

Ancient Tree Inventory

Mapping the oldest and
most important trees
in the UK



WOODLAND
TRUST

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What we do and why

Old trees are extraordinary. Some have lived for thousands of years, linking us with our history and culture. And they have astonishing ecological value too, supporting lots of wildlife.

The UK has thousands of ancient trees - more than many other European countries. The inventory already lists more than 160,000 trees, but there are thousands more to add.

Identifying where they are takes us one step closer to giving them the care and protection they need. Your records of these oldest and most characterful trees help us to identify ancient tree hot spots, monitor current threats and future losses, plan how best to conserve them in the future and much more.

Help protect our valuable tree heritage. Use this guide to spot ancient, veteran and notable trees and let us know by putting them on the Ancient Tree Inventory's map.

What are ancient, veteran & notable trees?

Ancient trees

An ancient tree is in the third and final stage of its life. The age of an ancient tree depends on the species, as some can live longer than others. An oak may be ancient after 500 years, but it will take a yew around 800 years to be ancient.

A tree is defined as ancient if it is:

- In the third or final stage of its life (this stage can go on for centuries)
- Old relative to others of the same species
- Interesting biologically, aesthetically or culturally because of its great age.

Veteran trees

Veteran trees are survivors that have developed some of the features found on ancient trees. However, veteran trees are usually only in their second or mature stage of life.

You might see signs of decay, fungal fruiting bodies or dead wood. These features may start to appear in the mature stage and also in traditional pollards.

Although veteran trees aren't as old or complex as ancient trees, they still provide holes, cavities and crevices

which are especially important for wildlife.

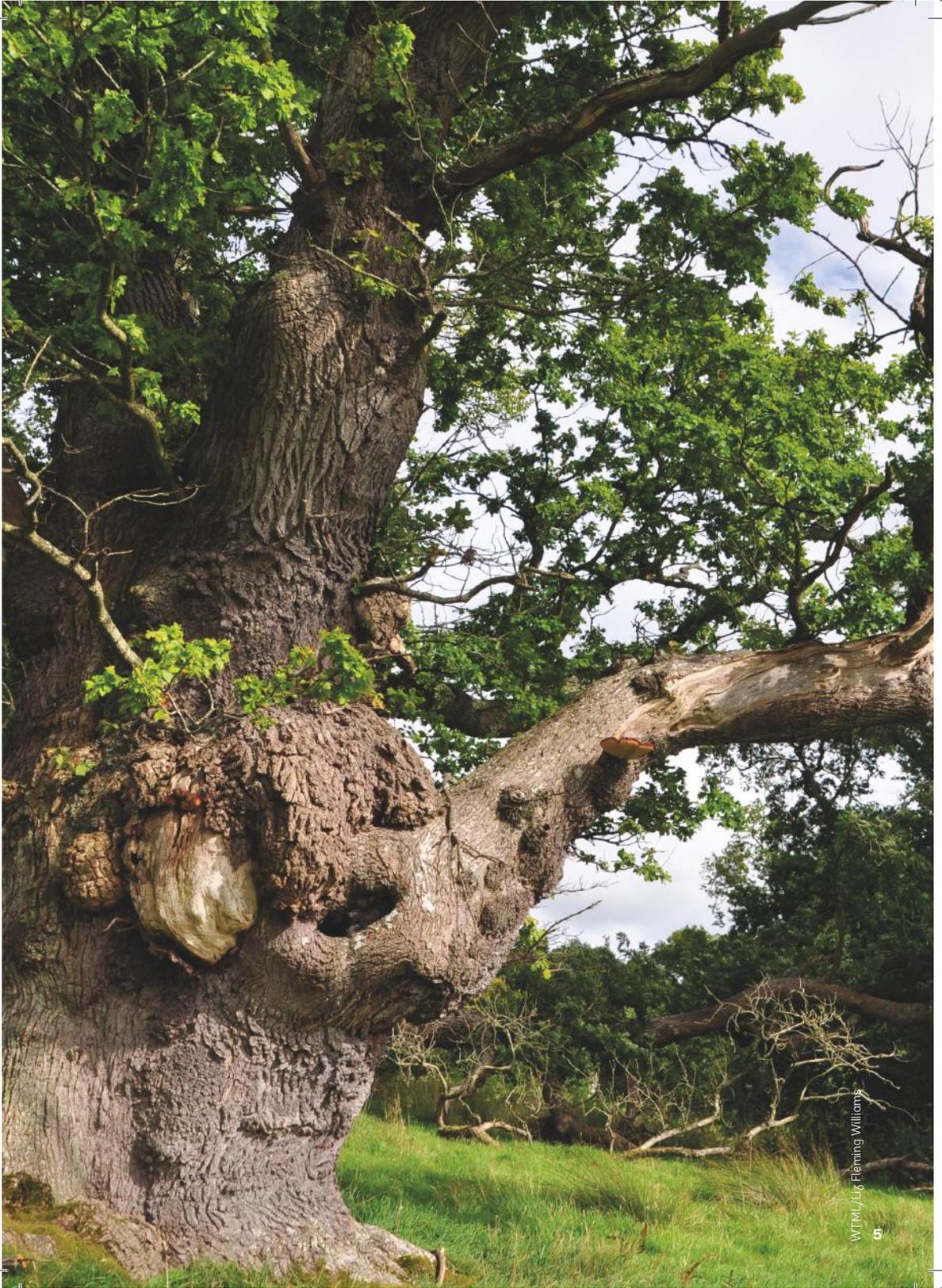
Ancient trees are veteran trees, but not all veteran trees are old enough to be ancient.

Notable trees

Notable trees are usually mature trees which may stand out in the local environment because they are large in comparison with other trees around them.

They don't have any obvious veteran characteristics, but may be taller than ancients and fatter than some veterans.

In parts of the UK where trees are less common, a tree may be relatively small and young but notable because it is significant in its local environment. Notable trees are usually worthy of recognition and can be potential next generation veteran trees.



Where are ancient and veteran trees found?

The UK has an exceptional number of ancient trees. Despite the shared name they are rarely found in ancient woodland. Top spots for ancient trees include:

- Former royal hunting forests
- Medieval deer parks
- Historic wood pastures
- Ancient wooded commons
- Old hedgerows

You'll find them in their greatest numbers in the New Forest, Sherwood Forest and Windsor Great Park. But small groups or individual trees can also be spotted in housing

estates, urban parks, village greens, churchyards and the grounds of historic buildings.

They survived in these places because they were:

- On land inherited down the centuries by aristocratic families who recognised their value
- Working trees, with their wood and leaves used as a sustainable, local supply of fuel, fodder and food
- Incorporated into the design of park land
- Revered and respected, such as sacred yew trees in churchyards.



What do ancient trees look like?

Ancient trees don't always look the same. Appearance depends on the species and where it grows. Several characteristics are a good clue to a tree's ancient status though, and the more a tree has, the older it's likely to be.

Look for these key features:

- Crown that is reduced in size and height
- Large girth in comparison to other trees of the same species
- Hollow trunk which may have one or more openings to the outside
- Stag-headed appearance - look for dead, bare, antler-like branches in the crown
- Fruit bodies of heart-rot fungi growing on the trunk
- Cavities on trunk and branches, running sap or pools of water forming in hollows
- Rougher or more creviced bark
- An 'old' look with lots of character
- Aerial roots growing down into the decaying trunk.



How to record

Find a tree to record. Look around your local area for trees which seem old. Usually they'll have a fat trunk and there might be other signs too, like decaying branches or fungi.

If you're not sure where to start when looking for trees, take a look at the historic maps layer on the ATI website at ati.woodlandtrust.org.uk. These maps were produced in the 1800s and can help you to locate old trees that may still be alive today.

If you've found a tree you want to add, double check that it isn't already recorded. If it's already recorded you can still add more information about it. Look on page 22 for more information.

If it hasn't been recorded, you can add it to the map. For your first tree, you'll need to complete a quick online registration to become an official recorder. Then just measure the trunk's girth, note any special features, take a quick snap if you can and share it all at ati.woodlandtrust.org.uk. The following guidance notes will help you to create accurate, comprehensive records that will be key to protecting the future of our special trees.



Location



It's important that the location of the tree is marked as accurately as possible. If you have a GPS unit or an app on your phone, you can use a grid reference. Or use the ATI website's online map to place the pointer in the correct place. Use the satellite view on the map to find the exact location of the tree.

Girth

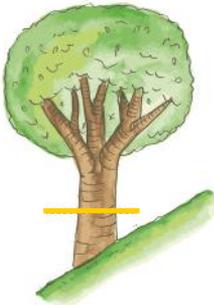
Measuring the trunk's girth isn't always straightforward.

For trees with a single stem trunk, always measure at a height of 1.5m above ground level.

- Make sure the tape is level
- Ensure the measuring tape is flat against the trunk and not twisted
- Don't presume the first attempt is correct - measure a couple of times to make sure
- Record the girth in metres and centimetres

How do I measure a leaning tree?

A leaning tree should always be recorded by measuring 1.5m up the underneath side. Follow all other points as if measuring a standing tree.

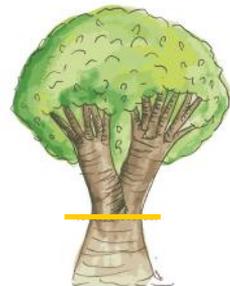


How do I measure a tree on sloping ground?

Measure at a height of 1.5m from the ground on the upper side of any slope, or the highest part of the ground if it's uneven.

What do I do if the tree forks at 1.5m?

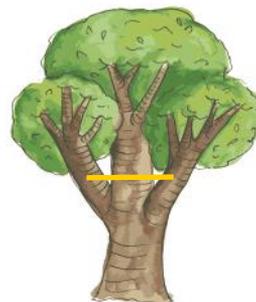
If the tree forks or abnormally swells at or below 1.5m from ground level, record the trunk at its narrowest point below 1.5m. Remember to note the height at which the measurement was taken.



What do I do if the tree forks below 1.5m?

Try to record the girth where it has a clean unbranched trunk, either above or below 1.5m. If the branches are very low but have a gap above you may still be able to record at 1.5m, but if you can't, remember to record the height at which you measured.

A tree that forks low down may be multi stemmed – see below.



How do I measure a burred or knobbly tree?

If the tree has burrs or swellings at 1.5m, put the tape around the stem at various points below 1.5m to find the smallest girth.

Keeping the tape level may include burrs which exaggerate the girth. In this situation it's okay if the tape is not level; this might allow you to avoid the burrs and measure the smallest girth.

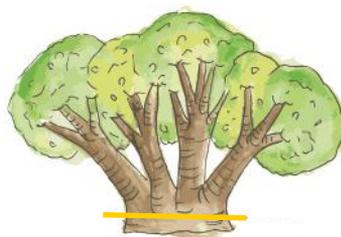
Make a note of how you measured the tree in the comments field on the recording form.

How do I measure a multiple stemmed tree or coppice?

If the stems appear to grow from a single tree, treat it as though measuring a single stem by finding and recording the smallest girth around all stems at 1.5m or below. Coppice should be recorded in this way.

If the stems arise close to the ground and it appears as though they may not all be part of the same tree, each stem should be treated and recorded as an individual tree. If the stems are so close together that this isn't possible, measure the smallest girth around all of the stems.

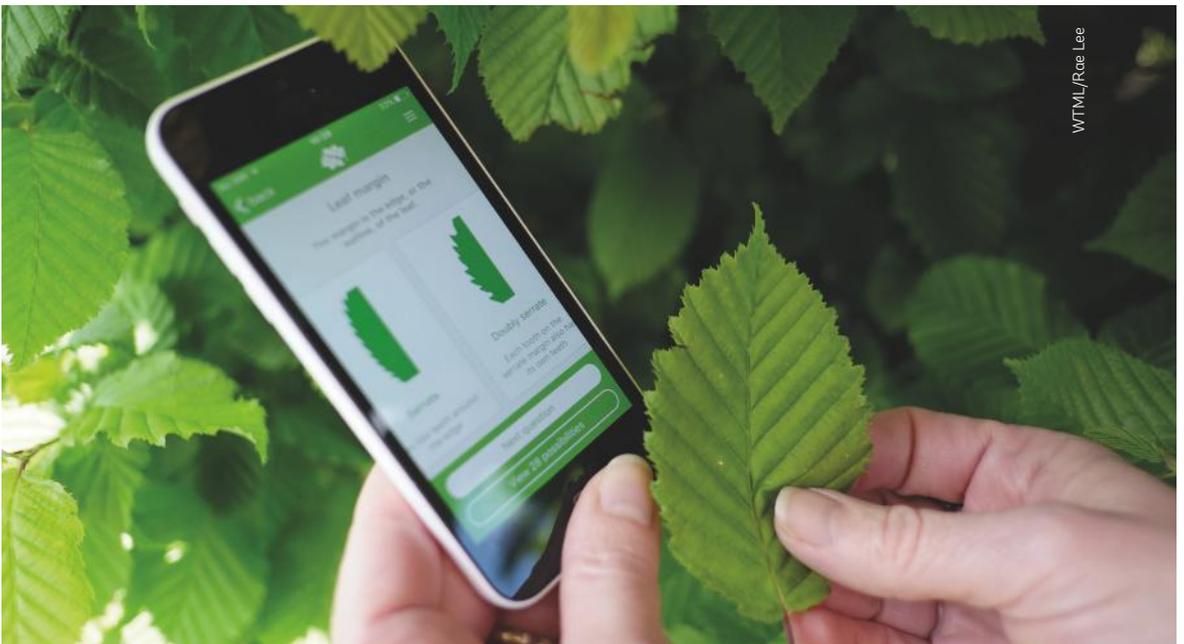
Make a note of how you measured the tree in the comments field on the recording form.



Can I estimate the girth of the tree?

Estimate the girth of a tree when it is:

- within a hedge, surrounded by dense undergrowth, or on the opposite side of a ditch or river.
- Try estimating the diameter of the stem and multiply by three. Remember to tick the 'estimated value' box on the recording form.



Species

The ATI website lists a large number of species to choose from in the 'add a tree' section.

If you are not sure what the species is, you can select the genus. For example, if you're unsure if a tree is a sessile or pedunculate oak, you can record it simply as oak.

If you are really unsure about the type of tree, try using the Woodland Trust tree ID app on your phone. Alternatively you can record the species as 'unsure'.

Access

The accessibility of each record is displayed on the map to show whether the tree can be seen or visited by members of the public. Possible options are:

- **Private – no access information recorded.**
- **Public – open access.** A tree that stands on land with full public access. Includes trees on streets, public parks, village greens, playing fields or Woodland Trust land.
- **Public – partial access.** A tree that stands next to or close to a footpath, road, garden, park or other publicly accessible land. Includes hedgerow trees next to a road or footpath.
- **Private – not visible from public access (permission required to view).** A tree that stands on private land and is either not visible or not close enough to record accurate data without trespassing. Permission of the landowner is required to see and record it. Detailed data or observations may be hidden on the website if requested by the landowner.
- **Public – no access information recorded.**
- **Public – Scottish Outdoor Access.** Please see the Scottish Outdoor Access Code website for full information.
- **Public – restricted access.** A tree that stands on ground with full public access but with limited opening times. There may be a charge to access these sites. Includes National Trust land, public parks, private estates and privately owned gardens. Please note – private estates and gardens that only open very occasionally should be recorded as private.
- **Private – visible from public access (permission not required to view).** A tree that stands on private land but can clearly be seen and identified from public access land. Permission of the landowner is required before recording the tree.



A man with dark hair, wearing a black jacket and blue jeans, is smiling and leaning against the trunk of a large, moss-covered tree in a forest. He is holding a camera with a lens in his right hand. The background shows other trees with some autumn-colored leaves.

A photograph

A photograph gives us a snapshot of what the tree looks like at that moment. Photos help us to look at changes over the years. They also help verifiers find the tree and assess condition when confirming your record.

A full view photo of the tree is ideal. It's also useful to photograph any interesting features of the tree such as holes, hollowing or fungi.

Tree form

Trees come in a wide variety of shapes. This often depends on their age and how they've been used or managed. Here are the tree forms you can record on the Ancient Tree Inventory.



Maiden

A maiden is an uncut tree. It hasn't been subject to pruning as a management technique and has one single trunk.



Multi-stem

When two or more trunks arise from or near ground level. The trunks may arise from a single tree that has branched at the base, or where a group of trees was planted very close together and has fused at the base.



Phoenix

Phoenix trees are those which have fallen over or split apart but continue to grow.



Coppice

A technique where the tree is cut back to ground level, resulting in the growth of many stems from the base.



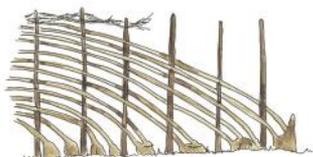
Stump

Record a tree as a stump if this is all that remains of the tree. This category is for stumps shorter than 4m.



Stump (high >4m)

Stumps 4m or taller.



Laid (hedgerow)

A line of trees trained into a hedgerow to create a barrier. Cuts are made into the stems so they can be bent over to form the hedgerow.



Hedgebank

Earth or rubble banks topped with hedgerows and/or trees.



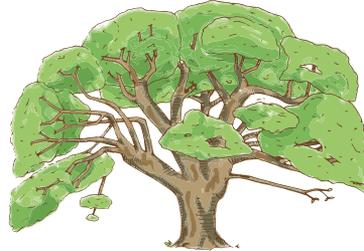
Pollard - managed

Trunks which have been cut above the height of browsing animals and regrown with multiple branches. This is usually at around 2.5m from ground level.



Pollard - natural

Trees that grow in a pollard form either naturally or following injury.



Pollard - lapsed

A tree which has been pollarded in the past but has not been re-pollarded will develop a large crown with heavy branches.



Coppard

A coppice with pollarded stems.



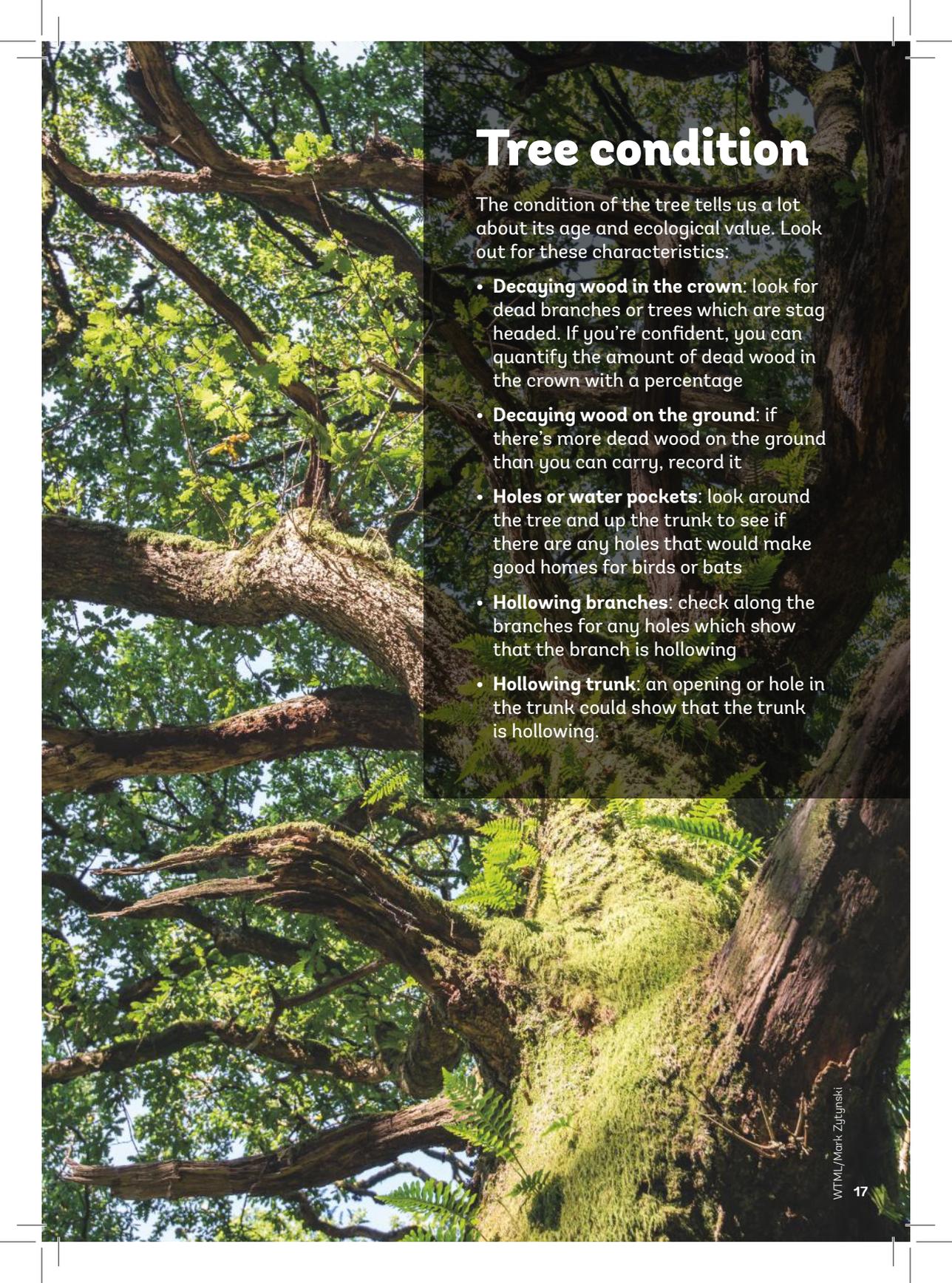
Cliff tree

Growing on a cliff edge.



Unknown

If you're not sure, record your tree as unknown and verifiers can add this detail later.



Tree condition

The condition of the tree tells us a lot about its age and ecological value. Look out for these characteristics:

- **Decaying wood in the crown:** look for dead branches or trees which are stag headed. If you're confident, you can quantify the amount of dead wood in the crown with a percentage
- **Decaying wood on the ground:** if there's more dead wood on the ground than you can carry, record it
- **Holes or water pockets:** look around the tree and up the trunk to see if there are any holes that would make good homes for birds or bats
- **Hollowing branches:** check along the branches for any holes which show that the branch is hollowing
- **Hollowing trunk:** an opening or hole in the trunk could show that the trunk is hollowing.

Fungi, epiphytes, bats

Lots of fungi species live on old trees. Here are the options you can record for the ATI:

- **Unsure of species** - if you can see a fruiting body on the tree but you don't know what species it is, record it as unsure of species.
- **Southern bracket** – on broadleaved trees, especially beech. Dark red, brown with white underside.
- **Beefsteak fungus** – usually found on oak or sweet chestnut. Bracket shape, it's initially yellow, turning red as it ages.
- **Chicken of the woods** – on broadleaved trees especially oak and beech. Bracket-like, it grows in groups. Orange-yellow in colour.
- **Oak bracket** – as the name suggests it's usually found on oak. The bracket-like fruiting body is yellow-brown turning dark brown with age.
- **Shaggy bracket** – on broadleaved trees, especially ash and apple. Rust brown with a distinctive downy surface.
- **Birch polypore** – found on the

decaying wood of birch. Bracket-like, rounded smooth and white or pale brown.

- **Dryad's saddle** – on broadleaved trees especially horse chestnut and sycamore. The fan shaped fungus is light brown with large brown flat scales.
- **Giant polypore** – on broadleaved trees, especially beech. Grows in masses. The surface is pale tan colour, turning dark brown with age.
- **Blushing bracket** – on decaying wood of broadleaved trees, especially birch and beech. The brackets have a sharp edge and a pale brown surface which turns red-brown with age.
- **Dyer's mazelgill** – on roots of conifers, especially Scots pine. Bright yellow and velvety, it turns to red then brown with age.
- **Species not listed** - choose this if you know the species but it's not listed. You can add the species name in the location and access comment.

If you're finding it difficult to identify fungi, there are many books or online guides available to help you.

Epiphytes

An epiphyte is a plant which grows on another plant. It might get its nutrients from water, the air or particles which accumulate around it. The following options can be recorded on the ATI:

- **Evidence of** - choose this when you can see a plant growing but aren't sure what it is
- **Moss**
- **Ivy**
- **Lichen**
- **Fern**
- **Mistletoe**
- **Cuckoo tree** – this is a tree growing in another tree. It's often a rowan tree which has grown from a seed dropped by a bird.
- **Other** – choose this if you recognise a plant that isn't on the list. You could add a comment or a message to the verifier.

Bats

Look for evidence of roosting bats which includes:

- Staining around a cavity or split
- Scratch marks around a cavity or split
- Bat droppings beneath a hole (they look like rodent droppings but will easily crumble to dust)
- Urine stains below a cavity or split (can look similar to water stains)
- Squeaking sounds, especially on hot days or at dusk.

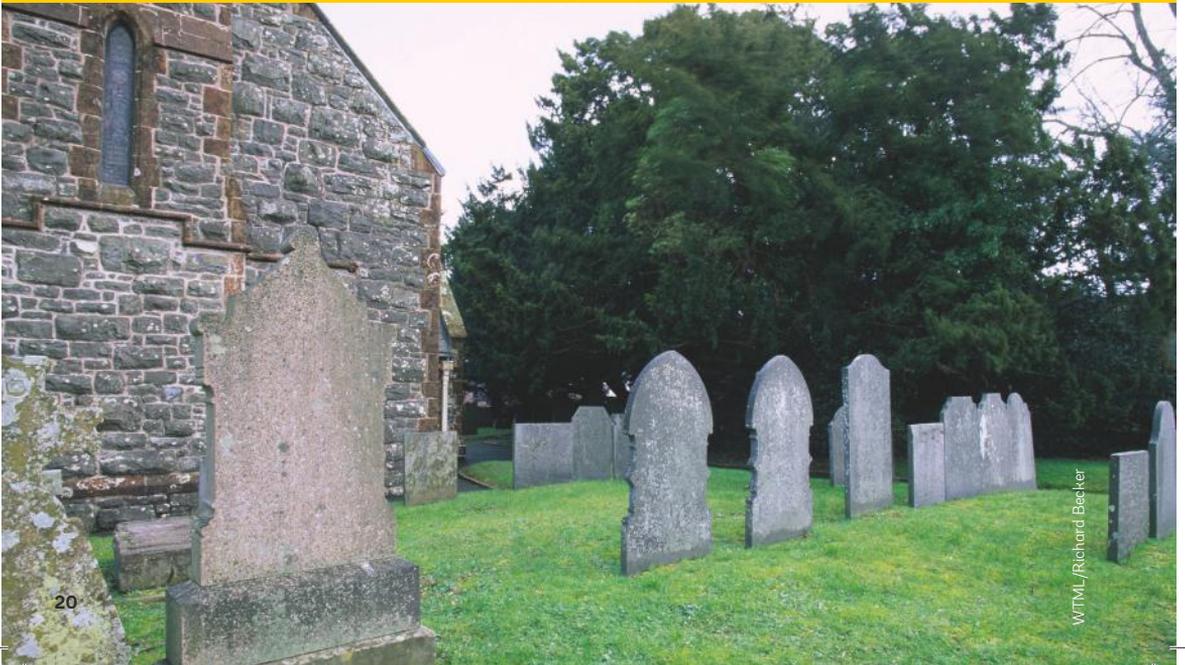
Images: Mossy tree trunk WTML/Jane Corey, Bat WTML/Laurie Campbell, Dryad's Saddle WTML, Beech fern leaf WTML/Fran Hitchinson, Birch polypore WTML/Laurie Campbell



Tree location

Tell us more about where the tree is. This can tell us a lot about the history of the tree and the area it has grown in. Options are:

- arable
- avenue
- beside railway
- bridlepath/footpath
- cemetery
- urban
- churchyard
- common/heath
- deer park
- medieval deer park
- tudor deer park
- domestic garden
- field
- hedgerow
- landscape garden
- market garden
- moorland
- nature reserve
- orchard
- parish boundary
- parkland
- historic park and garden
- public or open space
- river/canal
- roadside
- school/college ground
- Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)/National Nature Reserve (NNR)/Special Areas of Conservation (SAC)
- upland
- urban tree
- village green
- wetland
- wood pasture
- ancient wood pasture
- woodland
- ancient woodland
- other





Messaging

If you have a question about the tree you've recorded or you'd like to highlight something of importance to the verifier, you can send them a message which is not displayed to the public on the record.

There are two options:

- use the comments on location and access when recording the tree
- click the manage menu in a record and choose send a message to the verifier. If there's a verifier in the area they should get back to you with a response using the messaging system. Check your messages regularly in case a verifier gets in touch.

Adding to existing records

It's important that the records we hold are as up to date as possible, so it's great if you can add more information to an existing record. Try looking up your local trees and think about the following.

- Add a new photo. This allows us to make comparisons with how the tree looked in the past.
- Has the tree now got decaying wood or a hollowing trunk? Or perhaps the tree has fallen but is still present? From the manage menu of a record, click edit and you can change the information. This is sent to a verifier who will check the changes before they're displayed on the record.
- Has the tree grown? Perhaps the tree is fatter than when it was originally recorded. Edit the girth and it will be saved alongside its old measurement.
- Has a tree been removed? If there's no sign that the tree was there, you can report it using an option from the manage menu. This message will be sent to the Woodland Trust and the record can be updated to show the tree has been lost.

What next?

Once entered, your tree will be sent for verification.

Our team of trained volunteer verifiers will look at your record and determine whether it is an ancient, veteran or notable tree.

It may take some time for your record to be verified, but your record will not be lost and will remain on the map as unverified until this happens. The verifier may contact you about the tree, so sign in regularly to check your messages.

Every record you add will help us to celebrate and protect our extraordinary trees and give hope for their future. Thank you.

Recording form

Use this form to record information when you're out in the field. Before you wipe it clean, enter your record on ati.woodlandtrust.org.uk.

Grid reference (or find the location of your tree using the map on the online recording form.):						
Species						
Girth	m	cm	Height of girth	m	cm	
Public accessibility (see page 12):						
About the tree						
Tree condition (see page 17):						
Tree form (see page 14):						
Standing or fallen:						
Living status:	Alive	✓	Dead	✓	Unknown	✓

Form continued over page

Local or historic name of the tree:

Location (see page 20):

Wildlife

Epiphytes (see page 19):

Fungi (see page 18):

Evidence of invertebrates



Evidence of bats



Other comments:



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