

# Veteran Tree Management Guide

Durham Biodiversity Partnership

**Veteran  
Trees  
Project**



## 1 What is a Veteran Tree and why are they important?

When we think of veteran when used to describe a person, we think of somebody who has literally 'been in the wars', and maybe even injured. In a way, this can be used for trees. As a tree ages, it becomes damaged, showing cracks and crevices, blemishes on the bark and slight imperfections in exactly the same way a person would. These features do not mean that the tree is unhealthy in any way, and in fact provide both habitats and food



*Damaged bark provides both shelter and access to the heart wood and food*

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*Example of a veteran Rowan*

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sources for a wide range of wildlife.

A veteran tree is a tree in the mature stage of life with a range of important wildlife and habitat features. They can be found in-fields, boundaries or woodlands. They are valuable both alive and when dead, as the slow decay rate means that they continue to provide valuable habitat for wildlife long after the tree has died.



*A veteran Oak at Lartington*  
© Paul Hannaby



*A fallen tree providing deadwood habitat*  
© North East Wildlife



*A bat roost in a tree hollow*  
© Durham Biodiversity Partnership

### **Veteran tree habitat**

Veteran trees provide homes for a number of insects, animals, plants, fungi and birds. Around 6% of all invertebrate species rely on decaying wood to complete their life cycles. Veteran trees provide a variety of niches for bat roosts through rot holes, cracks and crevices, gaps made by splits and loose bark, dead and dying wood. They also provide an abundance of insects for bats and other species to eat.



*Barn Owl nesting in an Oak crevice*  
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A range of bird species including owls, kestrels, marsh tits, woodpeckers and tree-creepers nest inside the cavities of old trees. Some birds are also dependent on trees for the bulk of their food, whilst others feed upon the invertebrates associated with wood decay.

Fungi associated with Veteran Trees either decompose and recycle plant remains such as wood and leaf litter or help transport essential nutrients to aid tree growth. There are also certain species of predatory fungi that can affect the health of the tree, but at the same time provide the same habitats as the tree becomes less healthy. Some fungi also break up and soften tree bark and wood, making it easier for invertebrates to ingest.



*Tree creeper resting in a Sycamore hollow*  
© North East Wildlife



*Pleurotus cornucopiae (Branching oyster fungus)*  
© Karen Yendall



*Trametes versicolor (Turkey tail fungus) on a Veteran Rowan*  
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