

Badgers



The first records of Brampton Wood date back to the Domesday Book of 1086 AD. A large earth bank marks the wood's ancient boundary. The bank and ditch barrier was built in the Middle Ages to protect the wood from invading cattle and to keep pasture

History

Early spring sees primroses bloom on the rides, in grassy glades and under the dense tangle of honeysuckle that twines through the trees and scrub. Bluebells abound in the wood's north-east corner. The wide, grassy rides, which run through the wood, are one of the most important features. It is here that you can find the greatest variety of fauna and flora.

Welcome to Brampton Wood
Brampton Wood is one of the best examples of ancient woodland in the area. At 327 acres, it is the second largest wood in Cambridgeshire. Many rare and unusual plants grow in Brampton Wood because of its great variety of habitats. The soil is chalky boulder clay – this suits lime-loving plants, however in places it is acid enough for bracken. The wood is bisected by a stream, which runs through the wood in a south-easterly direction. The trees are mainly oak, ash and field maple with an understory of hazel, hawthorn and blackthorn.

History

For centuries many of the trees, especially hazel, were coppiced – cut down at the base, allowed to re-grow and harvested again on a rotational cycle. Before 1832 the wood provided timber, hay and livestock. During the 1860s bark stripped from the large oaks became an important product in the tanning industry. After 1900, probably during the First World War, virtually the entire wood was clear felled. Since then most of the woodland has regenerated naturally by growth from old stumps and seeds. The site's national importance was recognised in 1954 when it was declared a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

In the 1950s the Forestry Commission purchased Brampton Wood. About a fifth was replaced with plantations of Scots pine, Corsican pine and Norway spruce. The Ministry of Defence bought the wood in 1954.

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Wild service tree

animals inside. There are several other minor banks and ditches in the wood, which probably drained the prehistoric field systems. The first map of the wood, drawn for the Earl of Sandwich in 1757, shows that the wood's shape then was much the same as it today. Three principal rides are illustrated – Main Ride, Cross Ride and West Ride; these rides are probably much older than the map indicates. Rides are the roads on which timber, wood and charcoal were removed from the wood. Those in Brampton Wood are unusually wide, as shown by the drainage ditches on either side.

wood are two of the best specimens in Cambridgeshire. The wood has a good number of old oak trees, including the iconic 'Major Oaks' at the beginning of Main Ride. The rides stretch for nearly two miles and along them you'll find important plants such as meadow grasses, cowslip, devil's-bit scabious, water-purslane, wood spurge, false oxlip, creeping buttercup and both hairy and trailing St Johns wort.

Wood anemone



About 280 species of fern, conifer, flowering plant and tree have been recorded in the wood. Plants associated with ancient woodland include dog's mercury, bluebell, wood anemone, yellow archangel, primrose, wood sedge and violets. The yews, wild cherries and the wild service trees along the Main Ride were artificially planted. The magnificent wild pears on the western edge of the wood are two of the best specimens in Cambridgeshire. The wood has a good number of old oak trees, including the iconic 'Major Oaks' at the beginning of Main Ride. The rides stretch for nearly two miles and along them you'll find important plants such as meadow grasses, cowslip, devil's-bit scabious, water-purslane, wood spurge, false oxlip, creeping buttercup and both hairy and trailing St Johns wort.

Flora

There is an exceptional variety of habitats in Brampton Wood, ranging from ancient woodland, conifer plantations and wide, grassy rides to ponds and streams.

Wildlife

the 1960s, primarily as a safety zone for their Grafham firing range. After the range's closure, the MOD decided to sell the wood. In 1992 the Wildlife Trust launched a public appeal to conserve this magnificent area. Fortunately the appeal was successful and the Wildlife Trust began to manage the woodland and the rides for wildlife.

We are returning the deciduous woodland alongside the ride edges to a coppice cycle to improve the area for invertebrates and birds. Coppicing has many advantages for wildflowers, such as the bluebell, and produces a greater age range of trees and shrubs.



Purple hairstreak

Muntjac deer radically change the ground flora by overgrazing. They can also severely damage coppice plots that are not securely fenced. Therefore it is crucial that we monitor and control muntjac numbers.

It is important to keep the ponds open so that light can penetrate and allow the water plants to grow. We mow the area around the ponds and remove encroaching scrub. We monitor the newt populations regularly.

The Wildlife Trust reserves team, aided by a volunteer warden and local volunteers, carry out all these management tasks and maintain the paths, bridges, fences, hedges and car park, and collect litter. We always welcome extra help. If you are interested in helping to conserve the wildlife in Brampton Wood, please do not hesitate to contact the Trust or volunteer warden.



Devil's bit scabious

We hope you enjoy your visit.

How to find the reserve

OS Sheet 153 Grid Reference TL 184 698

Leave the A14 at exit 22 (Brampton), one-mile east of the A14/A1 junction. Take the Brampton exit (B1514) at the first roundabout. At next mini-roundabout turn right into Grove Lane, then after 100 m turn right again at the T junction. Follow this road through the village, over the A1, towards Grafham village. The reserve is on the north side of the road 1.5 miles out of Brampton. A brown sign shows the entrance. Park in the small car park.

More information

Your local Wildlife Trust protects wildlife and countryside for people to enjoy in Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire and Peterborough. We are a charity dependent on voluntary contributions.

If you would like more information about this reserve, other reserves in Cambridgeshire or about how you can support us, please contact: The Wildlife Trust, The Manor House, Broad Street, Great Cambourne, Cambridge CB23 6DH or telephone 01954 713500.

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Welcome to
Brampton Wood



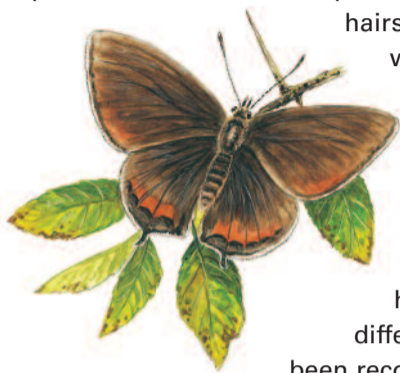
Photograph by Pat Doody
Illustrations by Mike Langman

Protecting wildlife close to home

Over 500 species of fungi exist in the wood. Autumn is the best time to find many of them, but there are some fungi fruiting at all times of the year. Do not eat any mushrooms or toadstools you find – some are poisonous and many inedible, despite attractive names such as ‘plums and custard’. Look out for false death cap, trooping funnel, common bonnet, sulphur tuft, birch polypore and King Alfred’s cakes.

Fauna

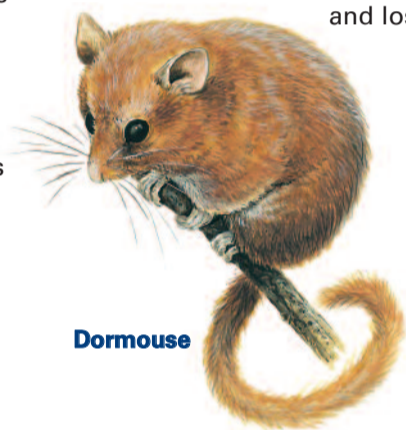
The black hairstreak, one of Britain’s rarest butterflies, has several colonies in the wood; this makes Brampton Wood one of the best UK sites to see this attractive insect. Black hairstreaks rely on blackthorn for food and shelter and we carefully manage areas of this shrub to provide ideal habitat. Purple and white letter



Black hairstreak

hairstreaks, brown argus and white admirals join the list of unusual butterflies that you find regularly. The conifers provide habitat for the pine beauty and the pine hawk moth. Over 700 different moth species have been recorded in the wood.

In 1992 English Nature re-introduced dormice to Brampton Wood. The population is thriving and has expanded to most areas of the wood. This mainly nocturnal, canopy-loving creature is incredibly difficult to see. Brampton Wood is ideal for dormice because it is a large wood; the dormice are able to increase their numbers and still live at low population densities. The wood also contains ample food sources for these animals, such as hazel, bramble, and a good variety of flowers and insects.



Dormouse

Look out for great spotted woodpeckers, green woodpeckers, sparrowhawks and buzzards. Goldcrests nest in the conifer plantations.

There are a number of small ponds in the wood where frogs and toads, smooth and great-crested newt live. The ponds are also habitats for dragonflies and water insects.

The larvae of several beetle species rely on dead wood, including the rare *Anaglyptus mysticus* – a longhorn beetle and Red Data Book species. The adult beetles feed on wildflowers along the rides. In early summer female glow worms light up after dark.

Badgers and foxes live in the wood, as well as other animal species (which can often cause damage) such as grey squirrels, rabbits and muntjac deer.

Management

We manage the rides by cutting annually alternate sides to encourage the diversity of wildflowers. We regularly cut back encroaching trees at the ride edges to prevent too much shade. Our aim is to restore the rides’ grassland flora to its original extent of 1757. Left unmanaged the rides would become overgrown and lose their wealth of diversity.

Some moths and fungi are found only where the conifers grow. We will leave some of the conifer plantations, but will thin out other areas to allow a wider variety of wildlife to thrive.



Bluebells

Map key

1 Two magnificent oak trees (see front cover)

Luckily these two oaks survived the 20th century wartime tree clearances – probably because they are near the wood’s entrance. They have several fitting names: ‘The Master Oaks’, ‘The Major Oaks’ and ‘The Sentinel Oaks’.

2 Cherries and chequers

A previous owner planted this group of wild cherry and wild service trees. Normally the wild service tree is rare and found only in ancient woodland. The bark of the mature tree has a chequered pattern, hence its alternative name of chequer tree. The brown berries, which you can see in autumn, were once used to make a fermented drink – maybe that’s why so many pubs are called ‘The Chequers’?

3 Yew trees

Yews are native trees, but the ones you see here were planted many years ago. More often seen in churchyards to ward off witches, these trees are among the oldest in the wood.

4 Ponds

The smaller pond was probably dug as a watering hole for animals. The larger pond was dug when a nearby butt was created for a firing range at the beginning of the 20th century. Look out for amphibians and a variety of water plants and insects.

5 The cross

We have removed conifer trees in this area and are restoring the clearing to become wide, sunny, grassy rides. This will encourage wildflowers and insects.

6 The wild pears

Two old, but still magnificent, wild pear trees grow here along the edge of the wood. They still fruit occasionally, although the pears are small and hard. These are two of the best examples of this rare tree in Cambridgeshire.

7 The crossroads

This is the main crossroads in the wood – at the junction of Main and Cross Rides. From here you have an excellent view of the rides and can see the land rising to the north and east. A crab apple tree is nearby; one of several good examples of Britain’s only native apple tree.

8 Bluebells

In spring this is the best place to see a wonderful display of our most popular native woodland flower. They make a beautiful blue carpet beneath the old coppice hazel.



Green woodpeckers

