

**HANDOUT FOR VISIT TO SHENLEY WOOD**  
**Tuesday 29<sup>th</sup> June 2021**  
**led by Mike LeRoy**

**Risks and taking care of your safety:**

A few main paths in Shenley Wood are hard-surfaced, but most are woodchip or turf paths with muddy sections, some of which are slippery.

- Please keep social distance from people we pass and those in our group.
  - Care is needed on wet, slippery and steeper sections of path.
  - Look out for hidden ditches and uneven surfaces.
  - If you leave the paths, watch out for trip hazards: stumps, branches, felled trees left to rot down as deadwood.
  - There are the usual risks of injury from thorns and brambles.
- We have a first aid kit as well as a mobile phone for emergencies.

If you see or hear any significant species why not submit them as Sightings for the MKNHS website, preferably with a photo: [sightings@mknhs.org.uk](mailto:sightings@mknhs.org.uk). You could then submit them to BMERC to be held as records: <https://www.bucksmkerc.org.uk>

***Shenley Wood***

The current woodland is 60 acres (24 hectares), but in 1771 it was 79 acres and in 1693 was 105 acres. For comparison: Howe Park Wood is 60 acres, Linford Wood is 100 acres, and Little Linford Wood is 105 acres. Shenley Wood is a designated county 'Local Wildlife Site' and is owned and managed by The Parks Trust.

***The story of Shenley Wood***

The Domesday Book of 1086 describes the wider Shenley area as "well wooded". Shenley Wood dates from well before 1599, when it appeared on the Salden estate map as 'Shenley Park'. As it dates from before 1600 it is 'Ancient Woodland'. Large coppice stools remaining in the woodland provide evidence of long-term coppicing. It is likely that it was managed for centuries before and after 1600 to supply local underwood and timber by a cycle of 'coppicing with standards'. This suggests that, in common with most such woodlands from mediaeval times, it supplied to the manors and ordinary people in the local area: underwood & brashings as faggots for heating and cooking, coppice products for fencing, tools, wattle and laths for homes, as well as timber for carts and buildings. Probably, like many woods of this kind, during the 19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup> century its large timbers were sold and not replaced. It then fell into neglect. In 1958, the farmer of Dovecote Farm, Shenley Church End (who then owned the wood) decided to replant the wood with conifers under a Forestry Commission scheme. Fortunately, most of these new trees failed. In 1985 the Milton Keynes Development Corporation bought the wood and developed a plan to restore it and remove the remaining conifers. It was transferred to The Parks Trust in 1992 who continue the work to restore it by re-establishing a structure of canopy, understorey and shrub layer, enabling the ancient woodland ground flora to flourish. The outcome is continuity for the wood's birds, bats, invertebrates, fungi and bryophytes. In all, Shenley Wood has: 160 flowering plant species, 18 species of butterfly, 225 of moths, more than 170 of beetles, around 25 breeding bird species, plus bat roosts, ponds used by newts and dragonflies, and there are grasshoppers and bush-crickets by the lakes.

### **Ancient Woodland flora**

Shenley Wood has an array of Ancient Woodland Indicator (AWI) species such as Bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*, Wood Anemone *Anemone nemorosa*, Dog's Mercury *Mercurialis perennis*, Yellow Archangel *Lamiastrum galeobdolon*, Hairy St John's-wort *Hypericum hirsutum*, Broad-leaved Helleborine *Epipactis helleborine*, Early-purple Orchid *Orchis mascula*, Greater Butterfly Orchid *Platanthera chlorantha*, Hairy-brome *Bromopsis ramosa*, Wood-sedge *Carex sylvatica* and Remote Sedge *Carex remota*. But the wood has no Herb Paris *Paris quadrifolia* or Sanicle *Sanicula europaea*, both of which are present in Linford Wood and Howe Park Wood. It is characteristic of what is known as 'W8: Ash–Field Maple–Dog's Mercury Woodland' (National Vegetation Classification, NVC). These are wet woodlands on clay.

### **Other plant species**

Other ground flora in flower in spring include: Primrose *Primula vulgaris*, Common Dog-violet *Viola riviniana* and Early Dog-violet *Viola reichenbachiana*, Lesser Celandine *Ranunculus ficaria* and Greater Stitchwort *Stellaria holostea*. There are also: Hairy Wood-rush *Luzula pilosa*, Wood Small-reed *Calamagrostis epigejos* and four species of **Fern**: Lady-fern *Athyrium filix-femina*, Broad Buckler-fern *Dryopteris dilatata*, Scaly male-fern *Dryopteris affinis* ssp. *borreri*, and Male-fern *Dryopteris filix-mas*. Other plant species present in small numbers are: (AWI) Pignut *Conopodium majus*, Common Figwort *Scrophularia nodosa* and Betony *Stachys officinalis*.

### **Tree canopy**

In 1980 there were an estimated 3,900 trees and shrubs in Shenley Wood with over 3,200 of these as canopy trees and over 700 as underwood and shrubs. The dominant canopy species now are: Ash *Fraxinus excelsior* and Pedunculate Oak *Quercus robur* with Field Maple *Acer campestre* below them. Aspen *Populus tremula* and Goat Willow (Sallow) *Salix caprea* are predominantly in the wetter south and easterly compartments. There are smaller numbers of Crab-apple *Malus sylvestris*, Wild Cherry *Prunus avium* and Downy Birch *Betula pubescens*. There are a few Grey Willow *Salix cinerea* and English Elm *Ulmus procera*.

### **Shrub layer**

The shrub layer has plenty of Hazel *Corylus avellana* and Blackthorn *Prunus spinosa*. There is also Midland Hawthorn *Crataegus laevigata*, Elder *Sambucus nigra*, Spindle *Euonymus europaeus*, Holly *Ilex aquifolium*, Dogwood *Cornus sanguinea*, Wild Privet *Ligustrum vulgare*, Guelder-rose *Viburnum opulus*, Wayfaring Tree *Viburnum lantana*, Dog Rose *Rosa canina* and Field Rose *Rosa arvensis*.

### **Rides and glades**

Along the paths and rides you will find quite a few ruderal species (ones that colonize disturbed land and tend to dominate) such as: thistles, Nettle *Urtica dioica*, Rosebay willowherb *Chamerion angustifolium*, docks *Rumex* spp and rushes *Juncus* spp. In places these are flanked by scrub species such as bramble *Rubus fruticosus* spp., with Hogweed *Heracleum sphondylium*, Cow parsley *Anthriscus sylvestris*, Meadowsweet *Filependula ulmaria* and Pendulous sedge *Carex pendula*.

More sparse flora can be found, such as: Tormentil *Potentilla erecta*, Betony *Stachys officinalis*, Pignut *Conopodium majus*, Angelica *Angelica sylvestris*, Three-veined

Sandwort *Moehringia trinervia*, Common Valerian *Valeriana officinalis* and Ragged-robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi*.

### **Ecological surveys**

There have been more than ten professional ecological surveys of Shenley Wood commissioned by MK Development Corporation and The Parks Trust over the past 45 years, some also covering Howe Park and Linford woods. Others have included Shenley Wood in wider surveys.

The first botanical survey was by ecologist Penny Anderson in 1980 followed by Bioscan's in 1998, then in 1994 Dr Jo Francis carried out an NVC survey. The most recent vegetation survey was in 2019. Each of these has proved valuable in evaluating and shaping the restoration of the wood.

One of the most recent surveys was of beetles in three of the woods: Howe Park, Shenley and Kingsmead Spinney. The coleopterist found 170 beetle species in Shenley Wood of which 14 are Nationally Scarce. Shenley had fewer deadwood (saproxylic) species as it has much less deadwood, but more wetland species several of which are scarce.

Other surveys have covered: birds, moths, butterflies, bats and fungi.

### **Woodland structure and management**

At its high point Shenley Wood is 92 metres above sea level. It slopes downwards, broadly northwards to V3 Fulmer Street. But it also slopes to west and east, so its shape is approximately like an upturned broad-beamed boat sloping down a beach. It is a wet wood with five main streams or ditches carrying water down the hillside.

The wood is managed and surveyed in 12 compartments. Its current thinning and coppicing cycle is 15 years. Generally, the replacement of trees is by natural regeneration.

To the east side a SUDS drainage system provides a series of four 'mini-teardrop' lakes stepping down the hillside with useful surrounding grassland and scrub habitat.

At the lowest part of the wood, its northern end, the Swan's Way long-distance bridleway passes through on its 65-mile way between Goring-on-Thames and Salcey Forest, via Stanton Low.

