

Ancient Woodland

Ancient woodland takes hundreds of years to establish and is defined as an irreplaceable habitat. It is a valuable natural asset important for:

- wildlife (including rare and threatened species)
- soils
- carbon capture and storage
- contributing to the seed bank and genetic diversity
- recreation, health and wellbeing
- cultural, historical and landscape value

It is any area that has been wooded continuously since at least 1600 AD. It includes:

- ancient semi-natural woodland mainly made up of trees and shrubs native to the site, usually arising from natural regeneration
- plantations on ancient woodland sites - replanted with conifer or broadleaved trees that retain ancient woodland features, such as undisturbed soil, ground flora and fungi

Historical features

Humans have relied on woods for fuel, food and shelter for centuries. We can still see signs of industry and management in woods which can help confirm their ancient status:



1. Tree management is visible in woods through coppiced and pollarded trees.



2. Coppiced trees have been cut back down to ground level resulting in the regrowth of many new stems. These stems would be let to grow for a few years then harvested for fuel.



3. Industry in woodland is more varied. Ancient woods house remains of charcoal production, mine pits, ore roasting hearths and furnaces, though they are not immediately obvious. These industries were based in woods for their steady supply of wood fuel.



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4. Boundaries in woodland often look like banks and ditches, sometimes with overgrown hedges and ancient boundary trees. These can be from old deer parks, livestock management or parish boundaries, and some even correspond with old maps.

Wood Pasture and Parkland

Wood-pasture and parkland are mosaic habitats valued for their trees, especially veteran and ancient trees, and the plants and animals that they support. Grazing animals are fundamental to the existence of this habitat. Specialised and varied habitats within wood pasture and parkland provide a home for a wide range of species, many of which occur only in these habitats, particularly insects, lichens and fungi which depend on dead and decaying wood. Individual trees, some of which may be of great size and age, are key elements of the habitat and many sites are also important historic landscapes.

Key features of these habitats are:



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1. Ancient/veteran trees which are special as some of the oldest living organisms in the UK.



2. The presence of grazing animals – animal dung contributes to invertebrate and fungal diversity and grazing controls tree and shrub regeneration, maintaining a semi-open habitat.



3. The presence of microhabitats including large diameter (relative to the species) hollowing trees, other decaying wood, rot holes, ageing bark and fallen but regenerating trees, which support a wide range of specialised invertebrates, lichen, and fungi.



4. Nectar sources for invertebrates.



5. Open grassland or heathland ground vegetation.