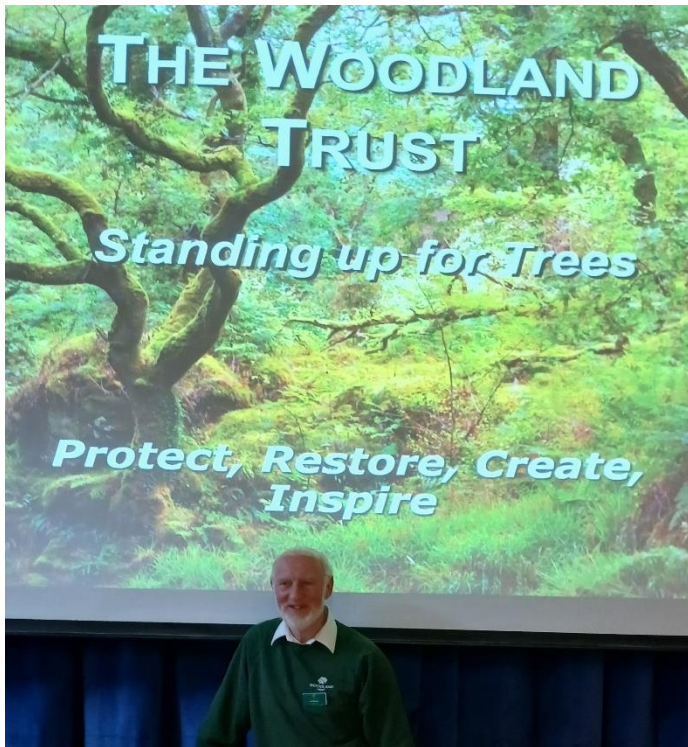


On Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> May 2025, the Woodhouse Eaves WI enjoyed a talk by Ian Retson on the work of the Woodland Trust and the National Forest.



Established over 50 years ago, the Woodland Trust is the UK's largest woodland conservation charity and has around 500,000 members. Its work includes protecting existing woodland, restoring old woodland, creating new woodland and inspiring all generations to understand the value of trees and woods. The UK is one of Europe's least wooded countries with only 13% of our land being wooded, compared with an average of 40% for the rest of Europe. 85% of our ancient woodland (defined as over 400 years old) has no legal protection, despite its being home to more threatened species than any other habitat.

There are both global and local challenges to overcome. Climate change is affecting all aspects of our environment, development of roads, railways and housing leads to habitat loss and trees are threatened by an ever-increasing number of pests and diseases.

Ian described several projects in which the Woodland Trust is meeting these challenges. In 2024, it raised

sufficient funds to buy Harrison Woods in Lincolnshire, where there is now a 100-year programme to manage and restore these ancient woods. At Glen Finglas in the Trossachs the Trust works with other organisations such as the Scottish government, the RSPB and Scottish Forestry to manage a 12,000-acre site where red squirrels, pine martens and beavers have been reintroduced and where eco-tourists are actively encouraged. In 2018 a 25-year plan to plant 50 million trees in the Northern Forest, stretching from Liverpool to Hull, was put in place. At Mead Young People's Forest in Derbyshire a 400-acre site, once an open-cast mine, has been landscaped and planted with trees by schoolchildren. Closer to home is the National Forest which covers 200 square miles. In 1990 only 6% of the land was woodland, compared to 26% today. Within the National Forest is Hicks Lodge near Ashby-de-la-Zouch, where visitors can walk, cycle and enjoy the café!

Finally, Ian described the importance of the trees of Bradgate Park, many of which are 400 years old and some as old as 800 years. A mature English Oak tree can support up to 2,300 species and absorb 150kg of CO<sub>2</sub> every year. It is also not susceptible to the pests and diseases affecting other native trees.

Ian was thanked for his interesting talk, which inspired me to look up the route of the National Forest Way, a 75-mile long distance path from Beacon Hill to the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire. I'll walk that one day!

Judith Harrison

PS For more information on the work of the Woodland Trust and how to become a member, visit [www.woodlandtrust.org.uk](http://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk).