

# IMPACT REPORT

## 2021



**SYLVA**  
FOUNDATION

*nurturing a wood culture, growing a future*

## Welcome from the CEO of the Sylva Foundation

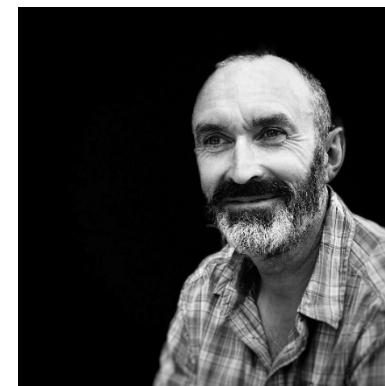
When we first set up the Sylva Foundation in 2009, our mission was to revive Britain's wood culture by advancing forestry knowledge, reconnecting people with growing trees for wood, and promoting sustainable forest management.

While we remain true to our mission, I could never have envisaged how quickly Sylva would grow. Highlights have included the development of our innovative myForest suite, which now benefits more than 130,000 hectares of woods and forests across Britain, and our popular Sylva Wood School with its unique focus on educating crafts people while promoting sustainable, home-grown wood. Our collaborations have grown from strength to strength; our successful Wood Centre now supports 25 woodworking businesses every year, while our British Woodlands Survey regularly receives more than 1,000 responses, providing a cornerstone of forestry research for our partners, including government agencies, major NGOs, university researchers, and the Forestry and Climate Change Working Group.

The past year has given us the opportunity to reflect on how far we have come in 12 years, but also to ensure our work remains accessible to all. We have come to realise that it is quite simple; even as we continue to grow, all the various strands of Sylva's work are connected by our belief that through innovating, collaborating, training, and learning, we can nurture a wood culture, and grow a future.

In this report, we thought it fitting to highlight the astonishing range of talented people who are invested in our work, and who embody these values. From woodland owners around Britain, to environmental scientists; from experienced trustees, to the next generation of designers and makers in wood. These people are at the very heart of our work and they define Sylva; not just in what we do, but indeed how we do it.

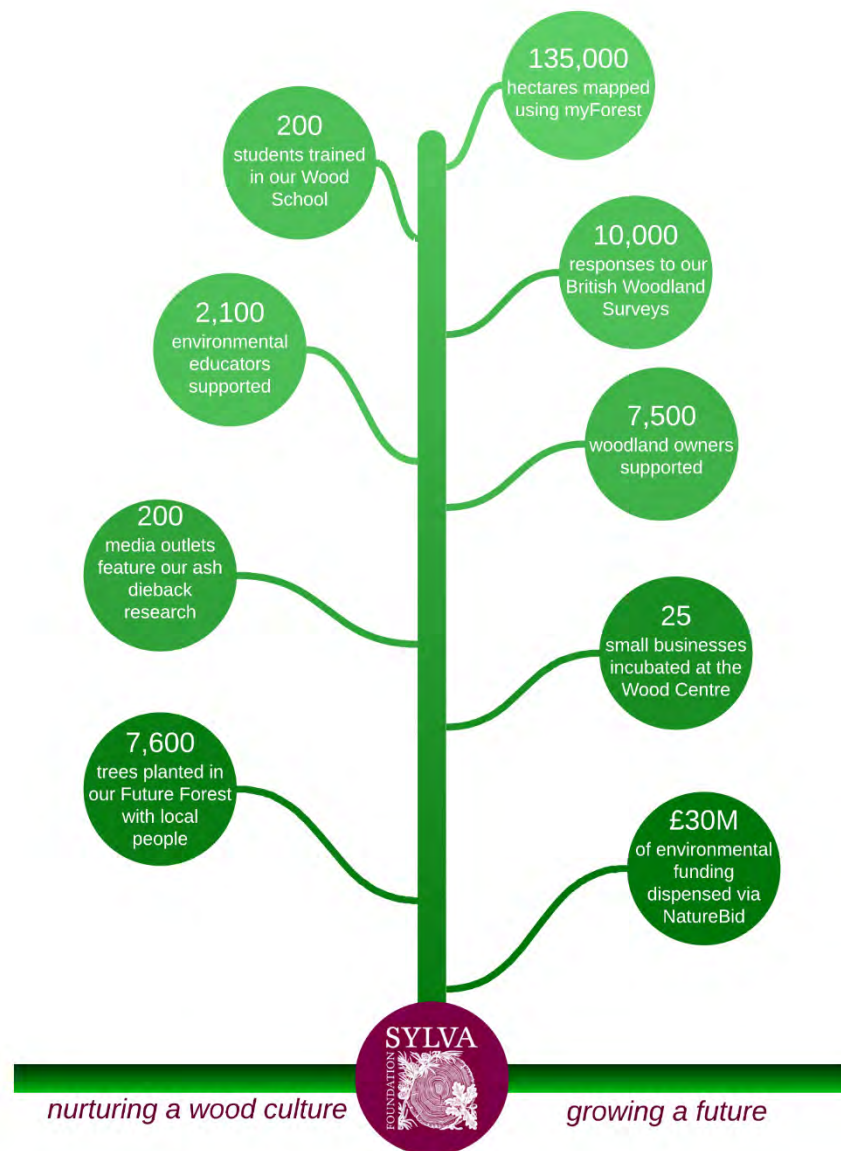
I hope you enjoy reading Sylva's first Impact Report, and thank you for your continued interest and support.



A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Gabriel Hemery'.

Dr Gabriel Hemery FICFor  
Chief Executive, Sylva Foundation





### Our vision is for a society that cares for nature while living in harmony with it.

We envisage a wood culture where people understand and promote the good stewardship of woodlands and are mindful of their utility, while being conscious of their fragility.

Future society will recognise the creative and productive value of forest products which can be derived from growing well-managed forests, and at the same time enhance their wider benefits for people and for nature. This will help result in a halt in the loss of biodiversity, a reduction in climate change, and a human society that can sustain itself.

Our actions today will be tangible in the love and respect that future generations afford our trees and forests.

### Our Mission:

- To use our forestry knowledge and information technology skills, supported by state-of-art evidence, to provide **innovative** solutions to some of the greatest environmental challenges facing modern society.
- To work extensively and selflessly with others, recognising that **collaboration** is necessary to overcome the challenges of halting biodiversity loss and reducing climate change, while supporting the transition to a sustainable human society.
- To deliver the **training** and education necessary to support the transformation of society, focussing on the stewardship of our forests and the utility of home-grown timber.
- To undertake **advocacy** to inspire one another, raise awareness, and endow people with knowledge, passion, and the shared ambition for a better and more sustainable society.



## Sylva ~ Our People

With its small skilled team, dedicated and experienced trustee board, and invaluable groups of volunteers, supporters and service users, Sylva has firmly established its role as an innovative organisation, offering solutions to some of the most challenging environmental issues of our time.

There's an old adage in forestry, that it is as much about people as it is about trees, and so it is with Sylva. The practice of forestry is usually defined as both an art and science, and it is no surprise that our trustees, staff, and volunteers provide a unique blend of scientific expertise, creative thinking, and practical know-how. We are fortunate to benefit from the support of these wonderfully skilled people who share in our passion, and in turn use this to support our charitable mission.



*Sir Martin and Lady Wood, Sylva Patrons*

*"Trees and forests are essential to our existence, just as they always have been, but they have the potential to affect our lives in ways that we are only beginning to appreciate."*

*Sir Martin Wood FRS  
Co-Founder, Sylva Foundation*

## Sylva Innovation ~ myForest

Paul Orsi, Director of Operations

### *Aims*

The myForest digital platform provides tools and support for woodland owners and managers to help them manage their woodland more sustainably.

### *About*

myForest is a focused and simplified Geographical Information System (GIS). This is a digital map with an underlying database, meaning stored data can be linked to elements of the map.

myForest is a simple way for users to map their woodlands using different mapping backgrounds (such as Google Maps and Ordnance Survey). This is valuable, since most people find it difficult to access digital tools that will allow users to simply draw out a woodland on a map, let alone access the slightly more complicated digital mapping and GIS tools.

In addition, myForest will suggest information that can be collected about the woodland, such as the species of the trees. From this simple start, more data can be collected. For example, measuring the trees can provide an idea of the age of the woodland, which, in turn, is important if wanting to sell timber to potential markets.

As this easy process continues, the myForest user might decide to do some management in their

woodland. For this, there are regulations which legally must be followed, and also good practice elements which are covered in the UK Forestry Standard (UKFS). Ultimately, myForest users are guided to create a management plan for their woodlands, and furthermore one compliant with the UKFS.

The Forestry Commission in England, and Scottish Forestry have template management plans, which are already embedded in myForest to make life easier. Moreover, they are linked to the data myForest users are starting to collect. By bringing everything together, myForest lightens the burden of regulations and good practice, and makes sustainable management in woodlands across Britain easier to achieve.

Finally, once a myForest user has filled in information, they can use the platform to create a management plan, and then download it, along with maps and supporting information, and this can all be sent to the relevant authority for approval. In England, management plan approval comes with 10 years of felling licences. In Scotland, management plan approval and gaining felling permissions are separate processes (apart from thinning). Once these processes have been followed through, the myForest user is then able to carry out woodland management legally and sustainably.

135,000  
hectares mapped  
using myForest

7,500  
woodland owners  
supported



### *Development*

The idea for myForest originated in 2009, through looking at how web technology could be harnessed to support the traditional sector of forestry and woodland management.

I was Head Forester at Blenheim Palace, and studying for my Masters when I first heard about myForest. As a result, my thesis focused on assessing the potential of this novel digital platform to reconnect the woodchain. Little did I know then, that I would later join the Sylva team.



Originally, we looked at how to connect up the different elements of the woodchain – all the stakeholders and businesses involved from the start of growing to the end point of selling the wood products. It was about making connections between woodland owners, those who managed them on their behalf, and people who wanted the timber or other services that came from the woodlands.

### Impact

The myForest service is a flagship project of the Sylva Foundation. It now supports more than 7,000 woodland owners who manage woodland properties across Britain covering more than 130,000ha.



While myForest is a tool designed for people to use for their needs, our graduate forester and graduate

*"I have used myForest for the last 7 years to help compile woodland management plans and create various maps including, for sales particulars and operation maps for contractors. The premium service is a great addition to the platform with the extra features being well thought out helping me work smarter, not harder"*

Steve Vessey  
Tree Generation, Independent Woodland  
Management Advisor

developer are looking specifically at how myForest is making an overall impact. To this end, they have just created an archive function that will store approved management plans to provide a broader understanding of how myForest is being used.

### Looking Forward

We are currently developing other tools on the myForest platform:

#### myForest Woodland Creator:

Woodland creation is currently high on the political agenda, and these new woodlands need careful planning if they are to deliver the many benefits that come from well-designed woodland (timber, carbon, wildlife, flood mitigation, clean air, recreation and more). Working in collaboration with the Forestry Commission, Scottish Forestry and the Woodland Trust, and funded by Defra, we are developing a new suite of tools to support woodland creation.

#### myForest Deer Manager:

Deer populations have increased dramatically over the last few decades and are having a huge negative impact on woodland ecology. myForest Deer Manager is helping landowners and managers control their populations of wild deer.

#### Stewardship Science:

Finally, we are looking at innovative ways all of the data collected on the myForest platform can be used for research. In particular, we are keen for myForest users to be able to gain wider insight from the information they are providing, for example; information on tree pest and disease control measures.

*"myForest has made both management planning and the coordination of our clients and work so much simpler. All the information and resources are in one place, the process is intuitive and straightforward. When we submitted the first management plan using myForest our local woodland officer said it was one of the best plans he had received."*

Tim Selman  
Managing Director, Wyre Community Land Trust

## Sylva Collaboration ~ British Woodlands Survey

Dr Gillian Petrokofsky, Sylva Research Associate

10,000  
responses to our  
British Woodland  
Surveys

### Aims

The British Woodlands Survey supports research across a wide range of important forestry topics in collaboration with universities and government partners, with the aim of advancing sustainable woodland management.

### About

The British Woodlands Survey is a series of major national surveys undertaken and led by Sylva Foundation. Through this innovative project, we actively ask stakeholders – private landowners, land managers, agents, tree nurseries and businesses who have an interest in our trees and forests – not just their reactions to policy, but also to inform policy by helping shape the survey itself.

While the British Woodlands Survey complements other Forestry Commission or Defra surveys, the benefit of our work is through the people we can reach. People who own just a small amount of land, or who run a community woodland may be overlooked by the government, but through Sylva we can reach these individuals who collectively make up a significant population of stakeholders in woodland management.

Through the British Woodlands Survey, we look to develop policy in a collaborative way. We ask stakeholders about their aims and aspirations, such

as the barriers to various approaches to woodland management, and also about threats, such as pests and diseases, and opportunities, such as growing the green bio-economy. From a science viewpoint, we're building an excellent long-term data set where we can compare responses to the same questions year-on-year to show what is really changing in British woodlands.

We use innovative ways of collaborating with our stakeholders. For example, in 2017, we adopted a '360-degree' approach to the survey. We ran five stakeholder workshops around the UK to help design the survey, in addition to providing the data and reviewing the outcomes. Not only was it scientific in how we crafted the questions and analysis, but it also meant it was more than a one-time connection with our stakeholders.

### Development

I've been involved with Sylva almost from the start. I like to think I was the first Sylva scholar, (although not the first official one!) In 2012, we built the British Woodlands Survey on an important series of surveys undertaken since 1963 by the University of Cambridge. I believe Sylva has a practical approach and is very clear about its priorities, and over the years it has been a joy to see its development. Along with the furniture, the crafting, the teaching,



and the science feeding it – the Sylva Foundation really has become a place of excellence.

British Woodlands Surveys completed to date:

- 2012 – Ownership, markets and management
- 2014 – Ancient woodland and planted ancient woodland sites
- 2015 – Resilience and environmental change
- 2017 – Shaping the future of forestry
- 2020 – Changes over time in environmental awareness
- 2021 – The future health of oak and attitudes to treatments in development

*"This independent report, which we commissioned, highlights how important it is that we continue to nurture our woodlands."*

*Sir William Worsley  
Chair, Forestry Commission*

The 2020 British Woodlands Survey, funded by the Forestry Commission, explored changes over time in environmental awareness and action since the 2015 report on the same theme. The survey highlighted how those who care for woodlands and forests across Britain are increasingly aware of the threats from environmental change, especially drought, wildfires, and pathogens, such as ash dieback and acute oak decline. However, there is little evidence of action being taken overall to improve woodland resilience.

*"This is an immensely useful report in our work promoting adaptation and resilience in the country's forests. While there are some positive indications of changes in awareness and behaviour, overall it's clear that the forestry sector is not doing enough nor reacting quickly enough to combat the climate emergency."*

*Simon Lloyd  
Chair, Forestry and Climate Change Working Group (FCCWG)*

## Impact

The British Woodlands Survey has become the go-to tool for influential environmental bodies and organisations to get the views of stakeholders from both a cross-section of the sector and across the country. The stakeholders attend our workshops in large numbers and engage in quite long and complicated questions requiring lots of thought. This in turn provides us with robust and valuable data.

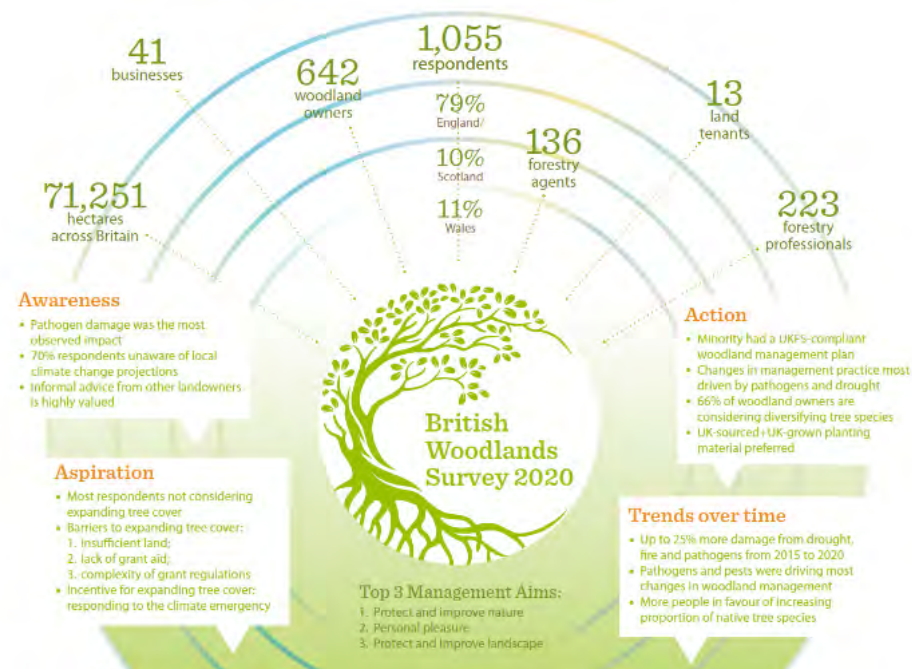
Impacts of British Woodlands Survey in:

- 2020 - 1,055 respondents, representing 3% of privately-owned UK woodland. Change Risk Assessment will underpin the work of the Forestry and Climate Change Working Group and its action plan promoting adaptation and resilience in England
- 2017 - 1,630 respondents representing 645,370ha (one-fifth of UK woodland). Used by FSC-UK to revise its standards and develop new provision for small woodlands
- 2015 - 1,509 respondents representing 11%

privately owned UK woodlands. Cited in the government's Committee on Climate Change 2017 evidence report, for a low level of understanding and action among stakeholders

## Looking Forward

One future area of interest is the theme of the impact of wood and outdoor spaces on people's health and wellbeing. Furthermore, it would be interesting to look at the collaboration of science and art, and building on The Tree Charter collaboration, look at ways of integrating a scientific approach to the place of woodlands in culture.





## Sylva Education and Training ~ Wood School

Joseph Bray, Head of Wood School

### *Aims*

The Sylva Wood School supports the revival of Britain's wood culture; to provide inspiration and employability, with an excellent standard of professional practice to ensure people can gain meaningful jobs working with wood.

### *About*

In broad terms, the manufacturing of furniture has declined in the UK. Not just the pandemic's impact on global buying, but there is low level of home-grown timber infrastructure, and a declining education in design and wood craft. Coupled with this, are wood industry statistics that highlight there is a significantly ageing workforce, and one that is not attracting young people. Yet in the small-scale designer-made workshops around the country there is a massive demand for skilled people. However, there is not enough training and education to provide these skilled people.

The work of the Wood School can be broken down into three main areas:

#### *Inspiring Young People*

From giving young people the opportunity to learn with sharp tools or professional level equipment, we want to show them the magic of how wood products are made. Through teaching processes such as simple whittling on a one-day course, to

more complicated steambending wood on our longer courses; it can inspire young people to engage with this as a potential area of work, not to mention the other benefits of working with wood such as mindful experience and learning new skills.

Our six-month professional course is a recent venture, and is really focusing on bridging the gap between education and professional life. We want to create an educational experience that is fit for purpose, and focuses on professional practice that ensures our students will be able to transition easily into the day-to-day life of working in the wood industry.

#### *Collaboration*

We are very keen on connecting with partners at all levels in the Sylva Wood School - timber suppliers, commercial clients and the wider wood industry. Already the Wood School has attracted interest from companies who support craft education; want their apprentices to benefit from our workshop environment, and who want to use sustainable, home-grown timber in their model of production.

#### *Bridging the Gap between Education and Professional Life*

Our six-month professional course is focused on creating an educational experience that is fit for purpose and professional practice, and will ensure



our students transition easily into the day-to-day life of working in the wood industry.

### *Development*

Setting up the Sylva Wood School over the past two years combines my experience as a designer and craftsman, as a teacher running the undergraduate furniture programmes at Rycotewood, and my 2019 Churchill Fellowship research, where I looked at how to upskill furniture graduates and make them more employable.

Working at Sylva, I feel I have been given such an opportunity to develop a course and workshop from scratch; it's been a real privilege. Just before the arrival of our first professional students, I

remember thinking; “wow, what an incredible moment and once in a lifetime opportunity this is.”

We are looking forward to running the first of our three-year summer schools for young people in 2021. Working in collaboration with Grown in Britain, our shared aim is to raise the perceived value of home-grown timber. Early career design-makers, university students and recent graduates will be given a live project briefing, and we are looking forward to seeing the journey from their initial innovative thinking, right through to their excellent quality product.

*“I’ve just unwrapped the beehive and it’s beautiful. From the first whiff of cedarwood I had a feeling this was going to be a work of art! The joinery is wonderful, the wood has been so carefully worked, planed and sanded, it feels almost like silk... Please thank all the members of your team who so lovingly crafted this hive, and let them know I will enjoy and appreciate their work for years to come...”*

*Jo Wise  
Sylva Wood School Beehive Customer*

We are also developing collaborations with three furniture companies:

- An international collective who are interested in craft education, looking to manufacture some of their products in the UK;

- A company with a strong belief in the value of craft and craftsmanship, and who want their apprentices to benefit from working in our professional workshops;
- A world-renowned furniture design company who approached us to learn how they can bring home-grown timber into their model of production

### *Impact*

The demand for our Wood School courses is already outstripping capacity. We are currently training hundreds of woodwork students each year, six of whom are attending our six-month professional course.

We are also delighted to be able to offer full and part-time bursaries for our six-month professional students, with the support of the Horlock Educational Trust. This is essential to our aim of providing opportunities for people from all backgrounds to be able to access woodworking skills.

### *Looking forward*

We hope in future that we can grow our team to help teach the Wood School courses. We remain lean and efficient, and as such we really have to be thoughtful about how we progress to make the most out of the opportunities that are being presented to us.

One such opportunity was a visit from 160 Oxford Brookes University architecture students, who went on to create innovative plans for the renovation of



the remaining large building derelict here at the Sylva Foundation. Not only will this space provide temporary living accommodation to support the Wood School students, but I’m really excited at the potential to lock up carbon – the timber building and smaller structures around the site could be a great way to mitigate climate change.

## Sylva ~ Nurturing and Growing

Sarah Taylor, Chair of Trustees

£30M  
of environmental  
funding  
dispensed via  
NatureBid

### Aims

Reaching nationwide from its roots in Oxfordshire, Sylva provides practical solutions to sustainable forestry and its products. Our innovative work is grounded in sound science and data gathering, and Sylva promotes the appreciation of our values to society and the environment.

### About

Since I joined Sylva, I have seen an exponential growth in its work on a national scale and for the general public, for example, through the success of British Woodlands Survey, and the development of NatureBid.

Looking at NatureBid in particular, I think it's an extraordinary tool Sylva has designed and developed with the Environment Agency. It is bringing together those who want to fund environmental restoration and enhancement, with those who can deliver it on the ground. For me, the real innovation is its flexibility in the context of environmental, social and economic good, and how NatureBid ensures real value for money. The platform has been used by Forestry Commission to support delivery of the Woodland Carbon Guarantee, and to date we've supported a total of 76 successful projects, resulting in 2,314ha of woodland created, with a woodland carbon value of a little over £16.5 million.

### Development

I first became involved in the Sylva Foundation in 2017, when I officially opened Sylva's Community Orchard in my role as High Sheriff of Oxfordshire. The Community Orchard is just one example of Sylva's work in bringing people and trees closer together, and I was delighted to be asked soon afterwards to become a Trustee.

I have always been passionate about the countryside. Through my long-term involvement with Oxford Botanic Garden and Arboretum, and the restoration of our own farm, woodlands and gardens, supporting Sylva provides a national perspective on policy and practice in supporting sustainable development. I am also learning about forestry fast!

I am personally keen to see Sylva build up activities, which provide much-needed surplus. For example, we are incredibly fortunate in having the base in Oxfordshire where additional buildings can be converted to provide business rental income, or the expansion of the Wood School to provide sustainable, long-term funding.

### Impact

I am incredibly proud of those who work and support the Sylva Foundation, and all they are achieving. As you read about our impact in this



report, I would like to reinforce that we are still a small charity. Yet, through our strong reputation for our knowledge base, and our innovative work that brings people and organisations together – we make things happen.

### Looking Forward

As I look to the future, I think Sylva is well placed to be a major contributor to government policy, and extend its reach throughout Great Britain. For example, how do you persuade landowners that trees are a valuable commodity for society, for nature, and for their own bottom line? This is where Sylva can help – in sharing our knowledge, and through our innovative and collaborative work, we can help find sustainable new solutions.



## Our Future Plans

Over the next five years, Sylva Foundation will continue to punch above its weight, influencing both policy and practice to support sustainable development across the length and breadth of Britain.

We will:

- Focus on the development of myForest suite, providing users with innovative online software
- Expand Sylva's Wood Centre, building the links between forestry and wood
- Continue to build evidence through the British Woodlands Survey, giving a voice to all stakeholders
- Support Sylva's people so they continue to develop and thrive
- Embed research across all of our activities to ensure we can show Sylva's impact throughout our work

*"Never before have we faced a global challenge to conserve life itself. We must work together to reduce the impacts of the climate crisis, develop and support a transformation into a sustainable society, and halt the loss of biodiversity. We must rise to these challenges boldly and with innovation, moving beyond long-held and outmoded approaches with real urgency and vision. We believe Sylva Foundation is already playing a significant part."*

*"We hope that you will support us to make our positive impact even greater."*

*Dr Gabriel Hemery  
Chief Executive, Sylva Foundation*



Visit our website today to learn more about us, read our latest news,  
and to find out how you could get involved in our work:



[www.sylva.org.uk](http://www.sylva.org.uk)