

Foreword

As we approach the new millennium spare a thought for the real veterans of this one - trees several hundred, perhaps one or two even a thousand, years old. This book, produced by the Veteran Trees Initiative, is the first dedicated solely to the care of the oldest living things in our countryside.

Veteran trees are a significant part of our historic, cultural and ecological heritage, treasured by many generations; in the past because of their economic and social value or as elements of picturesque or romantic landscapes and more recently as a result of our increased understanding of their considerable ecological importance.

In parallel with this has come greater understanding of the management they need. Many of the techniques familiar to our forebears have been lost or swept aside and current techniques have been re-assessed, notably through the lively meetings and discussions within the Ancient Tree Forum. The Veteran Trees Initiative is therefore issuing this guidance as our current understanding of best practice, although accepting that it may need to be revised in the future.

The handbook gives practical advice on all aspects of veteran tree management, from the importance of sometimes doing nothing at all to taking positive action for individual trees, their habitats and dependent species. All is set in context by an understanding of the way in which trees grow, age and decay.

This handbook is one of the most significant publications of the partnership which is the Veteran Trees Initiative. I am sure it will become an invaluable reference handbook for all those, from arboricultural professionals to countryside advisors, involved in the conservation and management of veteran trees whether for their ecological, landscape or historic value. Other elements of the work of the Veteran Trees Initiative are now reaching fruition and will be published shortly. Together they make a major contribution to the implementation of the Lowland Wood-pasture and Parkland Habitat Action Plan, which English Nature leads.

Baroness Young of Old Scone
Chairman, English Nature
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