

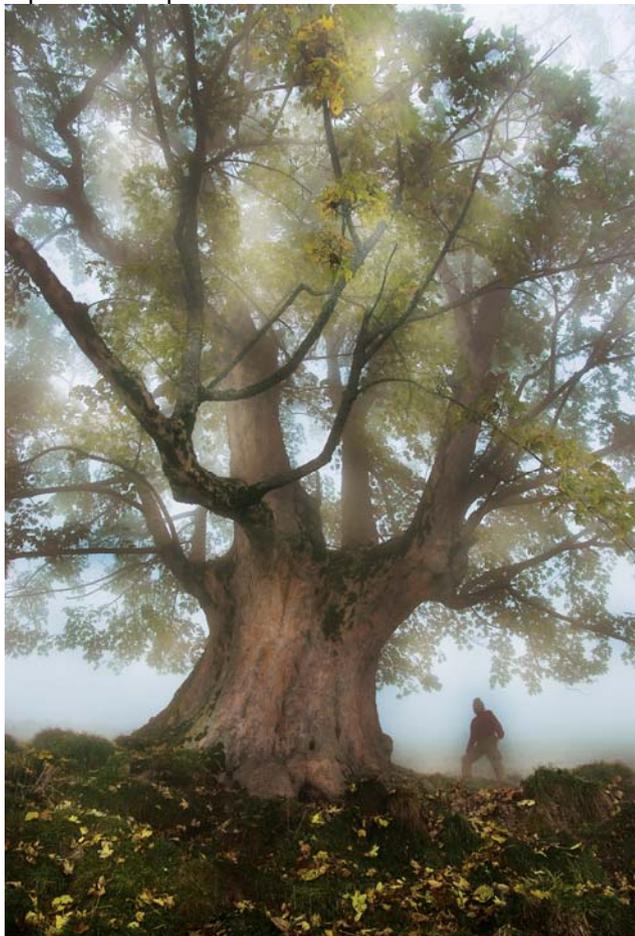
The European Champion Tree Forum

For some fifteen years we have had limited and intermittent contact with a handful of fellow tree hunters from elsewhere in Europe, who found us through their interest in the notable trees of the British Isles. And through them we learned of organisations similar to our own, although it seemed that few were quite as focused as us on finding and recording all the finest trees in their countries, whether native or exotic. Surely, we thought, we would have much in common with our Continental confrères – not only knowledge and expertise but also our shared enthusiasm for finding great trees.

However it was not until 2008 that we started to search systematically for such organisations and enthusiasts. Some were easy to find but - even with the help of the Internet - it took many months to locate others, especially those enthusiasts who seek and record notable trees on their own.

Mutually beneficial

Early this year we felt that we had made enough promising English-speaking contacts to plan a meeting, to get to know each other, to exchange information and ideas, and to discuss how we might co-operate in mutually beneficial ways. So we set about organising what we believe to be the first international meeting on notable trees in Europe, if not the world. (Please let us know of any others). And to give the meeting a clear identity we decided to call it the European Champion Tree Forum.



9.6m girth Sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*) in the Swiss mountains (Michel Brunner)

Tree hunters

We are grateful to Philippe de Spoelberch, founder of the Wespelaar Arboretum in Belgium and a keen student of notable trees, for inviting us to be the first users of its fine new Visitors' Centre. The meeting brought together some thirty five experienced tree hunters from nine countries in northern Europe, each active in identifying, recording, photographing, and/or promoting the appreciation of notable trees in either a professional or amateur capacity. Several of them have created their own websites dedicated to notable trees in their own countries (or, in a few cases, to trees in several countries). Also present were members of the Wespelaar team and representatives of the Tree Register; David Alderman, Christopher Carnaghan, Maurice Foster, Colin Hall, Tony Kirkham, Thomas Pakenham and Roy Lancaster.

Our guests:

Belgium: Tim Bekaert, Koen Camelbeke, Christophe Crock, Guy de Broqueville, Philippe de Spoelberch, Marc Meyer, Abraham Rammeloo and Marc Struelens
France: Jean Francois Breton, Frédéric Cousseran, Olivier Colin and Jean-Francois Dewilde
Germany: Michael Dreisvagt, Detlef Ehlert, Gabrielle Glass, Lutz Krueger, Marcel Robischon, Dr Heinz Schirinig, Dr Ralf Tegeler and Dr Reinhard Weidner
Hungary: György Pósfai
Ireland: Aubrey Fennell
Luxembourg: Eike Jablonski
Netherlands: Martijn Essers, Nick Gordon, Frank Moens, Jeroen Pater, Jeroen Philippona and Bas van Griesven
Poland: Krzysztof Borkowski and Piotr Krasinski
Switzerland: Michel Brunner.



To visit Wespelaar Arboretum
www.arboretumwespelaar.be

Great trees across Europe

David Alderman, our Director, set a fine pace and tone for the Forum in introducing the aims and activities of the Tree Register. Then came speakers from Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Poland, Hungary, France, Switzerland and Ireland. (We'll be putting the full list on our website). Some presented the work of national societies or group projects while others talked about their own research and discoveries. There was plenty on recording and databases, and a wealth of splendid images, some familiar (great oaks in Polish forests) and others unexpected (massive black poplars in Hungarian wetlands). Time being short this was clearly only a taster of the many great trees scattered across northern Europe.

General agreement

We closed with a brief review of what we had learnt about each others' groups, and listed topics of mutual interest – such as international databases, finding funding for research projects, helping to establish new groups in countries without them – that could set the agenda for future meetings. There was general agreement that these initial exchanges had been productive and enjoyable, and that we should remain in regular contact. As a first step we have established an email group to share information among those who attended the meeting and others who were invited but unable to attend. We really want this to be co-operative federal movement, started but not dominated by us, so that the next meeting of the ECTF will - we hope - be in another country and organised by another group.



Norway Spruce (*Picea abies*), Switzerland (Michel Brunner)
Michel spends six months in the year hunting and photographing amazing trees in the Swiss mountains. Find out more about Michel on his website www.proarbore.com (in German)



White Poplar (*Populus alba*) in Hungary (György Pósfai)
György set up and runs the champion tree register of Hungary on his own. His website is www.dendromania.hu (in Hungarian and English)



Larch (*Larix decidua*), Switzerland (Michel Brunner)



Sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*), Switzerland (Michel Brunner)

Extending our contacts

In future issues of the Newsletter we plan to introduce some of our new friends from across Europe, their activities, their websites and their societies. Meanwhile we will be putting links to them on our website. And we will be extending our contacts to other countries, notably in southern and eastern Europe. We know for example that Spain has very active groups and individuals devoted to recording and conserving notable trees, but our lack of Spanish means that we must find English speakers among them to permit easy dialogue. Please let us know if you could help us in this regard.

(Right) A 9m girth Sweet Chestnut (*Castanea sativa*) at Schouwbroek Castle, near Ghent, Belgium (Jeroen Philippona). Jeroen founded and runs www.bomeninfo.nl (in Dutch and English)

