

The future  
for Veteran Trees

## The future for veteran trees

Veteran trees are an exciting part of our heritage; the beauty and mystery of these gnarled old trees have been immortalised in legends, poems, books and paintings. Britain has the largest and best array of ancient trees in north-west Europe so we have a special responsibility for their conservation.

*Veteran trees are trees which, because of their great age, size or condition, are of exceptional value culturally, in the landscape, or for wildlife. Some trees are instantly recognisable as veterans but many are less obvious. Examples of some different types of veteran trees are illustrated throughout this leaflet.*

As a result of the recent efforts described here the conservation of veteran trees is now entering a new era. This leaflet explains why veteran trees are special, what has been done to help them, what will be done in the future, and where to get more information about them.

### Why are they special?

Veteran trees are an important part of our cultural and historical heritage and they have been incorporated into a succession of changes in the landscape. They provide a sense of continuity in an ever-changing world; their extraordinary longevity and character has inspired generations, with many having close associations with people, places and events.

Old trees would have been common in the wildwood but many of the veteran trees we have today started life as “working trees” being regularly lopped or “pollarded” to provide fuel and wood for people to use. It is not surprising, therefore, that those which survive in the landscape today are usually found in places with a long history of human activity such as ancient deer parks, wood-pastures, wooded commons, village greens, hedgerows, riversides and, in the case of ancient yews, churchyards.



Veteran tree on an ancient monument at Hailes Abbey. © Alan Richardson

  
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Front cover picture: The Bowthorpe oak, Lincolnshire. © English Nature



Left: Wasp mimic crane fly *Ctenophora flaveolata*. A species of large veteran beeches. © Roger Key  
 Below: Chicken of the woods *Laetiporus sulphureus* on a veteran oak. © Ted Green



Veteran trees are also important for many forms of wildlife. Some slow-growing lichens are only found on the bark of very old trees. The holes and hollows with which these trees abound are important sites for roosting bats and nesting birds. Hundreds of different species of insects depend totally on very old trees, feeding as larvae within the decaying wood. At any one time only a few trees contain just the right habitat for these special species so places which contain a concentration of veteran trees such as old parks and wood-pastures are particularly important, especially when they also contain plenty of flowers and blossom on which the often brightly coloured adult insects feed.

Fungi are critical in the ecology of almost all of the wildlife associated with old trees and some are themselves rare and restricted to only the oldest of trees. It is fungi which cause the decay and hollowing on which the other wildlife depends. The decay of heartwood and hollowing are a perfectly natural part of the ageing process of the tree, probably prolonging its life, and are not necessarily a sign of ill health.



A lapsed pollard at Ashstead Common, Surrey. © Helen Read



A 'Phoenix' tree: veteran willow in Lincolnshire. © Roger Key



Left: A maiden beech - not all veterans are pollards. © Roger Key

Below: Veteran lime pollard. © Roger Key



Ploughing too close to a veteran tree. © Ted Green

The greatest threat to the trees is not death but misunderstanding; many veteran trees have been cut down as they were thought of as dying, diseased and dangerous. Agricultural intensification resulted in the removal of many old hedgerows, along with their trees, and the ploughing up of old parklands. Surviving trees may suffer directly through inappropriate tree surgery, damage by grazing animals or vandalism, as well as indirectly through unsympathetic management of the surrounding land.



Restoration pollarding of a veteran beech at Burnham Beeches, Buckinghamshire. © English Nature

### What has been done to help them?

Although many of our veteran trees were lost during the twentieth century, a few people started to investigate ways in which the old working trees could be rescued. The pioneering work of the National Trust at Hatfield Forest and Croft Castle, the Corporation of London at Burnham Beeches and Ted Green at Windsor Great Park helped show the way forward in the restoration of landscapes rich in veteran trees. A group of people with an active interest in veteran trees set up the Ancient Tree Forum which joined with English Nature and other organisations to form the Veteran Trees Initiative.

### The Veteran Trees Initiative

The Veteran Trees Initiative was launched in 1996 at Windsor Great Park as an English Nature-led partnership which aimed to promote the conservation of veteran trees. It ran a series of awareness and training events for landowners, land managers, tree surgeons and others to help set new standards of best practice in the management of veteran trees and the landscapes in which they grow. The Veteran Trees Initiative also hosted a symposium on parkland management and developed a standard method for surveying veteran trees. A number of publications on veteran trees and their care were produced including a practical management handbook and guidance on safety issues. Further details of these publications and where to obtain them can be found on pages 8/9 of this leaflet. The Veteran Trees Initiative ended at the beginning of 2000 but the conservation of ancient trees and the places where they occur must still go on.



VTI workshop at Fountains Abbey. © Tony Robinson



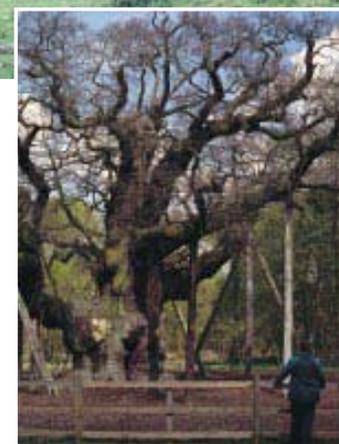
Living and dead veteran sweet chestnuts at Croft Castle, Herefordshire. © English Nature



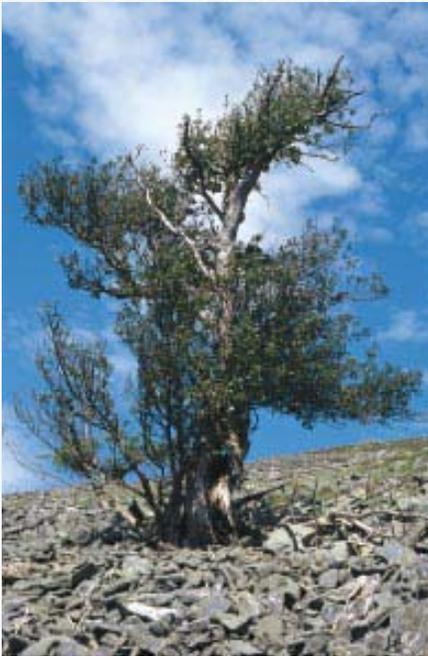
Ancient wood-pasture with veteran trees at Farmcote, Cotswolds. © Keith Alexander

### The lowland wood-pasture and parkland Habitat Action Plan

English Nature and its partner organisations are continuing to promote veteran tree conservation through the lowland wood-pasture and parkland Habitat Action Plan, a new initiative to conserve, restore, and expand this habitat which is so important for its old trees. All of the former partner organisations from the Veteran Trees Initiative are helping and many others have become involved. Copies of the Habitat Action Plan are available from the Biodiversity Secretariat, and further details about its implementation can be obtained from English Nature (see page 9 for contact details).



The Major Oak, Sherwood Forest. © Rachel Thomas



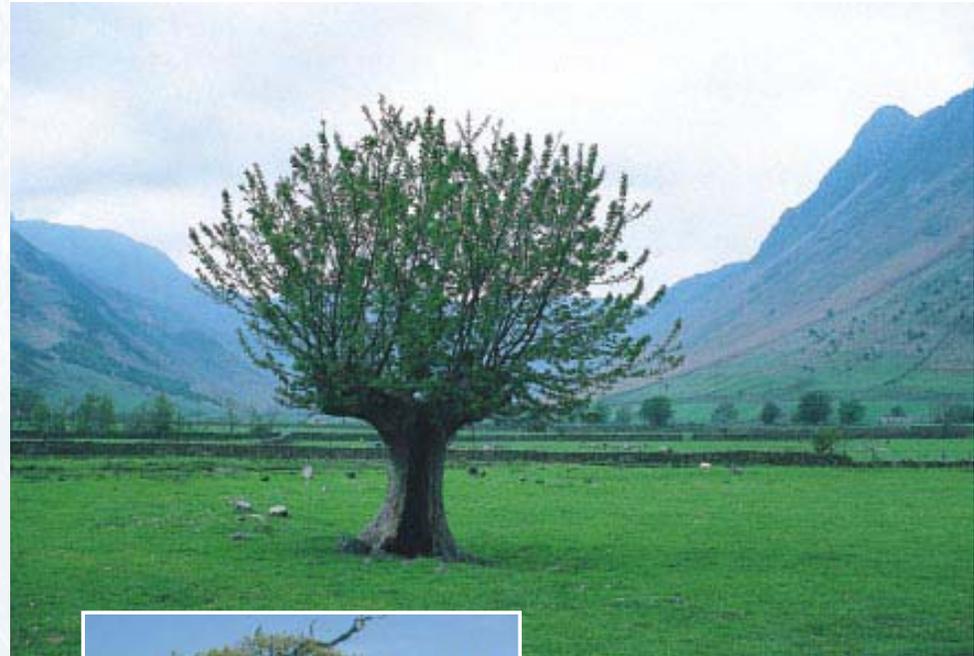
An ancient holly in the Scottish borders. © Tony Robinson

### The Ancient Tree Forum and the Woodland Trust

The Ancient Tree Forum is the main UK organisation concerned solely with veteran trees and has always championed their conservation, initially in this country but now also in Europe. In a new partnership with the Woodland Trust, the Ancient Tree Forum is determined to conserve our priceless legacy of old trees and ancient woodland, as well as creating a succession of new veteran trees for the future. The partnership will continue to raise awareness of the value and importance of veteran trees and ancient woodlands, and their rightful place as part of our heritage. A new veteran tree website is being established to provide the latest news, event details, and information on ancient trees via the internet (see page 9 for details).

### A future for veteran trees?

Across the country thousands of young trees were planted to mark the turn of the millennium. With care and attention some may grow on to become veterans, but as we begin a new century we must not neglect those trees that have already seen the passing of several hundred years. Awareness of the needs of veteran trees has never been greater but much still remains to be done. If you work with, own, or simply enjoy this important part of our heritage then support the work of the Ancient Tree Forum and Woodland Trust partnership and help to ensure that there is a future for veteran trees.



Above: Veteran ash pollard in the Lake District. © Helen Read



Left: A veteran tree in a hedgerow. © Roger Key

Veteran birch at Melbury Park, Dorset. © Roger Key



Sycamore pollard outside the Fox and Hounds at Foss Cross, Cotswolds. © Keith Alexander



Veteran hawthorn pollards. © Helen Read

## Veteran Trees Initiative products

The Veteran Trees Initiative published a range of books and leaflets relating to veteran trees and their conservation.

The following can be ordered from Telelink at:  
PO Box 100, Fareham, Hampshire, PO14 2SX.  
Telephone: 01329 668600  
Fax: 01329 664725  
E-mail: [reception@telelink.co.uk](mailto:reception@telelink.co.uk)

### Veteran Trees: a guide to good management.

This A4 format handbook provides a comprehensive guide to best practice in veteran tree management and is set to become the standard work on the subject. A must for anyone involved in tree or land management. Includes copies of the following two leaflets which are also available separately.

Price £15 including p+p.

### Veteran Trees: a guide to risk and responsibility.

A free leaflet for landowners and managers explaining risk and responsibility in the management of veteran trees.

### Veteran Trees: a guide to grants.

A free leaflet providing a review of the grants, available from a range of bodies, that are applicable to the management of veteran trees.

### Moccas: an English deer park.

A portrait of England's first parkland National Nature Reserve with comprehensive accounts of its history and natural history.

Price £20 including p+p.

Available Summer 2000.

### Guide to the care of ancient trees.

A free leaflet giving a simple introduction to veteran trees and their conservation. Particularly suitable for use by conservation advisers to promote veteran tree conservation to landowners and managers.

### Veteran tree slide pack.

A set of 24 slides with lecture notes illustrating different types of veteran trees, their wildlife and conservation. Suitable for colleges, conservation advisers and others giving presentations on trees and conservation.

Price £12 including p+p.

The following are available free from English Nature's Enquiry Service (details on page 9)

### English Nature

Northminster House  
PETERBOROUGH  
PE1 1UA  
Telephone - Enquiry Service 01733 455101  
<http://www.english-nature.org.uk>

### Specialist Survey Method.

A key element of the VTI was to develop a comprehensive and consistent method of survey as a standard for the recording of veteran trees. This spiral bound booklet contains easy-to-follow instructions on surveying and enough cards to record up to 300 individual trees.

### Parklands - the way forward.

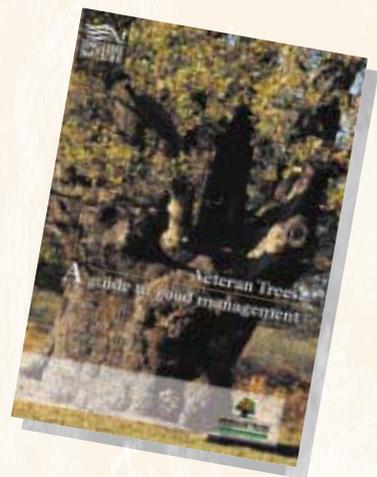
#### English Nature Research Reports No. 295

The proceedings of a symposium held in Hereford in May 1998.

### Veteran Trees Initiative: Historical and cultural aspects. A bibliography.

#### English Nature Research Reports No. 318.

A short compilation of books and references on the historical and cultural associations with veteran trees in England.



## Where to get more information about veteran trees

### Ancient Tree Forum

<http://www.woodland-trust.org.uk/ancient-tree-forum>

### Woodland Trust

Autumn Park  
Dysart Road  
GRANTHAM  
Lincolnshire  
NG31 6LL  
Telephone 01476 581111  
<http://www.woodland-trust.org.uk>

### English Nature

Northminster House  
PETERBOROUGH  
PE1 1UA  
Telephone - Enquiry Service 01733 455101  
<http://www.english-nature.org.uk>

### Other useful contacts

#### Biodiversity Secretariat

Tollgate House  
Houlton Street  
BRISTOL  
BS2 9DJ  
Telephone 0117 987 8000

#### The National Trust

33 Sheep Street  
CIRENCESTER  
Gloucestershire  
GL7 1RQ  
Telephone 01285 651818  
<http://www.ntenvironment.com>

#### Corporation of London

Burnham Beeches Office  
Hawthorn Lane  
Farnham Common  
SLOUGH  
SL2 3TE  
Telephone 01753 647358  
<http://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk>

#### Forestry Commission

National Office for England  
Great Eastern House  
Tenison Road  
CAMBRIDGE  
CB1 2DU  
Telephone 01223 314546,  
<http://www.forestry.gov.uk>

#### English Heritage

Gardens and Landscape Team  
23 Saville Row  
LONDON  
W1X 1AB  
Telephone 020 7973 3000  
<http://www.english-heritage.org.uk>

### Countryside Agency

John Dower House  
Crescent Place  
CHELTENHAM  
Gloucestershire  
GL50 3RA  
Telephone 01242 521381  
<http://www.countryside.gov.uk>

### Scottish Natural Heritage

12 Hope Terrace  
EDINBURGH  
EH9 2AS  
Telephone 0131 447 4784  
<http://www.snh.org.uk>

### Countryside Council for Wales

Plas Penrhos  
Ffordd Penrhos  
BANGOR  
LL57 2LQ  
Telephone 01248 370444  
<http://www.ccw.gov.uk>

### Environment and Heritage Service

Commonwealth House  
35 Castle Street  
BELFAST  
BT1 1GU  
Telephone 02890 251477

### Farming and Rural Conservation Agency

Telephone 08459 335577 for the location of your local office.

### Trees of Time and Place

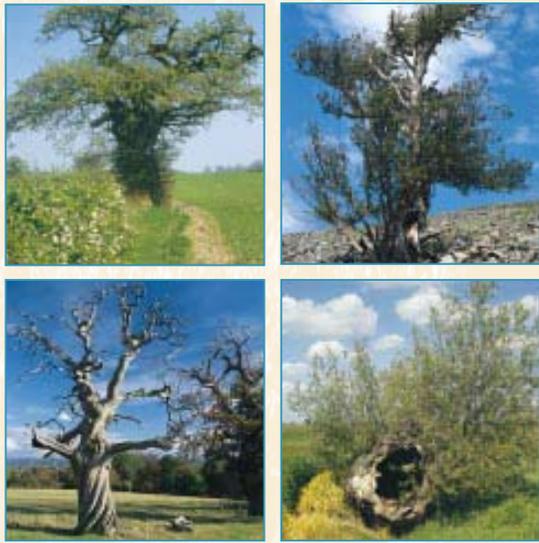
c/o Esso UK plc  
Mailpoint 08, Esso House  
Ermyn Way  
LEATHERHEAD  
Surrey  
KT22 8UX  
Telephone 01372 222528  
<http://www.totap.org.uk>

### Arboricultural Association

Ampfield House  
Ampfield  
ROMSEY  
Hampshire  
SO51 9PA  
Telephone 01794 368717  
<http://www.trees.org.uk>

### The Tree Council

51 Catherine Place  
London  
SW1E 6DY  
Telephone 020 7828 9928  
<http://www.treecouncil.org.uk>



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are trees which,  
because of their great age,  
size or condition, are  
of exceptional value  
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Written by Tony Robinson

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