Hayley Wood is managed for nature conservation by the Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire. It is an ancient woodland of national importance as a boulder clay woodland. The reserve is located near the village of Hayley, a small area of woodland close to home. 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 has been managed by man over many centuries. It is documented back to the Domesday Book. The hedgerow on the left is 800 years old and the other boundaries of the wood have hardly changed in the past 500 years. The wood was 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 grasy 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 willowherbs.

Welcome to Hayley Wood

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:

The Wildlife Trust, The Manor House, Broad Street, Great Cambourne, CB23 6DH.
Telephone: 01954 713 500
Email: cambridgeshire@wildlifebcn.org

The Triangle developed from an abandoned field since the early 1900s. The hedgerow on the left is 800 years old and the other boundaries of the wood have hardly changed in the past 500 years. The wood was 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.

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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 ½ miles, up Hayley Lane to reach the reserve.
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.

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.

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.

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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.

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.