Caring for our Ancient Woodland – Coppicing

Coppiced clearing in Ashenground Wood with substantial re-growth in evidence

It is probably safe to say that within Britain, no single woodland has remained uninfluenced by human activities. This is because woodlands provided essential materials for every day living. In pasture-type woodland, sheep and cattle would also be grazed. Pigs would be turned out to eat acorns and beech mast in the autumn. Thus woodlands were of great economic importance.

The species which inhabit Britain's woods are there in many cases **because of** past activities such as **coppicing**, rather than despite them. They are present because the conditions which prevail in such woods fit their habitat requirements. Species have developed in tandem with man's influence over the centuries.

Activities such a **coppicing** in woodlands provided a vital, continuous local supply of wood products in the past. This had the side effect of continually creating new glades in woodlands to replace those which had grown over with time. This encouraged great biodiversity in the coppiced woodlands. Wildflowers, grasses and brambles would progressively colonize each new glade as the tree canopy was opened up. The animal species associated with these plants would also then follow.

Removal of all human activity within a woodland will usually result in the development of dark, dense woods. This will favour a relatively small number of species which prefer this type of habitat. However, it will also result in the elimination of all those species which either require higher light levels, or which are dependent on other species with this requirement. If high biodiversity and a wide range of woodland species is the goal, then management will be necessary to create structural diversity within the woodland