

## Isle of Wight Woodland and Management



Many of the Isle of Wight's woods are small and isolated, but in total cover about 10% of the Island's total area.

They can be divided into four categories:

1. Ancient semi-natural woodland
2. Ancient replanted woodland (including conifer plantations and non site-native broadleaves)
3. Recent semi-natural woodland
4. Recent plantation woodland

Some 43% of the Isle of Wight's woodland is considered to be ancient woodland and therefore is important in terms of biodiversity. Ancient woodlands are woodlands which have been in existence since at least 1600 AD (and therefore likely to have been present for many centuries previous) before plantation forestry became popular.

Bridlesford Copse is a particular important site on the Isle of Wight, along with the northern part of Parkhurst Forest which contains several good examples of former wood pastures, which is a priority UK BAP habitat.

The distribution of woodland is uneven and is clearly related to soils and the underlying geology of the Isle of Wight. The majority of ancient woodland is situated in the north of the Island on the clays. They mostly comprise of Oak (predominantly Pedunculate Oak but Sessile Oak is also found on the more acidic soils), Ash and Hazel. There is very little ancient woodland on the chalk, but where there is, Ash and Maple dominate. To the south of the Island, on the lighter Lower Greensand, Pedunculate Oak, Birch and Hazel woodland predominates. Alder also occurs on the wettest sites.

### Woodland Management

Up until the early part of this century, broadleaved woodlands in this country were an important economic resource for timber and fuel. They were managed by rural communities on a sustainable basis, and provided a rich wildlife habitat. The following account briefly describes the common forms of woodland management practice adopted in this country, which are being slowly re-introduced on nature reserves and small estates.

#### Coppice

All broadleaf/deciduous trees will coppice. Conifers will not. Coppice is usually operated in rotation, where one section of the wood is cut annually, taking between 5 and 60 years to cut the whole wood and commence re-cutting the first section. Species traditionally coppiced include Hazel and Ash; the crop being used for sheep fences (Hazel hurdles), poles and firewood.

#### Pasture Woodland

Trees grown in pasture woodland were thinned and 'pollarded', i.e. branches cut above the browsing height of grazing animals such as pigs and cattle. Pollarding allows more light to penetrate the canopy and encourages grass growth on the forest floor for the animals. The timber extracted was used for fuel and poles.

#### Conifer Plantation

These trees grow rapidly and produce a timber crop in a much shorter time than deciduous trees. There is a dense growth of trees and they are in leaf throughout the year.

### Reference:

Peterken, G.F. (1981). Woodland Conservation & Management. Chapman & Hall, London. ISBN 0-412-27450-7