



# StarTree in Wales

*Toni Dickson reports back from the latest StarTree Assembly: a Wild Forest Products Fair in North Wales.*

The Wild Forest Products Fair that took place amongst the towering conifers and craft studios of Glynllifon Country Park in May 2016 was the first fair of its kind to take place in Europe. This was an event held to showcase and celebrate the innovation and diversity of small-scale enterprises from across Europe, that use and produce wild forest products; an event where one could engage with people who make their livelihood from wild forest products and an opportunity to share knowledge and skills amongst interested visitors, stakeholders, research partners and small enterprises.

The fair was an integral part of the most recent StarTree General Assembly and was a unique and welcome format for the 'knowledge exchange event' (KEE) that makes up part of every general assembly meeting. The KEE is a chance for StarTree partners and local stakeholders to discuss key issues and share ideas and experiences. For the organisers of the fair, our Welsh partners Llais y Goedwig [1], I am sure there was much pre-fair anxiety but they need not have worried; the sun shone, the atmosphere was warm and friendly and around five hundred visitors attended. People took part in a range of workshops and discussions, tasted wild food products from across Europe and had the chance to find out about different organisations and businesses, both in the UK and the rest of Europe, that support, research and produce innovative wild forest products.

## A packed programme

The programme was packed with workshops and demonstrations, some informative, others practical. Willow weaving, wild food preparation, herbal walks, uses for fungi other than as food and stripping bark to use as seating for stools were amongst the practical workshops and demonstrations on offer. Informative workshops were held by a local woodland group to

discuss management of woodlands for wild forest products and our StarTree partners held a series of interactive workshops focused on different aspects of StarTree research: moss harvesting, innovation, the relation between social networks and supply chains, and an overview of foraging for wild products from the pickers perspective in different countries in Europe. There were even social enterprise workshops held as part of the Making Local Woods Work programme [2], exploring the options and availability of support for setting up a wild forest product-based social enterprise.

The forty nine different stalls and exhibitors displayed a variety of wild forest and woodland delights, innovative products and a wealth of information. Amongst the local exhibitors were a bio-composite centre, wildplant educators, creators of food products made from hedgerow and woodland plants (including a tasty nettle, cleaver and dandelion water-based kefir), natural dyers, beekeepers, bluebell seed and bulb sellers and bark crafters. The StarTree consortium had numerous stalls representing academic partners, institutes, associations and organisations as well as a few selling products such as Latvian pine sweets, boar bristle brushes and Austrian 'Nature Park Speciality' berry products. Truffle crisps from Catalonia and the range of cork products from the Alentejo region of Portugal were two personal favourites; whilst they were not for sale the discovery of products such as gloves made from cork was a treat.

## From Scotland with love

The Scottish exhibit spanned a couple of tables and represented Reforesting Scotland, Scottish Wild Harvests Association, Scottish Working Woods label and also included some information on the Scottish Basketmakers' Circle and coppice. There were many visitors to the stall; the *Woodlanders* book proved popular as did tasting pure sea buckthorn juice and two bottles of Cairn O'Mohr wine

- elderberry and oak leaf - were wrapped in bark and taken off to Styria in Austria. This fair was not an event where we expected to gain new members for any of the represented organisations but it was a great opportunity to open up discussion about what is happening in Scotland in respect of woodland-based living, livelihoods and wild forest products. Indeed, around the fair many good discussions evolved as exhibitors, visitors and researchers found common interests and addressed many questions relating to wild forest products and their use both by individuals and businesses.

I am sure this fair may inspire other countries to hold similar events beyond the StarTree project. As an inaugural fair celebrating and showcasing wild forest products, gathering together interested parties and for providing a platform to share some StarTree work and results with a wider audience it was a success and has produced a model that could be used in many other regions. The variety of stalls illustrated how varied the enterprises and people are that use wild forest materials and ingredients and this first fair only scratched the surface of what is happening across Europe. There are many annual fairs and events that take place for the forest and food industry, neither of which ever seem to represent wild forest products. It was a pleasure to be present at the first fair that acknowledged and presented the diversity of wild forest products and the associated people, enterprises and organisations.

[star-tree.eu](http://star-tree.eu)

## More info:

1. <http://llaisygoedwig.org.uk>
2. <https://www.plunkett.co.uk/woodlands>

*Toni Dickson is researcher for the StarTree project. The end of the StarTree project will be marked by an academic conference: Wild Forest Products in Europe, to be held in Barcelona, 13-14 October 2016. See <http://star-tree.eu/final-conference-2016>.*

Clockwise from top left: Cork as a forest product; Forest plant dyes; Bees; Hedgerow products. Photos: StarTree.