

This Habitat Action Plan sets out to maintain ancient and veteran trees, and encourage new specimens to grow on Caravan Club-owned sites, and has been drafted for Club Site Teams and Site Wardens. It provides background information on ancient and veteran trees and makes recommendations for their effective management.

Introduction

An **ancient tree** is a tree that is old relative to others of the same species. Such trees have very substantial and widely recognised habitat, heritage and cultural value

A **veteran tree** is a specimen which shows significant wood decay habitats (veteran features) in its bark, root, trunk and branches. It may be a relatively young tree

The Caravan Club audit 2006 revealed that ancient and/or veteran trees may be present on at least 44 Club sites

How to recognise this habitat

- Wide trunk girth may indicate an ancient tree, but some ancient trees (e.g. Hawthorn) may be relatively small
- Ancient trees go through cycles of retrenchment and rejuvenation, where the crown dies back and new growth is stimulated lower down
- A veteran can generally be classified by:
 - Hollowing, and small holes and water pockets in the trunk and mature crown
 - Rot sites associated with wounds which are decaying
 - Dead branches or stems, either standing or fallen, and larger than 15 cm in diameter



A stylised veteran tree

Credit: Sarah Wroot/Natural England

Current status

- As ancient and veteran trees can be of any species, they occur throughout the UK
- They are most common in former medieval hunting forests, and also other parkland, wood-pastures, farmland, hedgerows, fields and some urban areas. They are least common in woodland, due to competition with other trees
- Considering their great ecological value and age, they have surprisingly little legal protection. Sometimes given Tree Preservation Orders (only for landscape reasons), but more likely to be indirectly protected through association with protected species – particularly nesting birds and roosting bats (Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 – as amended)
- Most under threat from development, forestry, intensive agriculture, and inconsiderate management – particularly when limbs are mistakenly considered a health and safety risk

Ecology/management requirements

Veteran and ancient trees are of exceptional value to a wide range of wildlife species, including many which specialise on them. These include mosses, liverworts, lichens, fungi, epiphytes (plants which grow on other living plants), invertebrates (including many rare specialists of dead wood), mammals (particularly roosting and foraging bats) and birds (for foraging, or nesting in tree hollows – e.g. woodpeckers, crested tits and owls)

How to look after this habitat

	Site safeguard and management	Habitat management and protection
DO'S	<p>DO <u>Survey your site</u> to identify trees which qualify for ancient or veteran tree status. In general, a girth of over 3 m indicates potential – but see link below for details</p> <p>DO <u>Encourage the next generation</u> of veterans by allowing, or even inducing decay and cavities in younger trees. <i>Note: only induce decay and cavities in a few younger trees where others are present, and never do this on established veterans</i></p>	<p>DO <u>Keep individual trees alive for as long as possible</u></p> <p>DO <u>The minimum amount of 'surgery'</u> necessary on a tree. Most will not require any surgery.</p> <p>DO <u>Leave any standing dead wood</u> in the canopy, providing it is safe – this provides valuable wildlife habitat</p> <p>DO <u>Submit records to the Ancient Tree Forum</u> – this may also result in more visitors!</p>
DON'TS	<p>DON'T <u>Fell all neighbouring trees</u> – this may cause leaf scorching, desiccation or frost damage to ancient/veteran trees</p> <p>DON'T <u>Compact the soil underneath</u> (i.e. no paths, vehicles, pitches near to or under canopy) – this can damage the roots and hinder water uptake</p> <p>DON'T <u>Alter drainage patterns</u></p> <p>DON'T <u>Build underneath or near to ancient or veteran trees</u>. Development can cause soil compaction and drainage problems, leading to a decline in tree health, which may in turn necessitate dead limb removal for health and safety or structural reasons</p>	<p>DON'T <u>Cut or trim unless the tree really poses a serious health and safety risk</u></p> <p>DON'T <u>Cut into cavities or holes, or drain them</u>. If some cutting is absolutely necessary, test the depth of the cavity first using a piece of flexible hose, then cutting into it</p> <p>DON'T <u>Allow damage to the lower parts</u> of the trunk, including damage by grazing animals (rubbing or chewing etc)</p> <p>DON'T <u>Don't tidy up</u> (i.e. flush cut) rough ends to branches – they can provide bird nesting and bat roosting sites</p> <p>DON'T <u>Treat stumps or cut/damaged branches</u> with sealant, fungicide or insecticide</p> <p>DON'T <u>Remove fungal fruiting bodies</u> - harmful for the fungus and also any organisms living in it</p>

For further information on this habitat visit:

The Caravan Club Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) for ancient and veteran trees: <http://www.caravanclub.co.uk>

Natural England's Veteran Tree Management Handbook, including full criteria for identification:

<http://www.english-nature.org.uk/pubs/Handbooks/> *Note: this can be downloaded free of charge*

