

Talking Trees

Volunteer Speaker Network

Annual report 2021

Hello and welcome to your new look annual report, which you are receiving as you are part of our fantastic Talking Trees volunteer network. Since we moved the speaker network into the regions earlier this year, we have been thrilled to be able to support such a dedicated team, who have achieved growing success despite the obvious restrictions as we adapt to life after COVID-19.

You all make such an impact across a breadth of work for the Woodland Trust. From attracting new members and volunteers and generating income, to inspiring others to get involved with our campaigns and other activities, we are so grateful to each and every one of you for continuing your journey with us. We had a great foundation to build on from the national network and the only way from here is up!

Read on for news from each regional team, sharing statistics and stories of what you have all been up to and what is planned for the coming year. We hope you enjoy it and, as always, if you have any questions or comments, please let your Volunteer Manager know.

With thanks and best wishes for a Merry Christmas and a very peaceful and happy new year.

Martha, Kirsty, Rachel, Anna, Lucy and Paul

Contact details

Martha Boalch, Volunteer Development Officer (Wales)

MarthaBoalch2@woodlandtrust.org.uk

Kirsty Duncan, Engagement and Events Officer (Scotland)

KirstyDuncan@woodlandtrust.org.uk

Rachel Harries, Engagement and Communications Officer (South West)

RachelHarries@woodlandtrust.org.uk

Anna Claxton and Lucy Shea, Volunteer Development Officers (South East)

SEVolunteering@woodlandtrust.org.uk

*In the absence of a Volunteer Development Officer in the North region at time of writing, please direct all enquiries to

Paul Bunton, Engagement and Communications Officer (North)

PaulBunton@woodlandtrust.org.uk

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A story...

“My story is set back in November, 1964. It is a damp misty evening, as it often is on the edge of Dartmoor, as we are in the hall of a West Devon village. The hall is packed because there is to be an illustrated talk by a naturalist who had grown up in one of the big houses near to the village. Many weren't sure what a naturalist was. Is it someone who doesn't wear clothes, wondered one? Word had got about that the speaker had a good camera and had mastered the art of the new-fangled 35mm slide technology so, one way or the other, it was likely to be an interesting evening!

Our man started his talk with a slide of a mammal. He asked the audience if anyone knew what it was. After a noticeable pause, an elderly gent shouted out, “it's an otter, mi dear”. Our speaker then pointed out that the reason why most did not recognise it, was that otters were almost extinct in Devon rivers. “You all know about the River Plym that flows a milky white all the way into Plymouth Sound because of the Clay works on the edge of the Moor”, he said. River water was pressurised and fired at the decomposing granite, from whence china clay comes. The water was then pumped into settling chambers and the runoff returned to the river. The company claimed that their process was entirely natural; it is just that they were speeding it up somewhat! The problem, our speaker explained, was that the milky suspension in the river water gets into aquatic gills and clogs them. Fish then suffocate and the otters starve. “And whilst talking about the rivers”, he went on, “let me tell you about the oaks that grow along the valleys. Many are very old. The Forestry Commission have felled a few but have surrounded others with larch and Corsican pine plantations. The oaks are being suffocated.” He prophesied that at some point “we will regret what has happened”. It was a good evening; people liked the pictures and the articulate and animated presenter's performance but - did anything come of it?

Well, perhaps something did as in the audience that evening was a teenager who had gone there only because there was no other entertainment and was particularly impressed. He remembered the message and is now telling it to you some 57 years later.

But something else happened. Given the success of the evening, our speaker was invited to repeat the 'show' in villages around the South West. The impressive wildlife pictures - along with a passionate delivery - impressed many. One such was a gentleman who owned an engineering business supplying and maintaining farm equipment called 'Watkins and Roseveare'. As such, he knew that, whilst he was making money, some of the equipment was being used to remove wildlife habitat such as hedges and copses. He was also interested in the technology that our speaker was using to photograph and project the living images. A friendship was born. A few years later when a wood was up for sale near Kingsbridge, our engineer, Ken, called upon our speaker, Hugh, for advice. The result, as you will have guessed, was the formation of the Woodland Trust in 1972.

We remember Kenneth Watkins as the founder of the Trust - the man who, along with his wife Mary, put up most of the money but we have overlooked the real inspiration that was supplied by our speaker (who was also a founding Trustee). His name: H. G. Hurrell.

If you are a speaker, you will be aware that you generally don't know who is in the audience. Nevertheless, if you succeed in inspiring them, who knows what might result.”

Gerald Price (Volunteer Speaker, North)

What's happening...?

Wales



Greetings from Wales!

My name is Martha and I am the Volunteer Development Officer for Wales. I manage our speaker network in Wales.

We may not have many volunteer speakers in Wales but the ones we have are top notch! To mention just a few, we have a retired lecturer, a management expert and a health and wellbeing professional. Our speakers have bags of enthusiasm and know their stuff when it comes to engaging with local interest groups, often drumming up interest for our free tree packs, membership and securing a donation. We are very grateful to our speakers for the work they do raising awareness and interest in the cause of the Woodland Trust.

2021 has been fairly quiet, at least until recently, but now that community groups are planning their group schedule for next year, we have a healthy number of enquiries coming in. We even have repeat bookings from groups who want to hear from our speakers again!

In 2022, we would love to expand our volunteer speaker network, particularly in our landscape focus area of Dyfi to Dwyryd. This is an area of particular ecological importance which spans from Llangurig to Blaenau Ffestiniog and across to the West coast. Here, we are working at landscape scale to facilitate delivery of positive change in our focus area. We aim to increase tree cover, encourage sustainable management and increase biodiversity and work with landowners and partners to explore options, to bring life and a brighter future for everyone to the hills and valleys of Wales.

Thank you to everyone involved and I look forward to working with you next year,

Martha



Speaker Spotlight... Professor Mike Goosey

Mike is our speaker in North East Wales. An Honorary Professor of Sustainable Bioenergy at the University of Nottingham, he first got involved with the Trust when his local community were assisting the Trust with the design and planting of his local woods, Haroldswood, as part of the 2000 scheme 'Woods on your Doorstep'. He later became the warden of this woods and has gone on to plant his own woodland on some local grassland which he bought.

In 2011, Mike joined the volunteer speaker program and he hasn't looked back. He's a very competent speaker and he thrives on generating interesting discussion with the local groups that he visits. Mike particularly enjoys the adventure of visiting different village halls in remote locations. A massive thank you to Mike and all of our speaker volunteers!

"It's great fun - as with many things, the more you put into it the more you get out of it."

Mike Goosey, Volunteer Speaker, Wales

Speaker Stats

5 Number of speakers

10 Number of talks delivered (June - Dec 2021)

£105 Total regional donations (June - Nov 2021)

What's happening...?

Scotland

New for 2022!



Hi – I'm Kirsty and I am the Engagement and Events Officer for Scotland, a role that sees me supporting volunteer speakers across my patch, amongst many other things! I am based in the Woodland Trust's Perth office.

My main priority for the year ahead is recruitment. If possible, I would like to try and recruit an extra volunteer or two within certain local areas to ensure that we can fulfil the requests that come into the country, as well as hopefully finding speaker volunteers who can deliver talks of a specialist nature, as we are getting more interest!

It is exciting to be involved with our Volunteer Speaker Network in Scotland and you are all very much appreciated.

Kirsty



Speaker Spotlight... Ian Baird

Ian has been a Woodland Trust volunteer since January 2013 and, through a variety of roles, has gained knowledge about the importance of trees and the challenges associated with planting, restoring, and protecting native woodland. Here he describes his involvement with the Trust...

"I very much appreciate my role as a volunteer speaker because, by talking to groups, I'm able to raise awareness of the importance of trees..."

Ian Baird, Volunteer Speaker, Scotland

"I very much appreciate my role as a volunteer speaker because, by talking to groups, I'm able to raise awareness of the importance of trees, encourage people to find out about and visit their local woodland, and possibly become a member and/or donate to the Trust. As well as indoor and Zoom talks I've also been involved in leading a few walks-and-talks in some amazing locations. The varied groups that I've spoken to include Rotary, Probus and Soroptimist clubs, gardening clubs, a Burns club, cub, scout and brownie groups plus mental health, macular condition and dementia support groups.

As a result of the Covid-19 restrictions on public meetings, my most recent talks have been delivered via Zoom and telephone conference calls. One talk of note that I delivered formed part of the 'Stop Climate Chaos Scotland' national initiative in the run-up to COP26. It took the form of an on-line evening presentation about how climate change is affecting our natural environment and I was one of three guest speakers invited to share knowledge and experiences and place a global problem into a local context, speaking about the importance of trees in combatting climate change. Over 40 members of the public participated in the event and everyone involved felt it was a great success.

It is great to be able to bring these important topics into a local context with particular reference to our Glen Finglas estate, which is local to many of those attending. We are also lucky to be able to work collaboratively with other local organisations who each work differently working towards a common goal, who also delivered talks. I've also had a lot of fun!"

Speaker Stats

5 Number of speakers

9 Number of talks delivered (June – Dec 2021)

What's happening...?

England South West

Hello. I'm Rachel and I am the Engagement and Communications Officer in the South West, which includes my role as Volunteer Manager for the Talking Trees speakers in the region.

With next year being the 50th anniversary of the Woodland Trust, and our birthplace being Devon, we're looking at what opportunities we have to help our speakers celebrate and to highlight our work in the county. We're also exploring how we can expand the speaker scheme including potentially recruiting new speakers to support us in our conversations with landowners – both around tree planting and restoring ancient woodland.

Thank you to everyone that I have had the pleasure of working with so far.

Rachel

Speaker Spotlight... Sarah Deere-Jones

One of our newer speakers in the region, Sarah Deere-Jones is a professional harp player and music lecturer who has performed and lectured all over the world. Sarah has a vibrant environmental streak and has run two environmental campaigning groups in south Dorset before moving to north Cornwall in 2002. Sarah's passion is rewilding, including her own land, a 50-50 mix of medieval meadows and a remnant of ancient Atlantic rainforest.

Sarah has recently become a trustee of the 'Keep it Wild' trust, which was set up by Derek Gow (of the beaver's fame) to rescue small areas of valuable biodiversity by crowdfunding their purchase. Sarah has been a speaker for the Woodland Trust since 2017 and we're looking forward to using her rewilding expertise to share our own ambitions to protect and restore trees and woods across Devon.



Congratulations, Rosie!

The South West lost one of its Talking Trees speakers this year, Rosie Walker as she decided to join the Woodland Trust as a paid employee! Rosie is our new External Affairs Officer for the South West, so she'll be doing lots of 'talking trees' to local authorities, councils, politicians and policymakers. She is already using her speaker expertise and making a name for herself as one of our media spokespeople. Look and listen out for Rosie on Radio 4's Costing the Earth, Songs of Praise and various local radio shows!

Speaker Stats

4 Number of speakers

3 Number of talks delivered (June – Dec 2021)

£90 Total regional donations (June – Nov 2021)

What's happening...?

England South East



Anna



Lucy

Here in the South East, there are two of us in the Volunteer Development Officer team, both working together on a part-time basis to support and recognise our volunteer speakers. Our speakers, as in other regions, feature a small but perfectly formed team with a range of experiences, who have been working hard to deliver talks to spread the word about the work that the Trust does.

In 2022, our plan is to increase this network of speakers so we can fulfil even more engagements, as we are fortunate to be receiving an increasing number of requests, particularly focusing on reaching the diverse communities around us.

We very much enjoy helping you all and are grateful for your time and commitment to developing the region's activities.

Anna and Lucy



Speaker Spotlight... Professor Alan Aylward

Based in Surrey, Alan is one of a committed team of South-eastern volunteer speakers, having travelled to many corners of the region during his time in the role. A retired Professor of Atmospheric Physics, his time with the Woodland Trust keeps him very busy in a number of ways, also including giving guided walks at Langley Vale Wood and supporting working group activities there, as he has done for several years.

Alan has wowed audiences both online during recent times and across the South East, cumulating hundreds of pounds in donations this year alone through reaching hundreds of people, perhaps notably delivering a presentation to the Department of Education. He also recently received a cheque for over £550!

Feedback received for Alan includes: 'Alan was very interesting and obviously knew his subject. We learnt a great deal of information and realised that we really didn't know much about the important work that you do for the environment. He was friendly and so interesting that time became the biggest restraint'. All of the groups Alan visits enjoy their time immensely and he, as with all of our speakers, inspire others to donate, spread the word or get involved with our activities. Thank you to our volunteers for making such a difference to the environment through the talks they deliver.

Speaker Stats

7 Number of speakers

14 Number of talks delivered (June – Dec 2021)

£724.12 Total regional donations (June – Nov 2021)

The Northern region's speaker team has been producing phenomenal results to date and it is inspiring to see the audience that the dedicated volunteers have reached across a vast geographical area. Under the guardianship of Claire Green, Volunteer Development Officer (North) until she sadly left the Trust in November 2021, everyone looks forward to seeing what happens in the year ahead. We are sure that it will be fantastic!

Before leaving, Claire had this to say: **"Quite frankly you are all absolutely amazing and doing an absolutely fantastic job of promoting and supporting our work. Thank you!"**

The perfect place to end it for now. Big pats on the back all round!



Speaker Spotlight... Alan Hunton

I have been a volunteer speaker for the Woodland Trust since 2005. It was so long ago that I remember that I received a set of 35mm slides to 'enhance' my first presentation; luckily this was not needed as my previous career in teaching had given me some experience of a new tool called Power Point.

"I did give one talk to a gardening club on the Costa Blanca in Spain which was well received but - do not worry - I did not claim travelling expenses."

Alan Hunton,
Volunteer Speaker,
North

My enthusiasm for all things arboreal did not start until I began volunteering and I found that I enjoyed talking to community groups and encouraging them to debate some of the issues raised. In 2007, I began contributing to the Ancient Tree Hunt and was accepted as a verifier; this basically meant that I could not only search for my own veteran trees but I was expected to visit trees recorded by others. I find these old veteran trees fascinating as each one is a small vertical nature reserve.

As you would expect, my talks are biased strongly towards Ancient Trees and Woods and I do like to include as many local examples as possible. My 'patch' is North and East Yorkshire and I have been as far north as Whitby and as far south as Retford in Notts. Perhaps my largest audience was 100 at a Civic Society in York and my smallest was three at a meeting of a WI club in rural East Yorkshire where we all sat around a box of chocolate biscuits for an hour and chatted about trees until the biscuits were consumed.

Speaker Stats

15 Number of speakers

101 Number of talks delivered (June - Dec 2021)

£1,150 Total regional donations (June - Nov 2021)



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