyed different manifestations over the years. Whilst we are justly proud of all, we have embarked on a new partnership and funding arrangement to produce the current incarnation. We continue to owe a debt of gratitude to Felix Dennis for his sustained support, and to those new sponsors that he has persuaded to join him. Their confidence in the magazine has been rewarded by recognition at the Periodical Publishers Association awards in November 2008. We also appreciate the exertion on the part of our publishing partners, Think, who have worked so hard with us to make it the success it is.

Our annual programme of community action, spearheaded locally by member organisations and Tree Wardens, has seen some landmarks. Seed Gathering Season has reached its 10th year and we finished the year in the 35th run-up to National Tree Week. For the last few years, the posters used to advertise events and activities have been downloadable from our website rather than sent out in paper form, and we are indebted to Luke Fitzmaurice, who worked pro bono to design the suites for this, and last, year.

My tenure in the Chair at The Tree Council comes to an end in October 2009, at the Annual General Meeting at which this report is offered. I have served on the Board of Trustees since 2001, and seen some significant changes during that time. The Tree Council operates right at the heart of tree issues and is an organisation that understands the important relationship between people, communities and trees and I pay tribute again to its dedicated and professional staff and committed board of trustees. I wish them every success in the future.

Sue Roe

Sue Roe OBE, Chairman



Membership

We are delighted that membership of The Tree Council is seen as an important step for increasing numbers of organisations, and welcome the added weight that this gives to our partnerships. We now have 35 not-for-profit organisations with a national remit (full members), 16 not-for profit organisations with a local remit plus 118 Local Authorities and 12 government departments/agencies (consultative members) and a further 3 commercial enterprises that support our objectives (associate members). We continue to research new ways to support our membership, using feedback to suggest avenues to explore and by generating approaches to suppliers and prospective sponsors of member benefits.

The extremely successful Communications Group continues to meet and discuss issues of common concern and interest, attracting speakers from other sectors who have new perspectives to offer. The Tree Council's consultant director of communications, Barbara Hall, plans and chairs this group most effectively and puts in her energies on a pro bono basis, for which we are greatly indebted.

Green Monument Campaign

Tree Wardens continue to support the Ancient Tree Hunt, the most ambitious project so far to map all the ancient trees across the UK. Ancient Trees – Hunting and Championing, an individually bound topic-based section for the Tree Warden Handbook that can be removed from the folder and slipped into a jacket pocket for on-site reference, was released in November.

Meanwhile, the strategy to address lack of effective protection of heritage trees pursued two avenues of possibility. The first was the removal of obstacles in law and guidance which prevented use of the existing tree preservation orders (TPOs), a reactive system operated by Local Authorities and subject to restrictions of their priorities and resources. The second was the addition of a mechanism for proactive protection of trees of national importance, to be listed on a special register with set criteria and drawing on the Ancient Tree Hunt and TROBI data. Both these avenues require changes to primary legislation and were proposed in response to the Planning White Paper.

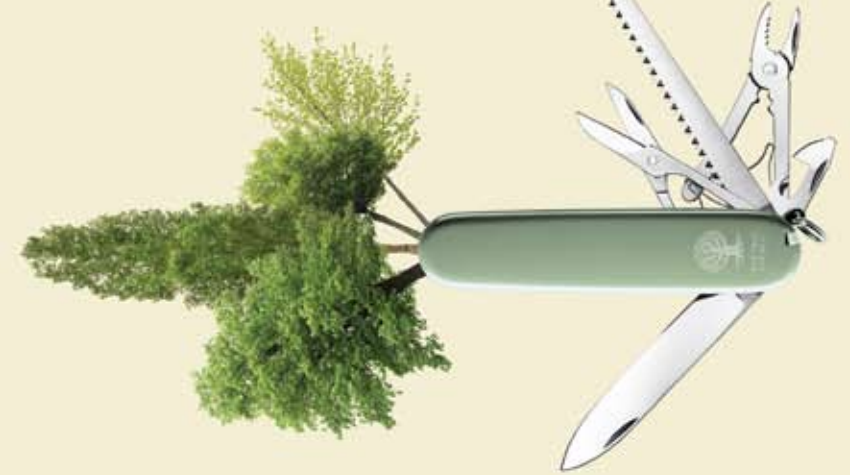
The Planning Bill provided for changes to the TPO system to be made by secondary legislation, but there were concerns that this was unclear in scope and that it did not provide for a proactive system of revised guidance to improve the protection given to trees – including making it clearer that trees of historic and cultural value can be protected.

Proposals for reactive protection were put to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) for inclusion in the Heritage Bill and the matter of the omission of heritage trees from the draft bill was raised with the Select Committee. DCMS were lobbied through all available contacts to recognise trees of national importance as heritage and to effectively protect them whilst continuing to work with Communities and Local Government on TPO improvements. Unfortunately, the Heritage Bill failed to progress and was put on ice at the end of the 2008 session, becoming one of a number that were put on hold while the administration concentrated its efforts on measures to improve the UK economy. We will continue to campaign on this matter.

Hedge Tree Campaign

The food value of the hedge has been used this year to promote the importance of the hedge not only to wildlife but also to humans. We developed the "Hedgerow Harvest" project, raising awareness of free, local, food that can be obtained from hedges. We launched this project in The Tree Guardian with an appeal to all Tree Wardens to send us their recipes made from produce derived from hedges and are continuing to collect this information. "A Cut above the Rest", a DVD to show how hedges can be managed to improve their wildlife potential and their value to a farmer was produced as a partnership between Natural England, DEFRA, RSPB, CPRE, the Hedge Laying Society and The Tree Council – all members of Hedgelink, the Defra Habitat Action Plan steering group. Copies were distributed to Tree Wardens through the 2008 regional forum events and were enthusiastically received.

A new section for The Tree Warden Handbook, Taking Action for Hedge Trees, was also published to enable more Tree Wardens to get involved in the campaign. It summarises much useful hedge tree information and includes a where to find out more section.



Walk in the Woods

A vigorous campaign to promote Walk in the Woods was helped this year by our partnership with innocent drinks on their Buy One, Grow One Tree initiative. The Tree Council helped facilitate the initiative and worked with them to develop web-based material, including a woodland code for walkers, downloadable Tree Trail, tree pictures and competition support whilst innocent promoted Walk in the Woods to children, families and all comers, encouraging them to visit local woods or parkland in May. Participants were also encouraged to upload pictures of themselves with their completed tree trail to the specially created flickr site.

On the launch day – 1st May – we had a very successful radio day with fifteen interviews broadcast by stations across England, some live and others pre-recorded, greatly helped by the willingness of Dan Pearson, one of our Ambassadors for Trees, who gave up his time to participate. He proved to be an able and effective promoter of The Tree Council's Walk in the Woods messages and a great champion of the Tree Wardens. We were able to generate many more opportunities for the public to hear about Walk in the Woods than would otherwise have been the case.

To promote Walk in the Woods itself, we issued news releases and put an attractive downloadable poster up on the website, designed to appeal to parents, children and schools alike, of young children enjoying themselves in local woodland. Events that were held included walks to see spring flowers and birds, dawn chorus and bluebell walks, survival training in the wild, a pirates treasure hunt and mini-beast hunts (for children) as well as wildlife and natural history, bat and moth walks.

Seed Gathering Season

This was the tenth anniversary of the launch of Seed Gathering, which begun as Seed Gathering Sunday in 1998 and was relaunched as Seed Gathering Season in 2006. The widely valued Good Seed Guide, published in 2002, was so popular that a much-expanded new book, Trees and How To Grow Them was written by Margaret Lipscombe and Jon Stokes and published by Think Macmillan to coincide with the launch. We were delighted to see it on sale in bookshops and received very positive feedback from readers who had found it invaluable.

National Tree Week

The theme for National Tree Week this year was Plant a Tree; Green the Future and was closely tied in with the launch of the Third Sector Green Paper No Trees No Future, campaigning to change the behaviour of planners, architects and urban designers and to get more, large canopy, trees planted in new developments.

The start of National Tree Week was celebrated in the Terrace Pavilion at the House of Commons with the DCLG Parliamentary Under Secretary of State Baroness Andrews on hand to formally launch it. The platform of National Tree Week launch was used to unveil the Green Paper and the annual Early Day Motion about National Tree Week, put down by Brian Donohoe MP, was this year designed to drive home the messages about the importance of urban trees.

Rupert Bear was the “celebrity” who this year joined children for the launch tree planting at a nursery school site in west London, echoing the Green Paper recommendations. Defra Secretary of State Hilary Benn also undertook a further National Tree Week planting for The Tree Council, a large London Plane at the junction of Dean Stanley Street with Millbank where he wielded a spade alongside Pauline Buchanan Black and Lord Clark, Chair of the Forestry Commission.

Tree Care Campaign

An attractive poster, showing the blocked-in outline of some of the tools and equipment used to care for young trees, accompanied messages for tree planters to return to check stakes, ties and tree guards as part of the continuing campaign to highlight the need for better care of all trees, of all ages, to increase the number reaching maturity.

The posters encouraged those who had planted trees to take some “simple steps for tree survival” and the website carried a range of tips and advice designed to make the most of a few minutes of care at the time when it will make the most difference.



Tree Wardens

During the spring of this year, a survey of networks was undertaken and this told us that our Tree Warden numbers have remained remarkably constant since the last survey, with networks losing individuals, but then recruiting more to fill the spaces. Overall the numbers – 8,000 volunteers - remain remarkable stable, and we are greatly indebted to them for their work as the eyes and ears of The Tree Council.

Common topics for this year's training for Tree Wardens were tree identification; hedgerow planting; orchards; trees and the law; pests and diseases; formative pruning; veteran trees; woodlands; bats; bugs; fungi; tree warden essentials; hazardous trees and moths. The annual Tree Warden Forums took place following a 'think global, act local' theme.

We were delighted that our partnership with Russell Jones and Walker to develop a Tree Warden legal advice line were successful and we were able to promote it at the forums with a simple flyer, with further information on the Tree Warden pages of our website to explain how the service will work.

During the year, we also changed the format of the Tree Warden newsletter. Over the past few years we have had requests from network co-ordinators and individual Tree Wardens to receive their regular updates electronically. As this makes very good environmental sense, we have been experimenting with a new electronic newsletter to replace 'The Tree Guardian'. We will be trialling this new format for 3 issues and will then review its success and make the decision as to whether to make the change permanent at the end of next year.

The first issue of this new electronic 'Tree Warden Update' was emailed in a format that the Tree Warden Co-ordinators can print out as a paper version and post to any of their Tree Wardens who do not have an email address. We announced this change just after Christmas and have had an overwhelmingly positive response.

Tree News

Feedback from the publication of our magazine has continued to be good since it was relaunched in Spring 2008. At the Periodical Publishers Association awards on 27th November, we were delighted that Tree News won Member Magazine of the Year - this, despite that it enjoys a circulation that is not confined to our member organisations and in fact extends to sales in Borders, WH Smith and independent newsagents - was shortlisted for Best Magazine Design and highly commended in the overall Magazine of the Year category. This has only been possible because of the excellent work of John Innes, publisher and Malcolm Tait, editor of Tree News, and their team and the continuing support of the Forest of Dennis and other sponsors, to whom we are greatly indebted.

Grants

Our extremely successful programme of grant-giving for tree planting with schools and community groups has introduced thousands more children under the age of 16 to a legitimate way to get muddy whilst making a positive difference to their environment. Our grants ensured that more than 20,000 trees were planted by children in National Tree Week 2008.

We were able to commission a CD ROM, Tree Ties, written for us by member organisation Learning Through Landscapes and copies were sent out to all our successful Schools and Community Groups Grant applicants. It will continue to be available and provided free to successful applicants in forthcoming years.

We have been delighted that our association with the Good Gifts Catalogue has also resulted in further funds to support sowing of new wildflower meadow areas on the edge of woodland as well as the clearing of woodland floor to allow the regeneration and planting of our natural English bluebell, *Hyacinoides Nonscripta*. The planting and clearing is being carried out through our volunteer Tree Wardens in their local communities and with some of our member organisations; we continue to see the results of projects in the pictures and feedback that we are sent.

The Tree Council has had a satisfactory year financially and the prospects for the forthcoming year are good. We had a small deficit (£9,648) on unrestricted income and expenditure.

Our total income in the year was £397,395 some £118,000 lower than last year. The biggest change was that in the previous year we received a one-off donation from an anonymous donor and it was the last year of the Defra Darwin project. Total expenditure was £365,930, also lower than last year. National Grid continued to be our major sponsor, funding most of our Tree Warden Scheme costs, along with Department for Communities and Local Government. This was the final year of our five-year sponsorship contract with National Grid.

At 31 March 2009, restricted funds were £140,597; £50,641 of this is the balance of grants received from our generous anonymous donor and from The Good Gifts Guide to fund planting of trees and wild flowers in schools and local communities. This programme continues in 2009-10 and beyond. There was also £87,585 remaining from the National Grid sponsorship which will be spent before March 2010. Total reserves, both restricted and unrestricted, were £228,134.

Reserves Policy and Risk Management

It is the policy of the Charity to maintain unrestricted funds, which are the free reserves of the Charity, at a level which equates to approximately one year's core costs. The budgeted core costs for 2009-10 are £125,000 and the unrestricted reserves are £85,537. The trustees recognise that this is too low a level but the budget for 2009-10 shows a significant increase in this figure; we expect to be in line with our reserves policy again by March 2010.

The trustees continue to keep the risks facing the charity under close review. In the light of the reduction in reserves, and with uncertainty in the Stock Market, the Trustees continue to keep almost all the reserves in the form of interest earning bank accounts.

Summary statement of financial activities (incorporating an income and expenditure account) for the year ended 31 March 2009.

	Unrestricted funds	Restricted funds	Total funds 2009	Total funds 2008
	£	£	£	£
Total incoming resources	145,868	251,527	397,395	515,185
Total resources expended	150,351	215,579	365,930	483,198
Net income for the year	(4,483)	35,948	31,465	31,987
Realised/unrealised gains/ (losses) on investment assets	(5,165)	-	(5,165)	(11,577)
Total movement in funds since last financial statements	(9,648)	35,948	26,300	20,430
Balances brought forward at 1 April 2008	97,185	104,649	201,834	181,404
Balances carried forward at 31 March 2009	87,537	140,597	228,134	201,834



Summary Balance sheet as at 31 March 2009

	2009	2008
	£	£
Fixed assets		
Tangible assets	857	2,846
Investments	21,355	26,520
	22,212	29,366
Current assets		
Debtors	21,906	37,679
Cash at bank and in hand	201,001	217,796
	222,907	255,475
Total creditors	(16,985)	(83,007)
Net assets	228,134	
Reserves		
Restricted income fund	140,597	104,649
Unrestricted funds:		
Income and expenditure account	87,537	97,185
Total funds	228,134	201,834

Income and expenditure accounts and balance sheet

The accounts, which have been prepared in accordance with the special provisions of Part VII of the Companies Act 1985 applicable to small companies, were approved by the Board of Trustees on 13th October 2009 and signed on its behalf

Sue Roe, Chairman

Ellida Dawes, Treasurer

Opinion

In our opinion, this extract from the financial statement is consistent with the full financial statements and gives a true and fair view of the state of the Charitable Company's affairs at 31 March 2009, summarising the incoming resources and application of resources, including its income and expenditure, for the year then ended.

Kingston Smith, Devonshire House,
60 Goswell Road, London EC1M 7AD.

Dated

2009