

'Trees ... will teach you that which you can never learn from masters.'

St. Bernard 1090-1153

The specialness of Shotover's woodlands

Woodlands are one of the most precious and valued places that people can go to 'get away from it all'.

A wood nurtures the spirit, calms the mind and helps you feel close to nature. Simply 'being in woodland' can (and does) have a profound effect on many people.

Shotover's woodlands are full of wildlife, and you can see this for yourself on a sunny day in spring or summer. On entering the wood you might be greeted with a cacophony of birdsong, the glimpse of a squirrel or even a fox. Further into the wood you may come across butterflies chasing each other along the sunlit paths or a bumblebee searching for nectar among the woodland flowers.

Shotover's woodland can feel surprisingly wild and un-tamed because of its abundance of old trees and undisturbed habitats; but for its exceptionally rich wildlife to survive, the woodland needs to be sensitively managed to ensure the plants and animals have the right conditions to thrive. This is the specialness that *Shotover Wildlife* is helping to conserve and protect for the future.

The Woodland Ecology Programme

Shotover Wildlife's Woodland Ecology Programme is bringing together the knowledge, skills, and experience of expert naturalists to conserve the biodiversity of Shotover's woodlands, both on the hill and on the lower slopes. The Programme takes an integrated

approach to woodland management, incorporating the conservation of as many species groups and niche habitats as possible, including birds, butterflies, mammals, fungi, insects, flowers, mosses and even slugs!

All of the management carried out by *Shotover Wildlife* in the SSSI (a Site of Special Scientific Interest) is based on our sound knowledge of the reserve.

Through survey work, study and research it has been established that the woodland is important for some particularly special species, a number of which are extremely rare. *Shotover Wildlife* is working to ensure these species and their habitats are protected.

There are 4 types of woodland at Shotover: Ancient woodland, secondary woodland, scrub, and plantation, and all have their place in the contribution they make to the diversity of Shotover.

Ancient woodland. The definition of ancient woodland is that there has been woodland on the same site since at least 1600.

The trees themselves are not necessarily ancient though. It is the woodland *habitat* that is ancient, i.e. the soils, archaeological features, boundaries, and the presence of particular plants and other wildlife.



Ancient woods support long-established woodland flora and fauna including 'Ancient Woodland Indicator' species. These plants and animals find it difficult to colonise new places.

Conservation Action Plan for Brasenose Wood

A Conservation Action Plan has been produced by *Shotover Wildlife* specifically to guide the management of Shotover's ancient wood.

The Action Plan focuses on coppice, rides, diversity of woodland structure (including ponds), dead wood, and veteran trees.

Management of coppice. There are over 20 areas of hazel coppice within the wood, and the stems of these shrubs are cut (coppiced) on a rotation of a few years. This allows light to reach the woodland floor and stimulates a new flush of spring flowers and the wildlife they support. Cutting the hazel promotes new shoots to grow and eventually, as they mature, the shade increases and shuts out the light once more and the spring flowers begin to recede until the next time the hazel is coppiced. This cycle of succession contributes to the woodland's diversity of wildlife. However, some areas of the wood are left entirely un-managed as some species require an undisturbed habitat.

Management of paths. Some of the paths (rides) are being widened and new sunny glades created to provide enhanced conditions for butterflies, other insects and wild flowers. Occasionally this requires the felling of carefully selected trees to let in the light.

Secondary woodland is a habitat that has developed more recently. Much of Shotover's secondary woodland (such as on Shotover Hill) has gradually developed since Shotover was farmed back in the mid 20th century (Westhill Farm and Brasenose Farm).

Survey work by *Shotover Wildlife* has established that the secondary woodland has become an important habitat in its own right, supporting vulnerable birds and other wildlife.

Scrub woodland is young woody vegetation which has developed where previous management has ceased. If left to mature it would become woodland. At Shotover it consists mostly of gorse, elder, hawthorn and blackthorn. Scrub is often seen as 'taking over', and something to be got rid of. But scrub has its place, and at Shotover is only controlled when it is out of balance with other habitats or when it is necessary to maintain it at a particular stage of development for the wildlife it supports.

Plantation woodland. Planted trees are found in Slade Camp Field and small areas on Shotover Hill. They include native Field Maple and Cherry as well as exotics such as Hickory, but tree planting is no longer carried out at Shotover. Plantation is managed as part of the overall woodland ecology.

Lichens, fungi and mosses of the woodland

Woodland is the natural home of lichens, fungi and mosses. These organisms fulfil a most important role in woodland ecology by supporting the bottom



of nature's food chain, providing food, shelter, and moisture for many hundreds of tiny creatures that in turn, become the food of larger animals.

The importance of dead wood.

Lying tree trunks are a vital part of the woodland's ecology. Occasionally a tree is selected for felling to provide this important habitat. As the wood slowly rots down it provides the right conditions for a huge range of wildlife as well as the crucial function of nutrient re-cycling.

Without dead wood (lying or standing) the woodland would be deprived of one of its most essential contributions to biodiversity.

Shotover Wildlife is an independent voluntary organisation founded to research and communicate the importance of Shotover Hill for wildlife

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WOODLAND ECOLOGY PROGRAMME

on SHOTOVER

