

# Training, trees and conservation

by Dr Richard Wilson

In 2008, I was made redundant. Fortunately, I had spotted the writing on the wall and had embarked on a programme of re-training in arboriculture. My endeavours were (and are) largely self-funded, but when a seemingly insurmountable financial barrier presented itself, the Education Fund stepped in and I have been able to complete my studies, culminating in the Level 6 Professional Diploma in Arboriculture. As I write, I am waiting for the results of my management exercises. But what impact has the fund made to the health, management and conservation of trees in the wider environment? I describe two examples where my training has been used directly to preserve trees and the habitats associated with them.

## Example 1: Preservation of a nesting site in a dangerous roadside tree.

In March 2011, during a garden tree survey in Letchworth, Hertfordshire, a box elder (*Acer negundo*) was identified on the property boundary, with a major dead bough extending over a pavement frequently used by school-children. The wood was extensively cracked, bored by insects, with areas of decayed wood breaking off. In addition, a woodpecker hole could be seen, which appeared to have a hollow behind it. Signs of dysfunction in the main stem were also evident. It was decided to remove the tree. The habitat value of the bough was later underlined when blue tits were observed entering and leaving the hole, so felling was deferred for six weeks. In the meantime, using an idea taken from the FC dead wood guide, a plan was devised to preserve the bough intact and fix it securely into a nearby oak tree. A major concern was that the bough might contain bats, or more nesting birds, and a careful inspection was carried out prior to felling. Once on the ground, the stem was found to be extensively decayed and a large hollow was found in the dead bough. Even though the bough appeared to be uninhabited, it was left undisturbed behind shrubs for five days. The operation was successfully completed in June and a re-inspection carried out in October showed that the fixing straps were still securely in position. Whether the bough will be used for nesting next year remains to be seen, but the habitat has at least been preserved, while the risk from the dangerous tree has been eliminated.

## Example 2: Retention of oak tree with *Ganoderma* infection.

A particularly difficult area for the arboriculturist is making the decision to retain or remove significant trees with fungal infections. Consequently, a



great deal of attention was given to this subject during the PD Arb. course, including consideration of decay detection instruments. An opportunity to put this into practice was presented by an English oak (*Quercus robur*) with a small bracket of *Ganoderma applanatum* ('the artist's fungus') visited in September. The tree was estimated at 300 years old in a parkland location and had been condemned by a local 'tree surgeon'. I was asked to provide a second opinion. Using sonic tomography (an imaging technique using sound waves) to map the decay column, the tree was found to be weakened though not in danger of structural collapse. Instead of tree removal, a programme of crown reduction and target management was recommended, which is now being put into action. Thus the tree has been retained, the loading on the weakened stem reduced and the risk of injury to visitors to the site also reduced.

So, in these examples I have shown how the charity's support of my re-training has had tangible benefits in the environment. Clearly, I have greatly benefitted from the opportunity to learn more about trees, ecology and the environment, and have immensely enjoyed working outdoors, but an unexpected benefit has been the interest in trees and the natural environment that this has encouraged in my children. To the dismay of my wife, the tea-table has now become a make-shift laboratory for the examination of the day's specimens. Perhaps the next generation of Confor's membership?

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## SKILLS BRIEFING

### Study travel bursaries available

The RFS, through the Donald Randle Trust, is offering two bursaries, each worth £500, to foresters travelling abroad to undertake independent study. In addition, the RFS Yorkshire Division offers an annual bursary up to £600 to allow a student with strong local links to carry out a forestry-related project. [www.rfs.org.uk/about/bursaries](http://www.rfs.org.uk/about/bursaries)  
Closing date for the Randle Bursaries is 07 March 2012. Tel 01442 822028.

### Lantra developments

A £2.9m investment in land-based and environmental businesses has been confirmed as part of the Employer and Investment Fund. This will enable Lantra, the Sector Skills Council, to deliver three new projects. The first is a web-based, one-stop-shop, land-based business centre, providing information and support to businesses on skills and business development. The second is a professional standards framework, encouraging the workforce to build its level of professional standards, leadership and management skills through professional registers. The third is aimed at supporting land-based career entry and progression routes. [www.lantra.co.uk](http://www.lantra.co.uk)

### FC promotes ICF

Having previously left the matter to personal choice, FC has taken the decision to formally encourage its forestry staff to attain chartered status with the UK's only Royal Chartered body for tree professionals, the Institute of Chartered Foresters.

### Silky joins with RFS for award

RFS has linked up with Silky Fox Handsaws to offer an annual award to students on courses with a strong practical arboriculture or woodland management element. The first awards are being made in 21 colleges across England and Wales this summer to the student each college judges to be the 'best student' or 'student showing most endeavour' in 2012. Each winner will receive a Silky pruning saw together with a year's membership to the RFS. [www.rfs.org.uk](http://www.rfs.org.uk)

### CFA young forester award 2012

Applications for the Commonwealth Forestry Association young forester award are invited from students and young professionals under 35 years on 30 June 2012, who are nationals of Commonwealth countries. The selection committee will discuss placement options with short-listed applicants, who will then be asked to write up to 500 words on what they want to achieve on the placement. The application form is at [www.cfa-international.org](http://www.cfa-international.org) The closing date is 30 April 2012.