

11.2 WOOD PASTURE, PARKLAND AND VETERAN TREES

Wood pasture and parkland are defined by a vegetation structure, rather than a particular plant community; usually a large number of veteran trees growing above grassland, heathland or woodland ground floras. Tree management, usually by pollarding, has maintained the characteristic veteran trees, whilst grazing by domestic livestock or deer has maintained the vegetation structure. Both habitats may have been converted to other land uses such as arable fields, woodland or amenity uses, but may still retain trees and be of value for nature conservation where the specialist species supported by veteran trees have survived.

The national HAP definition includes lowland wood pasture and parklands derived from mediaeval forests and emparkments, wooded commons, parks and pastures with trees in them. Some have subsequently had a designed landscape superimposed on them in later centuries. Parkland may originate in landscaping of estates around country houses two or three hundred years ago. Some parkland may be only 100-150 years old but may contain veteran trees from an earlier landscape.

Veteran trees are of interest biologically, culturally and aesthetically because of their age, size or condition. Trees can be considered veterans if they are exceptionally old for their species and have reached or passed their peak growth rate. Long-lived species such as Oak and Beech reach this point at around 150 – 200 years at the earliest. Veteran trees may be either indigenous or introduced species. Generally however it is the associated features of the tree e.g. dead wood and sap runs which are of importance, rather than the species. Where veteran trees are isolated, this increases their vulnerability.

A rough rule of thumb can be adopted for species such as Oak as follows:

Trees with a girth of 3.2m are potentially interesting

Trees with a girth of more than 4.7m are valuable in terms of conservation

Trees with a girth of more than 6.25m are truly ancient

It has been estimated that Britain holds 80% of Europe's resource of veteran trees. Veteran trees are important for the many niches they provide for birds, bats, and mammals and for the dead wood and sap run habitats, which are valuable for invertebrates and fungi. Many of the species found on veteran trees are rare, endangered dead wood specialists, making veteran trees an important BAP habitat. Veteran trees are also of value historically, culturally and visually as an integral part of the English landscape.

Associate habitats such as flowering shrubs, especially Hawthorn, together with grassland and tall herbs such as umbellifers and various composite species are important as they provide nectar and/or pollen for saproxylic invertebrate species such as Longhorn Beetles and flies. Other relevant HAPs are those for hedgerows, unimproved grasslands of all types, field margins and woodlands.

Wood pasture and parkland & veteran trees in Derbyshire

In Derbyshire, wood pasture and parkland is characterised by Pedunculate Oak, occasionally Ash and a variety of planted species such as Beech, Sycamore and Sweet Chestnut which are not considered to be native in Derbyshire. Lime used to be an important species in the natural forests of this region. Wych Elm was also important in some locations until Dutch Elm disease reduced the numbers; the initial result was an increase in dead wood habitats, reflected in a rise in records of some species locally, but subsequently many trees were felled. In Lowland Derbyshire the distribution of parkland is very scattered, but with most parks in the southern half of the area.

Though rare fungi, lichens and bryophytes are associated with veteran trees and parklands in Derbyshire, high levels of pollution affect the distribution of the lichens. Parklands may be important sites for bats, such as Noctule, Natterer's bat and Leisler's bat, and for birds including hole-nesting species such as Woodpeckers, Spotted Flycatcher, Tit species, Redstart and Tree Sparrow. Parklands may retain areas of unimproved grassland as seen at Hardwick Hall.

In the Needwood and South Derbyshire Claylands National Character Area (NCA) Kedleston Park, originally a mediaeval deer park is now owned by the National Trust and designated as a SSSI. Other estates, where parkland exists include Osmaston Park, Sudbury Hall and Shirley Park. Some parkland dates from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries but some originates earlier, since this part of the county had several deer parks in mediaeval times. In some cases there has been no survey work to evaluate wildlife. Some parkland is associated with other valuable habitats such as ancient woodland, valley marshes and streams and lakes.

In the Derbyshire Peak Fringe and Lower Derwent NCA the main remaining parks include those at Wigwell Grange, Windley Hall, Alderwasley Hall and Alton Manor, all privately owned. The only equivalent of a royal forest in this area is Duffield Frith, which was deforested early in the Middle Ages, but remnants can still exist for example Belper Park.

On the South Magnesian Limestone NCA the main area of parkland is the Deer Park associated with Hardwick Hall. On the 'Coalfield' NCAs there are smaller parks at Ogston, Stubben Edge, Locko Park and Stubbing Court. Examples at Renishaw Hall and Breadsall Priory are now altered because of their use as golf courses. In the Melbourne Parklands NCA Calke Abbey parkland is a SSSI and National Nature Reserve and parkland at Elvaston Castle still supports mature and veteran trees and has significant wildlife value.

Of the veteran trees in the wider countryside, Beech, Sweet Chestnut, Horsechestnut and Sycamore are commonly found as well as native species of Oak, Ash, Yew, and Small-leaved Lime. There are a few veteran Black Poplar and some ancient Willow pollards. Though little studied, some distribution patterns between the NCA in Derbyshire can be discerned. Some woodlands will have a large number of veteran trees e.g. Crich Chase and Bow Wood.

Solitary Limes, for example, can be found occasionally in the Derbyshire Peak Fringe and Lower Derwent NCA.

Oaks are more common in the Needwood and South Derbyshire Claylands NCA, especially in hedgerows. Here there are also some veteran Willow pollards

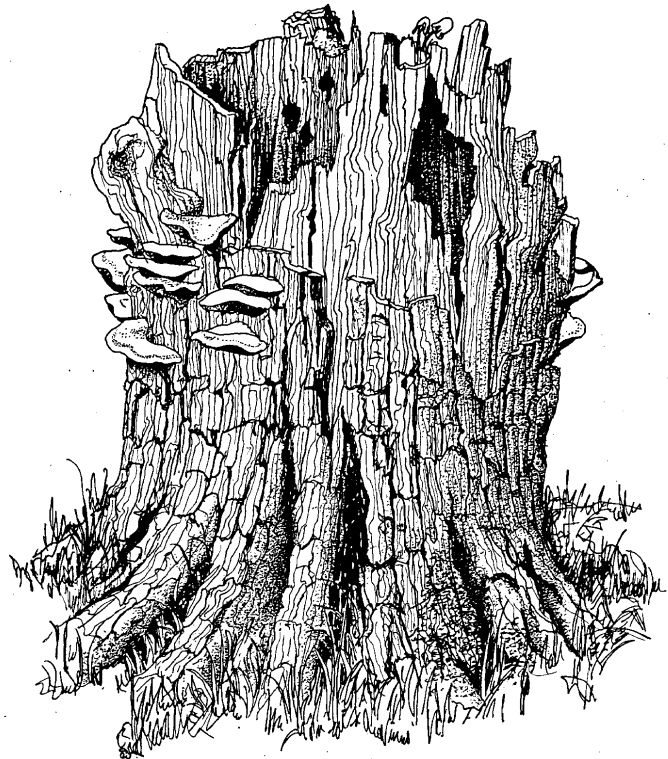
Within the 'Coalfield' NCAs veteran trees of all species are very scarce, the few remaining, usually Beech or Oak, often associated with long destroyed parkland landscapes.

On the South Magnesian Limestone NCA veteran trees occur very occasionally in hedgerows with fewer in woodlands.

In the Trent Valley Washlands NCA Oaks occur in hedgerows and Yew in churchyards. Here again, some veterans occur where there was wood pasture and parkland but where this landscape may have disappeared. There are also some large Willow pollards and native Black Poplar occurs only in this NCA.

Application

Natural England have developed a site assessment protocol for veteran tree sites (Castle & Mileto, 2005^{A & B}). These protocols should be referred to when sites are being considered for selection against the Local Wildlife Site Wood Pasture and Veteran Trees criteria to provide context and guidance.



Wood-pasture, Parkland and Veteran Tree Selection Guidelines

Sites that meet one or more of the following guidelines will be eligible for designation as a Local Wildlife Site.

Pk1 Parkland or wood pasture sites greater than 2 ha.

UKBAP Habitat Action Plan - Wood Pasture and Parkland

Application

This guideline should be applied to sites that support habitats and species that are traditionally associated with Parkland or wood pasture and/or support blocks, groupings, scattered old (>150 years) or veteran trees in combination with either grazed woodland or grassland and or in combination. Associated features of sites may also be included such as grassland, ponds, woodland and old walls. Parkland sites may also be considered under the species guidelines.

Justification

Wood pasture and parkland are considered to be priority habitats within the UK BAP.

Pk2 Groupings of 5 or more trees exhibiting features indicative of veteran or ancient status within 0.25 ha

UKBAP Habitat Action Plan - Wood Pasture and Parkland

Application

This guideline should be applied to old/veteran trees (at least 150 years old) that are known to support fungi and or invertebrates and/or lichens that are either characteristic or specialist species of veteran trees. Associated features of sites may also be included such as grassland, ponds, woodland and old walls.

Justification

Wood pasture and parkland are considered to be priority habitats at UK level and feature within both the Lowland Derbyshire and Peak District BAPs.