

Wayfaring is a journey of exploration inspired by the chalk landscape and ancient routes of the Icknield Way. Find out more at [wayfaring.org.uk](http://wayfaring.org.uk)

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

## Old Trees. What stories can they tell?

Trees can live to be very old, much older than humans.

Ancient forests and historic parks and gardens are good places to visit to see old trees and the special wildlife that they support. Many of these trees have been protected in some way.

When this tree was young the world was very different.



The Great Belly Oak in Savernake forest is thought to be more than 900 years old.



Sweet Chestnut

## How and why have people needed and looked after trees?

Trees have been used and managed since prehistoric times. Stone Age man used trees for building and fuel. The trees on the chalk ridge across southern England were easy to clear as the soil was thin and the roots not deep. By the time the Romans arrived there were fewer trees here than there are now.

## Where do our trees come from?

After the last ice age when the UK was still connected to mainland Europe, trees spread by natural processes across to the UK. These are called **native trees**; they made their own journey here. The **oak, willow, ash, hazel** and **beech trees** are native to the UK.

Neolithic man came to the UK about 8000 years ago and since then humans have brought many trees for lots of different reasons. These are called **non-native trees**.

For example, the **Douglas Fir** was brought here from America about 200 years ago. It can grow to 55m tall and live for 1000 years. It is good for timber and building as it grows straight and tall.

The **Sweet Chestnut** (see photo) is thought to have been brought by the Romans who liked to eat the chestnuts.

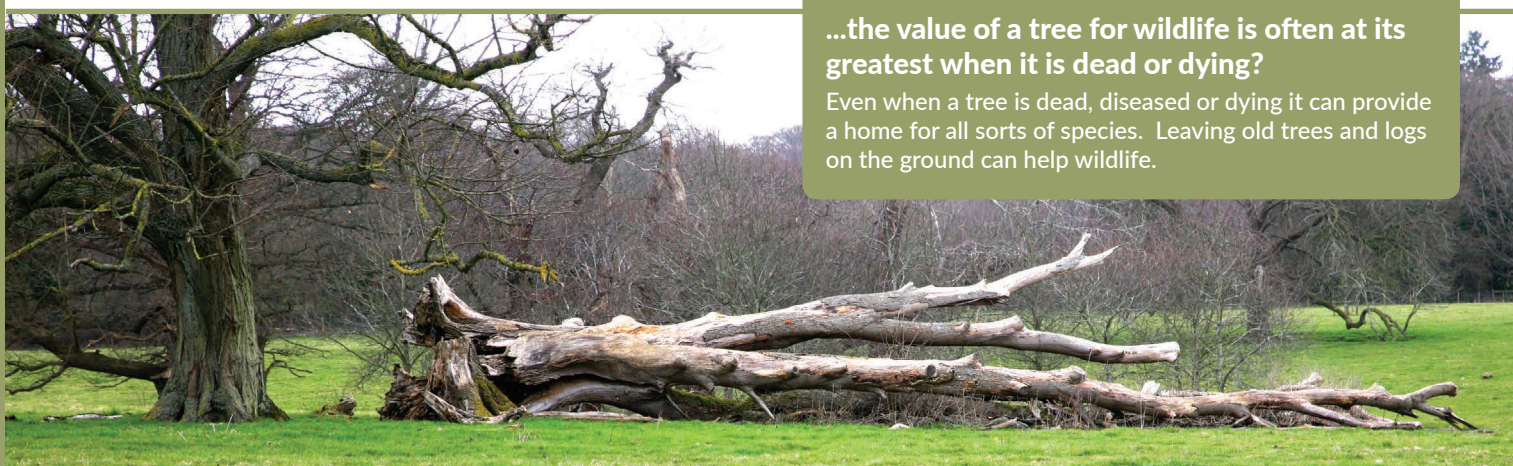
The **Copper Beech** tree was brought to the UK for its beauty.



## Did you know...

...the value of a tree for wildlife is often at its greatest when it is dead or dying?

Even when a tree is dead, diseased or dying it can provide a home for all sorts of species. Leaving old trees and logs on the ground can help wildlife.





## Wood Pasture

For more than two thousand years, people have grazed their animals in woodland. The animals eat the young trees and shrubs so the woodland doesn't get too dense and the light can still get in and their dung is good for wildlife. We are used to seeing cows in fields but they are natural woodland browsers and the trees benefit from them too.



©Mark Lord



Old trees make new homes for wildlife

## Insects

There are more than 2000 invertebrate species in Britain that need decaying wood at some point in their lives. They in turn provide food for lots of birds. Hollows, cracks and holes in trees provide homes for insects, bats and birds.



## Did you know..?

...Certain kinds of fungi which spread through woodlands below ground can be extremely large. A honey fungus in the USA has been estimated as measuring over 3.5 km across. It weighs 650 tons and is thought to be between 1900 and 8650 years old! It is thought to be the world's oldest living organism.



Jelly Ear Fungus © Peter Spence

## Fungi

Fungi on a tree are a natural part of the tree's ageing process and they can even help the tree to live longer. The fungi can give the tree chemicals that it needs to live and grow. The fungi make holes in trees and these holes make homes for birds and animals..

## Birds

Some birds such as **owls**, **kestrels**, **marsh tits** and **tree-creepers** move into existing holes in trees but others including **woodpeckers** and **nuthatches** make alterations to make their new homes better suit their needs.

Some birds, such as **titmice** and **warblers** depend on the tree for their food but others eat the insects and small creatures that live on decaying wood.



Short-eared Owl ©David White



Willow Tit ©Matt Cole

## Other animals

Holes and cavities in trees also provide warm and dry homes for **squirrels and foxes**. And there are lots of things that live on a tree that are too small to see...



## Did you know..?

...One estimate puts the number of species that can live on a tree as 2.3 million!



## Bats

Tree cavities provide good homes for bats. Some live in the root holes, others live in cavities behind the bark.

Barbastelle Bat

To download the full set of factsheets and lots of other useful resources: [www.northwessexdowns.org.uk/publications-resources.html](http://www.northwessexdowns.org.uk/publications-resources.html)

## Sources and Further information

**The Ancient Tree Forum** [www.ancienttreeforum.co.uk](http://www.ancienttreeforum.co.uk)

**Native and Non-Native trees** [www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/visiting-woods/trees-woods-and-wildlife/british-trees/native-trees/](http://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/visiting-woods/trees-woods-and-wildlife/british-trees/native-trees/)

**Honey fungus** [www.bbc.com/earth/story/20141114-the-biggest-organism-in-the-world](http://www.bbc.com/earth/story/20141114-the-biggest-organism-in-the-world)

**Number of species on a tree** [www.huffingtonpost.com/ann-reid/23-million-species-in-one\\_b\\_8178846.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ann-reid/23-million-species-in-one_b_8178846.html)

**Savernake Forest** [http://northwessexdowns.org.uk/uploads/File\\_Management/Publications/Special\\_Qualities/Landscape\\_and\\_Natural\\_Resources/Savernake\\_factsheet.pdf](http://northwessexdowns.org.uk/uploads/File_Management/Publications/Special_Qualities/Landscape_and_Natural_Resources/Savernake_factsheet.pdf)