



KEITH KIRBY

CIEEM Medal

for

Outstanding, Lifelong Contribution to the Advancement of Ecology, Forestry and Woodland Management

26 June 2014

The prestigious CIEEM Medal is awarded in 2014 to Keith Kirby in recognition of his outstanding, lifelong contribution to the advancement of ecology, forestry and woodland management.

Keith has a first class honours degree in Agricultural and Forestry Sciences and completed a doctorate on bramble ecology in 1976, both from Oxford. After a short period (1977-1978) undertaking habitat survey in Cumbria, he has worked as a woodland ecologist with the government conservation agencies, first with the Nature Conservancy Council (1979-1991) and then its successor bodies, English Nature (1991-2006) and Natural England (2006-2012). He is now based at the Department of Plant Sciences, University of Oxford, continuing to write about woodland conservation.

Keith has made a huge effort to engage with the academic community, and has produced a substantial number of peer reviewed journal papers, and regularly also peer-reviews himself. He is also on the editorial board of the Journal of Nature Conservation. He regularly contributes to symposium articles and book chapters, as well as other outlets, such as articles for British Wildlife. In 1992 he published the book *Woodlands & Wildlife*, published by Whittet Books, and was an editor and contributor to *Wytham Woods – Oxford's Ecological Laboratory* published by Oxford University Press in 2010.

His research is always topical and applied, and he continues to push forward thinking on issues such as climate change, tree disease and ecosystem services, while anchoring new theories by basing them on sound woodland ecology.

Keith has been responsible for advances in woodland conservation, especially in survey and monitoring, where he has done much to promulgate the importance of long-term data sets and of long-term ecological research and monitoring. He has worked at refining the National Vegetation Classification (NVC), revising the first edition to produce updated maps and a more user-friendly field guide version of the woodland NVC. He has also pioneered monitoring methods for woodland Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) condition assessments. Keith has pushed forward the ancient woodland inventory which has become a significant tool in woodland conservation.

For many years, Keith's quiet thoughtfulness has earned him respect across numerous different stakeholders, and his opinion, knowledge and pragmatism is so widely accepted by so many different bodies that he has seen huge gains for woodland conservation through bringing stakeholders together and getting agreement in finding a suitable path forward. Keith is widely respected in the sector and beyond as the oracle on woodlands.

Keith has always been a strong advocate for professional bodies, as a way of keeping abreast of current practises and for professional development. He is a Fellow of both the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) and the Institute of Chartered Foresters (ICF), and has been a long-serving member of the British Ecological Society (BES) and the Royal Forestry Society (RFS). In 2012 he was awarded the prestigious RFS Gold Medal for his contributions to the forestry sector. He served on the Council of the BES and was Secretary of their Forest Ecology Special Interest Group for many years, also producing his popular column in the BES Bulletin entitled 'a civil servant speaks'. Keith is an active member of CIEEM and runs training courses for members, for example on woodland NVC, and has given talks at both national and regional conferences and events.

Keith is not a public figure, but there are two areas where he has shone: people and policy.

He interacts with people in his own quiet and unassuming fashion, providing guidance and teaching to individual students, for courses and giving talks to the general public. Within Natural England, Keith has helped a great many individuals develop in their field, through encouragement and peer support, and has also pushed hard at convincing the organisation for the need for ongoing internal woodland training and delivered it.

Externally, he has actively engaged with student projects from a number of different institutions, including UCL, Birkbeck, Imperial, and Liverpool, where he has advised and mentored MSc and PhD projects, as well as examining PhDs.

Keith gives numerous talks and presentations on woodland management, history and ecology in local fora such Wildlife Trusts and the University of the Third Age. His books and popular press articles are very accessible to the public, and he is often engaged with the media in press coverage of stories, and is very good at getting clear, positive messages across, such as at the launch of the *Wytham* book.

Policy development is a key area of work for the government agencies and Keith has engaged in this subject throughout his career. He consistently finds the relevant subjects to push into the political arena. His wisdom and patience in this area have brought forth results in turning around key areas of thinking, for example, the 1985 Broadleaves Policy, the 1995 Planning Policy Statement 9, and the 2005 Keepers of Time Policy. This cannot be better demonstrated than through his secondment to the Independent Panel on Forestry, which advised the government on the future of forestry in the UK.

Through his wisdom over policy-related matters, he has driven woodland conservation forward hugely over the course of his profession, and has continued to do so in retirement.

Keith Kirby is an unsung hero who has enormously advanced our understanding of ecology, forestry, and woodland management through his consistent, long-term commitment to and excellence in the field of forestry and woodland management. Added to this, his individual contribution to developing others and influencing forestry policy has been outstanding. Keith Kirby is an unquestionably worthy recipient of the 2014 CIEEM Medal.

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