

# How can you help?

You can join the Durham Veteran Tree Volunteer Group and receive the quarterly newsletter by filling in the form below and submitting it to:

Durham Biodiversity Partnership,  
c/o Durham Wildlife Trust, Rainton Meadows,  
Houghton – le – Spring, DH4 6PU

Alternatively, visit the website at [www.durhamveterantrees.org.uk](http://www.durhamveterantrees.org.uk) or the Woodland Trust's Ancient Tree Hunt Website at [www.ancienttreehunt.org.uk](http://www.ancienttreehunt.org.uk) for more information.

Survey forms are also available if you would like to contribute to the data being collected, there is also an online submission form on the website.

## Join us

I would like to join the Durham Veteran Tree Volunteer Group

Name:

Address:

Postcode:

Tel:

Email:

*Below left: Volunteers examine a Sweet Chestnut, Witton Gilbert  
Below right: Hollow Oak, Witton Gilbert*



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Several partners are involved in this Heritage Lottery Funded project including Gateshead Council, Darlington Borough Council, South Tyneside Council, Sunderland City Council, Durham County Council and Durham Wildlife Trust. These partners are working with the Durham Biodiversity Partnership to create this database and ensure that trees are protected all over the Durham Biodiversity Action Plan area.



*Below: Horizontal Rowan, Sharnberry*

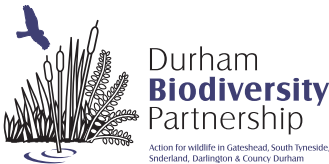


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## For more information

If you would like to know more about the Durham Biodiversity Partnership Veteran Trees Project, please contact the Veteran Trees Project Officer on 0191 5843112 or e-mail [info@durhambiodiversity.org.uk](mailto:info@durhambiodiversity.org.uk). Information about the veteran tree project and other projects can be found at

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



# Durham Biodiversity Partnership Veteran Trees Project



© John Durkin  
Cover: Rowan, Teesdale



**Helping Protect  
and Maintain  
Britain's True  
National Heritage**



# Veteran and Ancient Trees

Thousands of years ago, not long after the retreat of the Arctic Ice Sheet and the end of the last Ice Age, huge, thick trees covered most of Britain. This giant forest is known as the 'Wildwood' and was a haven for thousands of species of animal, bird, plant and fungi. In the ten millennia or so since, the amount of tree-cover in this country has vastly decreased, and it is now relatively difficult to see many trees that have reached full maturity, and likewise many of the species that call these trees home. As it takes trees so long to reach full maturity, finding one that has is very important, and as it starts to die back, it goes through a few changes that make it vital to many other dependent species:

- ◆ Bats and birds use hollowing branches and trunks to build roosts and nests.
- ◆ Flaking and lost bark provides a unique habitat for invertebrates.
- ◆ Dead and rotting wood is food for saprophytes (organisms that eat dead material), many species of which are rare or endangered.

*Below: Sycamore, Castle Eden Dene*



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So the trees themselves are not only important in their own right, but also provide a natural habitat for other species that may be endangered or protected. Veteran Trees are a Durham Biodiversity Action Plan Habitat. The aim of the Plan for this habitat is to maintain the number of Veteran Trees in the area.

Depending on the species, certain trees can become veterans at 80 (willow), 100 (birch, hazel), 200 (beech), 400 (oak, ash) or 700 (yew), but these are only rules-of-thumb. Many different factors can affect the growth rate of a tree, from the quality of the soil to exposure to the elements or even competition from other trees.

## What to look out for

When looking out for veteran trees, there are many different characteristics that can be spotted other than simply size, especially as the tree can be very old and not necessarily that large. Here are a few features that a tree might display once it has reached veteran age:

- ◆ Loss of canopy from limbs dying or falling off.
- ◆ Hollowing of the trunk or branches.
- ◆ Oddly-shaped form.
- ◆ Sap runs along the side of the stem or limbs.
- ◆ Water-filled rot holes.
- ◆ Natural bark loss.
- ◆ Fungus.

Despite all of these seemingly devastating traits, trees can still be in relatively good health and even live for decades displaying them. In fact some people may argue that the hollowing of the trees trunk is an attempt to make it stronger for the same reason as scaffolding poles being hollow.

*Below left: Veteran Beech, Ivesley*

*Below right: Fungus (Piptoporus betulinus polypore) on an Ash Tree*



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## Threats to Veteran Trees

Malpractice and poor management is the reason most veteran and ancient trees are damaged or removed today, especially as by this stage in the trees life, it has no real commercial use. They can be seen as obstructions to machinery or vehicles, or removed because of health and safety reasons, even if realistically there would be no danger at all.

Even if an ancient or veteran tree does pose a problem to health and safety of passers-by, there are other management measures that can be taken to keep the vital habitat, incredible landmark and beautiful tree without having to remove it completely. Another aim of the project is to distribute information to landowners that may have veteran or ancient trees on their land. Vandalism can also pose a problem, though this is much more difficult to put a stop to.

## Actions being taken

The Durham Biodiversity Partnership has recently begun a two year Veteran Tree project which is funded by Heritage Lottery Fund. The main focus of the project is to create a regional database of veteran, ancient and notable (trees that have some sort of local importance that will hopefully one day become veteran or ancient) trees to contribute to the Woodland trust's Ancient Tree Hunt national database from Durham, Darlington, Gateshead, Sunderland, South Tyneside and the North Pennines.

This database is fully public so that anybody wishing to visit one of these amazing Veteran Trees can obtain data – including not only its location, but also whether the land is public or private, the size of the tree, and any photographs that have been taken of the tree. The information gathered will hopefully also be used to put forward a request to the government for a tree management fund to be made available to landowners, or perhaps even legislation protecting trees from removal or damage in the same way that some European countries have.

## Other aims

Other aims of the project include visiting schools for activity days and teaching children the importance of the trees and hopefully reducing the threat of vandalism to trees, particularly in more built-up areas. Volunteer days will be organised to help people who want to help with collecting data, as well as seed collecting, planting and tree identification.

The Durham Veteran Tree Volunteer Group has also been established, with a steady stream of data being submitted. The group receive a quarterly newsletter detailing any events and other information about the project.