

2010 International Year of Biodiversity November 2010



A celebration of life on earth and of the value of biodiversity in our area, this month we take a look at trees in our area ...

Trees



Beech Wood, Nr Kings Worthy

The area covered by Kings Worthy is on the edge of the South Downs, and has a typical soil profile of the downland environment with a shallow alkaline soil over chalk that varies in depth from the top of the hills, where it may only be a few centre metres, to the valleys where the soil may be relatively deep due to local erosion from the hills.

This has always influenced the tree population of the area. Before Kings Worthy became a village tree diversity would have been very limited with Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) forming most of the tree cover over the hilly area, and Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) and Yew (*Taxus baccata*) forming the understory. In the valley area there would be mainly Alder (*Alnus glutinosa*) and Willow (*Salix species*), especially if these areas remained wet for long periods.

It is still possible to see the remnants of this ancient forest in that we still have some very fine specimens of Beech on the hills. Ash trees are by far the commonest tree in the village, growing wild in many areas; and plenty of Yew.

Willow and Alder are less common being that most of the wet area would have been drained, but are still be seen along the river or by the watercress beds.

We also would have had a rich shrub layer that would have formed under the Ash and in gaps in the canopy due to fallen Beech. This would have been made up of Hawthorn, (*Crataegus monogyna*), Blackthorn, (*Prunus spinosa*) and Elderberry (*Sambucus nigra*), as well as Bramble (*Rubus spp*) and Ivy (*Hedera helix*).

Today, the trees of Kings Worthy are far more diverse with many trees from all over the world; some fifty species have been recorded within the village

boundary. This is made up of relatively-large specimens that are visible from public roads and footpaths. Some are very common, like Horse Chestnut (*Aesculus hippocastanum*) and many species of Flowering Cherry (*Prunus species*), and with at least ten species of conifers.

How to identify some of the native trees found in the village:

Beech – the largest tree found in Kings Worthy, trunk is a smooth silvery-grey with a network of small ridges, the small shoots are dull purplish-brown with a slight zigzag, and the buds are long and slender. The fruit is a triangular nut.

Ash – commonly found in the village, the bark of young trees is smooth pale grey but with age it becomes interwoven with ridges, young shoots are flattened at the buds which are black. Leaves have several pairs of leaflets. The fruit, called ash keys, remain on tree long after the foliage has fallen.

Alder – found mainly down by the river, the bark is a purplish-brown on young trees, becoming dark and cracked with age. Leaves are ovate with a wavy edge. This tree produces catkins in spring, and the fruit is a small woody cone.



Ancient Yew, Kings Worthy

Yew – this is the only common native evergreen tree found in the village. This medium sized tree is very long lived. The leaves are short dark green, and the fruit is a small red berry containing one seed.

Hawthorn – by far the commonest hedgerow shrub in the village, producing masses of white flowers in the late-April/May, followed by the classic red berries in September/October.

Blackthorn or Sloe – the common names give a clear indication of what the shrub is like, having black bark which produces small white flowers early in spring, followed by purple-black plum fruits. It is widespread along the old railway track.

Elderberry – a common shrub, producing masses of small white flowers in June, which are followed by small blackish purple fruits in autumn. **Wilf Simcox**

Please help WCV create a nature picture of our local parishes by recording your trees sightings at www.worthysconservationvolunteers.org.uk/naturewatch