



# ERNEST COOK TRUST

learning from the land since 1952

## A DAY IN THE LIFE OF... THE TRUST'S WOODMEN

**Stephen Boulton**, pictured right, has many sides to his work. When he's not maintaining the Ernest Cook Trust woodlands on the Fairford, Hatherop, Barnsley and Eastleach Estates in Gloucestershire, he is busy with the Trust's three Forest Schools.

Forest Schools give children and young people the opportunity to learn outdoors and Stephen is responsible for creating a safe environment for this to happen.

During wet days, ever versatile Stephen finds time to create giant insects out of steel to put around the Forest Schools as points of interest, ready for when the Education Officers lead minibeast hunts. These 'beasts' include a dragonfly, bumble bee, wasp and a butterfly.

He has also overseen the building by two pupils from Farmors School of an outdoor classroom in Horseshoe Wood and a bench area (pictured right) where the class can sit down together and talk, or study interesting things they have found.

Stephen can relate to young people learning outdoor skills, as he joined the Ernest Cook Trust in 1981 on a youth training scheme. "It was just myself and another young lad here – it was a case of prove yourself and you can stay on," he recalls.

He evidently did prove himself, and nearly three decades later, he has no regrets. He enjoys teaching rural skills such as dry stone walling or hedge laying to pupils from local schools, passing on what others have taught him.

He has also helped local pupils build bird and bat boxes, which are installed around the Forest Schools. Picnic tables have also been constructed and placed around the estate for anglers and the general public to use.

Throughout the year, when not involved in educational work, Stephen's role as woodman keeps him busy, thinning and pruning trees, clearing footpaths and mowing while also taking care to preserve the wild flowers. His other responsibilities include maintenance of fencing, gates and roadside trees.



*Models made by Stephen Boulton help children at ECT's Forest School learn about minibeasts*

**Michael Dickinson** (pictured, right, with his wife Mandy) is the woodman at the Little Dalby Estate in Leicestershire. He joined the estate's staff in the summer of 2009, bringing a wealth of experience after 21 years on the Duke and Duchess of Rutland's Belvoir Estate.



Michael's role with ECT is much broader than simply tending to the 5,500-acre estate's woodlands and hedges. "More than half of it is looking after the trees on the estate, but the job will vary depending on the month of the year," he says.

"For the shooting season I could be helping out with the gamekeepers, early spring and summertime I'll be keeping the estate looking neat and tidy. And then there's the property side of it, basic maintenance, and with any empty properties, making sure they're ready to let."

Michael began his career working for the Peak District National Park. After training in forestry at Lincolnshire College of Agriculture, Riseholme, he worked at Doddington Hall in Lincolnshire, before moving on to the Belvoir Estate.



**Lee James** has been looking after the 50-acre Redwood mixed woodland which is part of the forestry on the Slimbridge Estate in Gloucestershire since 2000.

In addition to managing the woodland, a large part of Lee's job is supporting the Trust's Head of Education Anne Newman as she supervises the frequent school visits to the Redwood Education Centre.



Lee's many skills have been put to good use, creating a large new pond and wildlife area in the meadow on the edge of the woods, along with an outdoor classroom – and toilets which have a reed bed sewage system.

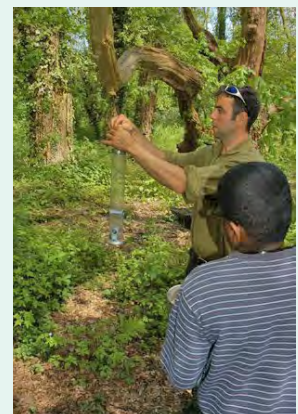
He also turns his hand to helping children make marker posts for footpaths and bird boxes.

"It's unusual for someone in my job to have the chance to get so involved in education," he says. "But it's given me a chance to learn things too. I created the pond from scratch, and the wildlife it now supports is incredible. I've also helped to build the education centre, using local materials.



"It's great to see the youngsters enjoying themselves outside, and discovering the wonders of nature. For many of them, it is the first time they have had a chance to really explore a wood, and look at what lives in a pond, or toast marshmallows over a log fire."

To find out more about how the Ernest Cook Trust looks after its estates, visit [www.ernestcooktrust.org.uk/estates](http://www.ernestcooktrust.org.uk/estates)



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