

Highfield & Hangingcroft Woods

Local Wildlife Site...

explore...

1 The mature woodland at the south western end is characterised by Beech and Cherry with an understorey of Holly. In spring, a wide variety of ancient woodland indicator plants such as Sweet Woodruff, Sanicle, Yellow Archangel and Bluebells can be found here in flower before the Beech leaves are fully open, blocking out the light.

Many of the large trees are pock-marked where birds such as Nuthatch, Treecreeper and Great Spotted Woodpecker have been searching for invertebrates to eat. There are also many Woodpecker holes in the trunks and larger branches - some are in use by Woodpeckers but others are used as roost sites for the golden-brown Noctule Bat. With a wingspan of up to 40cm it is one of Britain's largest bats.

2 Where trees fall, or are felled by man, glades open up. Sunlight pours in and woodland grasses, sedges and flowers flourish. Soon, shrubs such as Hazel, Hawthorn and Blackthorn take over - unless they are cut back. Highfield Wood has several small glades where specialist plants such as Coralroot Bitter-cress and Wood Barley can be found. These plants are found in many woodlands locally but are nationally rare, so it is important that we look after them. The glades are good places to spot insects like the Speckled Wood butterfly flying in the dappled light.

3 Follow the way-marked trail and climb the flight of steps to the top. Take a minute or two on the bench to catch your breath. Watch and listen for woodland wildlife - that rustling of leaves was it a Blackbird, a Fox or maybe even a Badger?

4 Walking along the top path through the mature Beech woodland you will soon come to the boundary bank between Highfield and Hangingcroft Woods. Its easiest to see in winter especially if a snowfall brings it to life!

5 Further archaeological evidence of the wood's history is indicated by a sawpit. These are approximately 3x2m oval depressions and show where the woodsmen of old would have worked, cutting the trees into planks ready for the local furniture industry. Meanwhile the famous Bodgers would have worked the Beech on polelathes turning them into chair legs by the thousand.

6 Not all wildlife is good though - there are many signs of browsing of woodland flowers, particularly Bluebells, by Muntjac deer. The worst natural enemy of the woods however are Grey Squirrels who damage, and even kill trees, by stripping off the bark of younger trees. There is plenty of evidence of this in the woods. On your way round the site, look for the tracks created by the animals which live here including Badgers, Foxes, Deer, Mice and Voles. If you are lucky you may come across a Slow-worm or Common Lizard basking in the summer sunshine in one of the glades.

7 The ride with Blackthorn and Willow growing along its margins, buzzes with insects in the long grass during the summer. Butterflies found here include Comma, Ringlet and Meadow Brown. Other invertebrates such as Lacewings and Hoverflies are hunted by Blue Tits, House Martins and Chiffchaffs by day. At night these insects are replaced by moths and midges which are in turn hunted by Pipistrelle bats.

8 Here maturing Ash with coppiced Hazel and Wych Elm, combine with a field layer of Ivy, Dog's Mercury and Garlic Mustard (Jack-by-the-Hedge) to create a different woodland structure. Keep an eye out for Robins and Great Tits foraging along the woodland edge for invertebrates.



Great Spotted Woodpecker



Mature Beech



Coralroot Bitter-cress