

MISTLETOE (ORCHARDS) WANTED (from winter 2007/08)

Jonathan Briggs (Mistletoe Matters Consultancy), is looking for apple orchards with plentiful mistletoe where he can demonstrate and experiment with long-term sustainable mistletoe harvesting.

Sites within the '3 counties' (Worcestershire, Herefordshire and Gloucestershire) preferred – but all proposals will be considered.

Background: Good mistletoe husbandry – pruning to limit damage to the host tree, whilst ensuring a continued mistletoe crop – is becoming rare. Too many old apple orchards have become overwhelmed by mistletoe, often because the valueless unberried male plants are left untouched at Christmas. This is a growing problem for both traditional orchards and for the future mistletoe crop. In just a few years we will see yet more old apple trees succumb to the increased senescence and susceptibility to wind-blow that can be caused by uncontrolled mistletoe, particularly by large male plants. The loss of these trees will, in turn, lead to a shortage of harvestable mistletoe. (Mistletoe 'in the wild' – in limes, poplars and willows, is self-managing and unthreatened, but is unharvestable too!)

The Plan: I am looking for orchards where a sustainable approach can be developed, with careful cropping of the female plants, accompanied by proper pruning and control of the usually neglected male plants. Remedial management may be needed where existing mistletoe overgrowth is extensive. The idea is to take a long-term view, revisiting the same orchards over several years to establish exactly the right management regime.

The aim is to produce definitive management guidance for mistletoe, for distribution to orchard owners across the 3 counties and beyond, within a few years. Preliminary guidance will be available in 2008.

NB This exercise is limited to developing and disseminating good practice mistletoe harvesting, and helping increase financial yield. General apple husbandry is outside the scope of the project.

What's in it for your orchards? Mistletoe-filled apple orchards should regain vigour through effective long-term management of the mistletoe. And you will be more confident of a modest long-term seasonal income from selling mistletoe.

What will happen to the cropped mistletoe? This is entirely up to local arrangements; the arisings, both commercial and non-commercial prunings, can be disposed of /marketed either by the local orchard owner, or through TEME, my mistletoe-trading partner. TEME (Tenbury English Mistletoe Enterprise) sell Tenbury-branded mistletoe online to customers all over the world.

Costs: At present Mistletoe Matters have no budget or grant-aid for the project, so will need to cover costs in some way. For year 1, depending on circumstances and size of orchard. It may be possible to neutralize costs by providing some cropped mistletoe to Mistletoe Matters. Possible grant-aid is being reviewed, and more may be possible if this is secured. For orchards where TEME become directly involved – with mistletoe being bought by them, Mistletoe Matters costs would be covered by TEME.

Timing: Mistletoe management can occur throughout the winter months – from October to March. Financial returns are only realistic pre-Christmas – though there is limited demand in January and February for decorative use and for propagation projects.

Who are Mistletoe Matters? Mistletoe Matters is a specialist consultancy providing advice, talks and general information on mistletoe. Working with several orchard action groups on orchard conservation projects, we are promoting better mistletoe management, and maximising long-term income from mistletoe.

Interested?

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