

Mill Copse



Mill Copse is a woodland that shows the difference between traditional Hazel coppice and conifer plantations.

History

The site of Mill Copse, now 5.7 hectares (14 acres) in extent, has been a woodland for at least 400 years and as such is classified as an ancient woodland. Originally known as Barnfield Copse, it was once a woodland of

Oak and coppiced Hazel, with other species such as Wild Cherry, Field Maple and Spindle.

The older coppice management valued the cyclical cutting of Hazel stools and the regular removal of standard trees. In the 1960s the drive to increase the nation's timber production led to many Forestry Commission woodlands being felled and replanted with conifers. Mill Copse was almost clear felled and a mixture of mainly conifer and a few broadleaved trees such as Beech and American Oak were planted. Conifer cultivation is the woodland equivalent of intensive agriculture and by the end of the 1980s had formed a dense canopy. Little of the original wildlife of the wood survived under these conditions and the future looked bleak for the few remaining inhabitants.

A Rescue Plan

Mill Copse was one of the first purchases by Wight Nature Fund and has been used as an example of what may be achieved in other Island woodland. Some large broadleaved standard trees had escaped the felling and may be seen today. One of the first jobs was to clear the conifers from the north eastern side of the copse. 163 volunteers including schoolchildren planted over 300 Hazel trees in the winter of 1993 to help the area recover. These planted trees, in addition to the natural regeneration of the copse from suckers and seeds which have fallen to the ground, resulted in the rapid recovery of wildlife which you are able to see today.

What are the benefits?

Endangered species such as Red Squirrels and Dormice need the right woodland habitat in which to feed and thrive. There is far more birdlife now: Chiffchaff, Blackcap and Lesser Whitethroat are all present in the spring and therefore the wildlife value of the wood has increased. A Song Thrush may now be heard on your spring walk and you may see Kestrels and Buzzards. The link with the wildlife of the Western Yar is now more pronounced and the area as a whole has shown signs of recovery.

If you follow the perimeter walk you will see that native plants have colonised territory formerly lost to conifers. Bluebells, Town Hall Clock, Wood Anemone and Woodland Orchids need the traditional coppice management in order to propagate. Some dead wood will be seen on your walk to encourage fungi and invertebrates. Standing dead trees have a particular value for wildlife.



Management for the future

A walk on the perimeter path highlights the special location and importance of Mill Copse in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty but which is bounded on two sides by intensive agriculture. Further conifer clearance will take place but the appeal of the Coastal Redwood trees is such that these will be left for the next generation as indeed will some of the Monterey Cypress trees which are an important all year food source for the Red Squirrels.