

Illustrated guide to trees, woodlands and scrub

Woodlands and habitats that contain a variety of trees, shrubs and grassland generally support a great abundance of wildlife, including rare and declining species. They are a traditional feature of the English landscape and provide colourful displays of flowers, foliage and fruits. Some are ancient and have great historic and cultural value as well as biological and landscape importance. Their characters vary widely from ancient wood pasture to low input upland pastures; from small grass fields bounded by hedges to woodlands recently created under farm woodland and other grant schemes. To help protect Britain's trees and woodlands, a felling licence from the Forestry Commission is required to fell trees and it may be an offence to fell a tree without this.

Old and veteran trees

Old trees are valuable for their biological, historic, cultural and landscape importance. They are as much a part of our heritage as stately homes, cathedrals and works of art, yet they are often forgotten and neglected.

Many have been cut down, sometimes just to “tidy things up”.

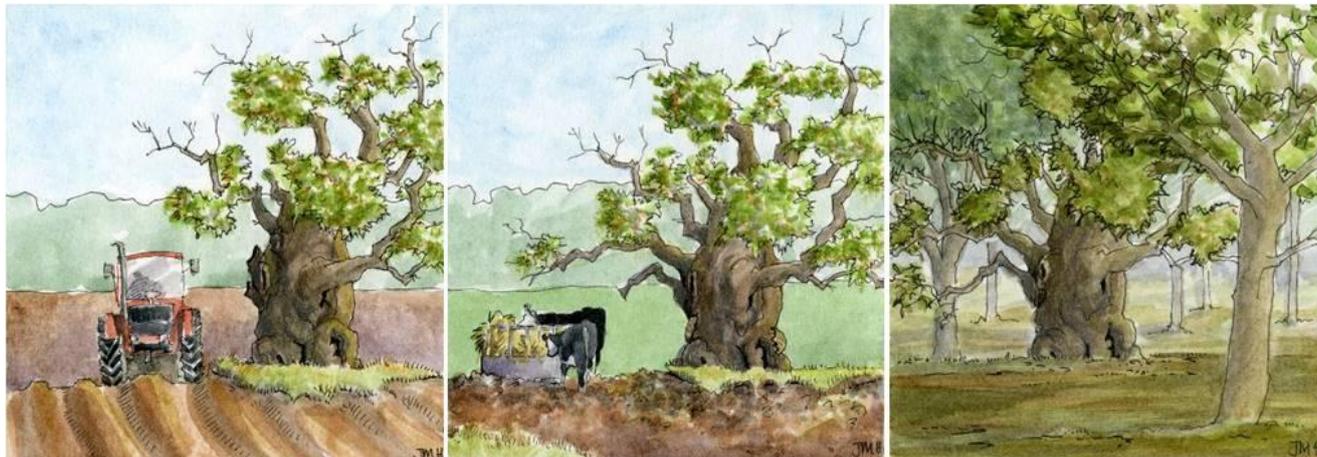
Even when they look like they are about to die, with the right care and attention, old trees can live for many years.



Veteran trees are usually large and have rot holes

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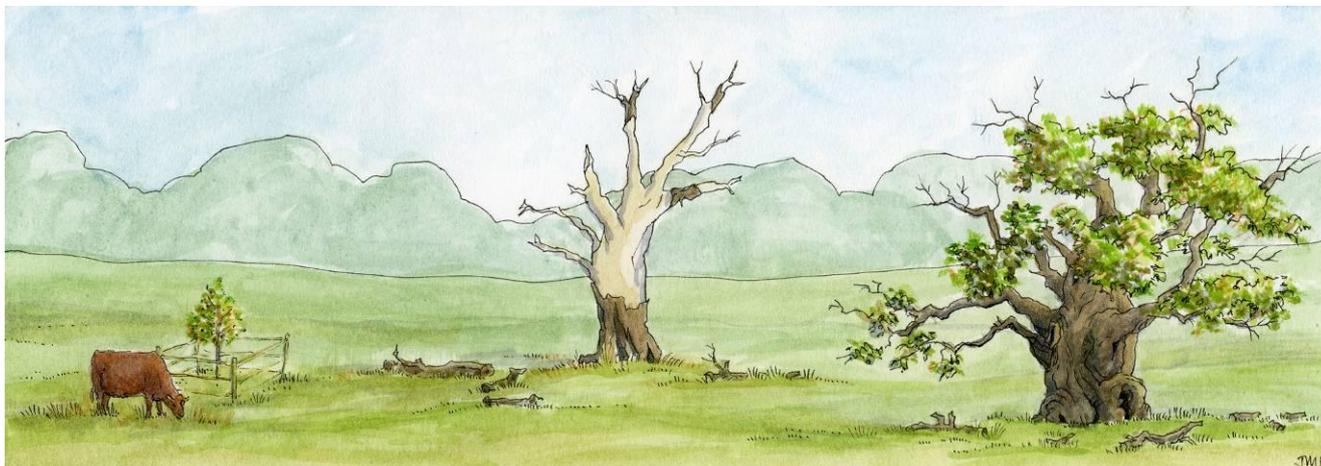
Avoid



Veteran trees under threat

- Do not plough or undertake any other form of cultivation, soil compaction or use fertilisers or other agricultural inputs within 15 times the diameter of the trunk of an old or veteran tree.
- Do not fell old trees, remove lower limbs or undertake unskilled tree surgery.
- Do not allow trees to be damaged by livestock, intensive grazing, fire, nails or fence staples.
- Do not allow old trees to be shaded by younger, more vigorous trees.

Ideal



Extensively managed grassland is ideal for old, open-grown trees and their replacements

The ideal condition for an old tree is a stable environment where the roots are not disturbed and the leaves have plenty of sunlight. For example, trees growing in undisturbed soil with extensive grass around the base.

Where trees are being shaded in wooded situations remove the shading gradually to avoid shock and desiccation to the tree.

Look out for new growth on the trunk and branches of old trees as this is a sign that they are regenerating.

Where possible plant suitable trees to replace old trees when they eventually die.

In designed parklands all new tree planting must follow the historic design and the restoration plan.

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Decaying wood

Deadwood or, more precisely, decaying wood habitat has become rare and many of the fungi, invertebrates, bird and mammal species that depend on decaying wood have suffered severe declines.

Often these species are critically connected. For instance fungi are eaten by some beetles during their young stages and these beetles in turn provide food for birds and bats.

Decaying wood is valuable wherever it occurs, including in the trunk and branches of living trees, on standing dead trees, on fallen limbs and trunks and even below ground in tree roots.

Small branches and twigs also have value, but these are less critical and may be tidied up.

Ideal

- It is best to leave trees unmanaged, provided it is practical and safe to do so.
- Leave dead branches on trees as they are unlikely to affect the health of the tree.
- Leave standing trees that die.
- Leave fallen limbs uncut beneath the tree and avoid disturbing the roots, trunk and main limbs of fallen trees.

Avoid

Avoid felling or removing trees that have died. Where possible leave them standing. If this is not safe, then fell the tree but leave it on site.



Avoid removing, cutting and stacking dead and decaying branches

Farm woodlands

Farm woodlands are important for historic and cultural reasons as well as for wildlife, the landscape and resource protection.

Trees, shrubs and ground flora should be free from livestock and wild mammal damage. This may mean managing rabbits and deer where they are causing unacceptable damage.

Within the woodland remnant historic features such as old wood banks and sawpits should be retained and maintained.

Consider reinstating traditional woodland management operations such as coppicing and pollarding and where possible maintain traditional open features such as rides, glades, ponds and streams.

Where appropriate, buffer or extend a woodland by creating new woodland or other semi-natural habitats, for example grass margins, scrub or wood pasture. Where there is an ancient woodland boundary a ride should be left between the old and new woodland to protect the old woodland bank and any associated edge flora.

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Ideal



Farm woodland with ground flora and shrub layer in good condition

The widest range and greatest abundance of wildlife will be supported by a woodland with a variety of native tree and shrub species of different ages and heights, including old and dead trees.

Where necessary protect young trees and shrubs where these regenerate. To prevent damage and litter, remove the protection when it is no longer required.

Avoid



Farm woodland being damaged by livestock grazing

- Avoid overgrazing and supplementary feeding within a woodland. This can destroy the woodland ground flora, kill trees, cause soil run off and prevent the regeneration of trees and shrubs.
- Do not dump rubbish or farm waste in woodlands. This damages woodland ground flora and encourages weeds such as nettles and elder.
- Do not plant or encourage invasive or exotic species such as conifers, rhododendron and snowberry. These can be a threat to native plant and animal communities.
- Do not crop right up to the woodland edge as cultivations damage tree roots and crop spraying may harm the plants and animals in the wood.

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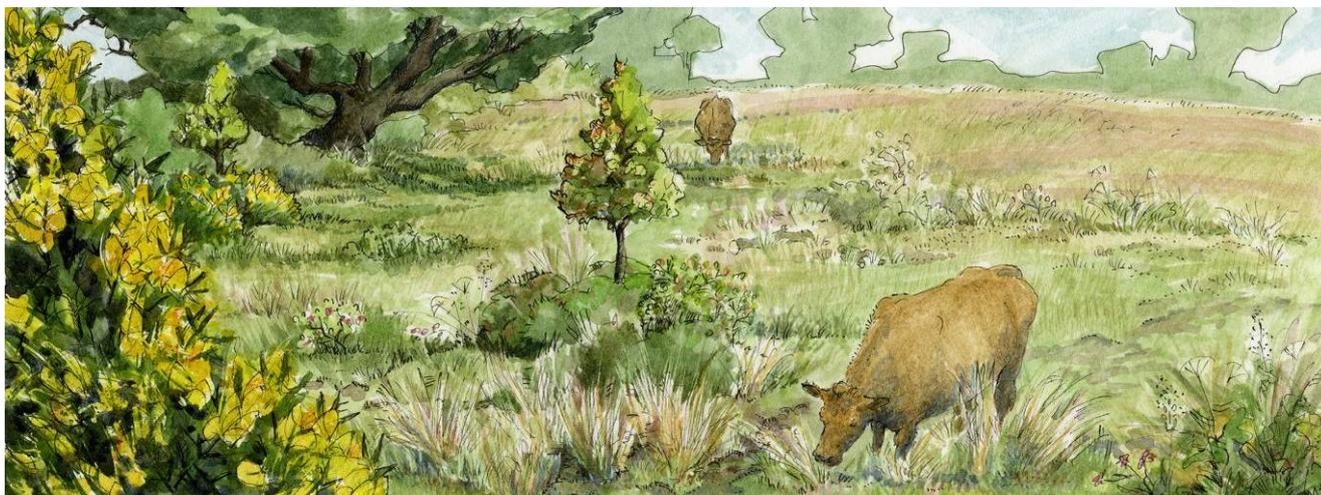
Trees, shrubs and grassland mosaic

This habitat mosaic can be a valuable buffer beside, or link between, existing semi-natural habitats. Encouraging flowering shrubs and trees can greatly increase the wildlife value of fields that are not capable of developing into species rich grassland.

This habitat mosaic is dynamic and management is required to maintain a diverse structure and prevent dense scrub or woodland developing.

Any cutting and clearing of trees or scrub should be done in the winter, outside the nesting season and after the berries have been eaten.

Ideal



Extensive cattle grazing is an ideal way to manage this type of habitat mosaic

The ideal habitat condition depends on the particular habitat or species you want to encourage, but in general aim to create and/or maintain an intimate mixture of grass, shrubs and trees, with lots of edges between them.

Encourage a variety of species, height and age structures of trees and shrubs. Retain very old trees and shrubs and any deadwood. However, cutting, coppicing and planting may be undertaken to encourage structural and species diversity.



Cross section of a habitat mosaic created by extensive cattle grazing

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Notes

- Within the habitat mosaic the sward should exhibit a varied structure, including patches of short grass, small areas of bare ground and taller vegetation with seed heads.
- Regular but light management is best. Extensive cattle grazing is particularly valuable, but sheep grazing and mowing can also be beneficial. Practice sympathetic management of any problem weeds.
- If possible allow trees and shrubs to establish by natural regeneration, although it may be necessary to plant some desirable species that won't regenerate naturally.
- Particular care is required in open landscapes, where the character of the landscape could be harmed, and species adapted to open conditions could suffer if trees and shrubs develop in the wrong places.

Avoid

- Do not allow the development of trees or dense scrub on sites of historic or existing wildlife value.
- Avoid leaving sites unmanaged, and undertaking drastic management at infrequent intervals. Unless you intend to create woodland, do not allow dense scrub and trees to dominate.
- Do not allow pernicious weeds to spread or any one species to become dominant.

New trees and woodlands

Planting trees and shrubs, either individually or part of a woodland or other habitat is generally very desirable. However, particular care needs to be taken to avoid environmental damage. For example:

- Planting should be with native species found in the local area.
- Trees and shrubs must not be planted on archaeological sites or sites with an existing valuable wildlife interest.
- Planting should be in keeping with the landscape character and reflect historic patterns.
- Planting should not obscure valuable public views.

You may be an Environmental Impact Assessment before establishing new woodland, wood pasture or scrub, see below.

Further information

Natural England publications are available to download from the Natural England website at www.naturalengland.org.uk. In particular see:

- Technical Information Note TIN001: *The historic environment and woodland management*
- Technical Information Note TIN053: *Guidance on dealing with the changing distribution of tree species*
- Information note IN131: *Veteran Trees: a guide to risk and responsibility*.

For enquiries please contact the Natural England Helpline on 0300 060 0863 or email enquiries@naturalengland.org.uk

Forestry Commission:

- *Farm woodlands:*
www.forestry.gov.uk/england-farmwoods
- *Safe guarding Europe's protected species (Woodlands and trees)*
www.forestry.gov.uk/england-protectedspecies
- *Environmental Impact Assessments for Forestry Projects*
www.forestry.gov.uk/website/forestry.nsf/bunique/inf-d-6dfkbc

Woodland Trust

Why woods matter

www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/en/why-woods-matter/Pages/woods.aspx

This guidance has been developed to support Environmental Stewardship agreements. It does not replace an agreement and you must continue to follow the prescriptions and specifications.

The outcomes shown may not be appropriate or suitable for all sites. Please consult scheme handbooks or your Natural England adviser for further information.

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