Hayley Wood

Welcome to

Bedfordshire
Cambridgeshire
Northamptonshire

THE wildlife TRUSTS

Protecting **Wildlife** close to home

Welcome to Hayley Wood

Hayley Wood is one of the largest ancient woodlands in Cambridgeshire. The mosaic of dense woodland, coppice plots and open rides and glades provides perfect conditions for many different plants, animals and fungi.

History

Hayley Wood has been managed by man over many centuries. It is documented back to the Domesday Book (1086) and once belonged to the Bishops of Ely. The boundaries of the wood have hardly changed in the past 800 years.

The wood is reached via an ancient track called **Hayley Lane**. The hedgerow on the left is 800 years old and contains a large variety of trees and shrubs which provide a rich habitat for many birds. At the end of the lane is the former Cambridge to Bedford **railway line**. Built in 1863 and abandoned in 1969, it has been colonised by a variety of wildflowers and grasses making this an important area for butterflies and insects.

Next you reach **The Triangle**, a small area of woodland that is younger than the rest of the wood having developed from an abandoned field since the early 1900s.

You then cross a bank and ditch which marks the edge of the ancient woodland. This area has been wooded since prehistoric times and was once a source of firewood, timber and building materials for the Bishop and local villagers.

Hayley Wood was designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in 1955 in recognition of its national importance as a boulder clay woodland.
In 1962 it was the first nature reserve to be purchased by the recently formed Cambridgeshire and Isle of Ely Naturalists' Trust (now the Wildlife Trust BCN).

Trees

Oak, ash, elm, maple, hazel, aspen and sallow are the most common tree species found in the reserve. The oldest trees are ash and maple coppice stools with multiple stems arising from gnarled bases that have been cut down and grown again many times. Most of the large oak and ash trees are around 160 to 220 years old. Some, mainly ash, are becoming 'veteran' trees, developing the hollow insides and dead boughs that make them a valuable habitat for hole-nesting birds and insects. Old trees are also a habitat for rare lichens. These were badly damaged in the middle of last century by fumes from the Bedfordshire brickworks but are now recovering.

Oxlip

Flora

Hayley is well known for its fantastic display of oxlips each spring. This delicate pale yellow flower is confined to East Anglia and prefers poorly drained ancient woodland sites. The wood also has spectacular displays of bluebell, low growing white-flowered wood anemone and yellow lesser celandine. In summer the open rides are scattered with purple clumps of betony and purple loosestrife, frothy white heads of meadowsweet and the delicate mauve flowers of devils bit scabious. There are five species of orchid: bird's nest, early purple, common spotted, greater butterfly and twayblade.

Clustered bellflower

Management

For over 750 years Hayley, like most English woods, has been coppiced; areas of ash, hazel and maple were cut down and allowed to grow again from the stump. This produced a renewable supply of firewood as well as materials for fencing and construction. Historically nearly the whole wood would have been managed in this way. Coppicing declined throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries but was revived here in 1963. It was one of the first sites to reintroduce the practice for the benefit of wildlife, something that is now much more widespread. Coppice plots have been established along the main ride though much of the reserve is now managed as non-intervention woodland where natural processes are allowed to dominate.

The grassy rides and glade are mown on a bi-annual regime to reduce nutrient levels and enhance the diversity of wildflowers. The railway line is mown to prevent encroachment of scrub and dominance of tall species such as willowherb.

How to find the reserve

OS sheet 153, Grid reference TL 292 530

St Neots 8 miles, Cambridge 17 miles.

Take the A428 from St Neots towards Cambridge. After around 6 miles turn right onto the A1198 towards Royston. After 3 miles turn right to Longstowe on the B1046. A mile beyond the village look for a water tower on your right. Park on the verge opposite and walk 300m up Hayley Lane to reach the reserve.

You can also reach Hayley Wood by taking a bus from Cambridge to Longstowe and then walking 1 ½ miles.

We hope you enjoy your visit

More information

Your local Wildlife Trust protects wildlife and the countryside for people to enjoy in Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire. We are a charity dependent on voluntary contributions. If you would like more information about this reserve, other reserves in the area or to find out how you can support us or get involved, please contact:

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Great Cambourne, CB23 6DH.
Telephone: 01954 713 500
Email: cambridgeshire@wildlifebcn.org

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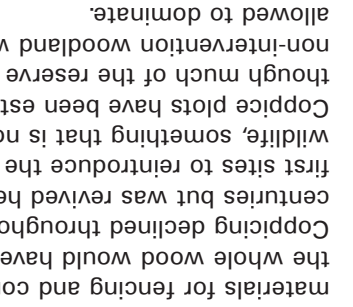
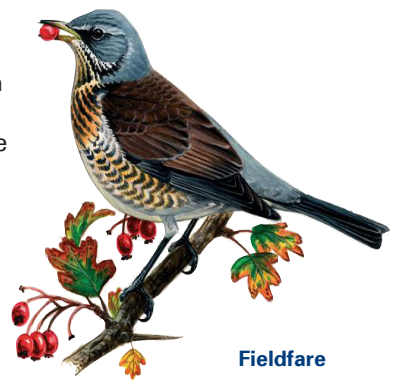
Fauna

Many species of butterfly can be found feeding on the nectar rich flowers that grow in the wood and on the railway line. In 2010, the silver-washed fritillary, a large butterfly that has recently recolonised Cambridgeshire, was recorded in the wood. It gets its name from the beautiful streaks of silver found on the underside of the wings. Butterflies that are easier to spot include green-veined white, comma, speckled wood, peacock, common blue and gatekeeper.



Speckled wood

In summer up to 40 species of bird can be found in the wood. Look and listen out for woodpeckers, nuthatches and chiffchaffs. If you are lucky you may catch a glimpse of a treecreeper or a spotted flycatcher.
In winter large flocks of redwing and fieldfare can be seen feeding on the profusion of berries in the wood and surrounding hedgerows.



Fieldfare

Muntjac and fallow deer live in the wood along with badgers and foxes. The wood is also home to smaller animals such as wood mice and field voles which provide prey for birds like tawny owls.

At least 540 species of fungi have been found in the wood, most of which appear in early autumn. See if you can spot the thin white columns of the candle snuff fungus or the large brackets of dryad's saddle.

The railway line has become home to many interesting plant species, including hairy violet, clustered bell-flower, woolly thistle, tall purple stalks of great burnet and tiny white flowered fairy flax as well as more common species such as knapweed, St John's wort and wild strawberry.

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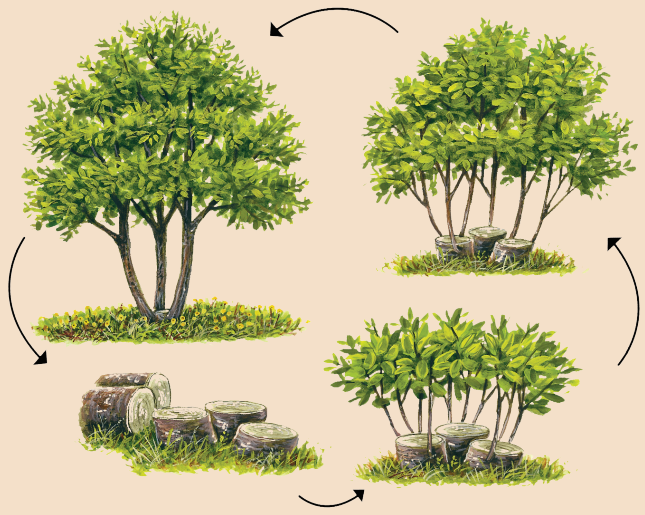
Deer

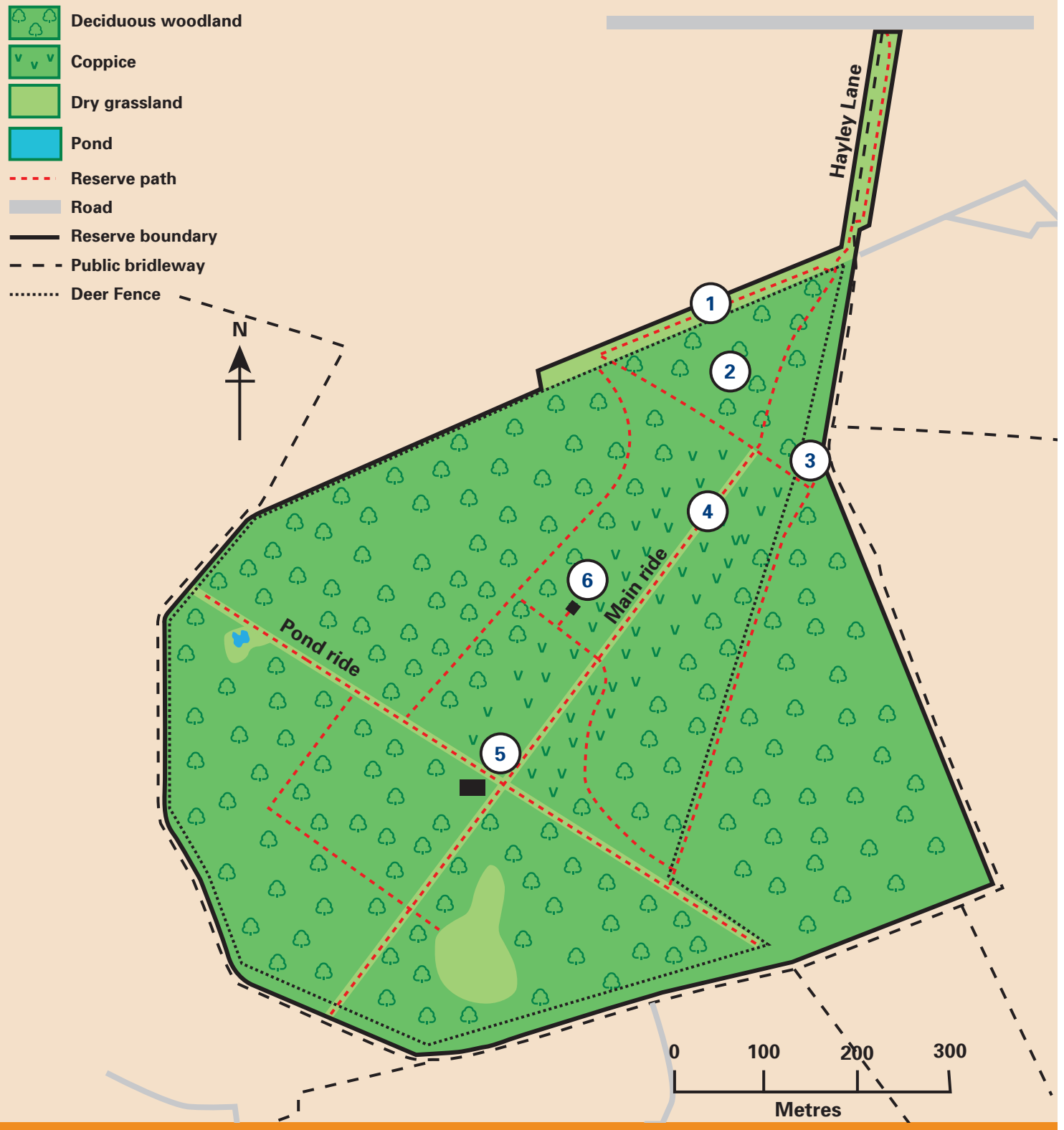
As in most woods Hayley has suffered from the 20th century increase in deer numbers. When the Trust purchased the reserve in 1962 fallow deer, originally introduced to Britain by the Normans, were already present. Since then numbers have increased and they have been joined by much smaller muntjac deer, an early 20th century introduction from China. Too many deer put extreme pressure on the wood by eating young tree saplings, coppice regrowth and wildflowers such as oxlips as well as removing valuable low cover for birds. Left unmanaged they would have a devastating effect on the reserve.

When coppicing first resumed in the wood, some ash trees were cut at shoulder height (a process known as pollarding) to prevent the regrowth from being eaten by fallow deer. These tall pollards can still be seen in some of the coppice plots.

Since 2002 most of the wood has been surrounded by a tall fence designed to exclude deer. Before this oxlip numbers had reduced from around 2 million plants to approximately a quarter of a million. Numbers are now increasing again and many plants have grown much larger. The large plastic pipes under the fence are designed to allow badgers to pass through but not muntjac.



Coppice cycle



Points of interest

1 Railway Line

When the railway was built Hayley Lane was such a busy thoroughfare that it warranted a full scale level crossing complete with cottage (now privately owned) which can still be seen today. Reclaimed by nature since 1969, around a fifth of the total number of plant species found in the reserve can be seen here. This strip of grassland is an excellent place to spot butterflies feeding on wildflowers.

2 The Triangle

Agricultural depression around the turn of the 20th century led to seven acres of arable land adjacent to Old Hayley Wood being abandoned. By the 1920s scrub had begun to invade and over time this has naturally developed into an area of woodland. Flowering plants are slowly spreading into it and it is a good place to spot bird's nest orchid. If you look closely you can see that the ground is undulating with uniform strips of high and low ground. This is known as ridge and furrow and is the result of ploughing during this area's agricultural past.

3 Ancient Oak

Dating back over 400 years, this oak is thought to be the oldest tree in the wood. Parts of the tree have begun to die providing valuable deadwood habitat for invertebrates. In the past it has been pollarded, a technique that involves periodically cutting the upper branches enabling them to shoot again and so prolonging the life of the tree.

4 Coppice plots

There are 14 one acre coppice plots running alongside the main ride. Each winter one plot is cut to allow more light and warmth to reach the woodland floor. We are slowly expanding coppicing along the other woodland rides. This is a good place to see oxlips and wood anemone, which take advantage of the higher levels of sunlight in more recently cut plots.

Wood anemone

Nuthatch

5 Roundabout

The point where the two main rides meet is known as the Roundabout. Historically this area was used as a turning point by horses when extracting timber. An information shelter is now located here where you can find out more about the reserve.

6 Tower Hide

This is a great opportunity to climb up into the canopy and see some of the bird species that like to stay up in the trees.