

Countryside Code

- Do not leave any litter
- Do not climb or damage trees
- Do not pick any flowers.
- Please keep dogs on leads
- Many plants and animals live along the nature trail; try and make as little noise as possible and try and not disturb

Explore the natural environment

The nature trail at Aldenham Country Park provides the ideal pathway to explore the wildlife and the natural woodland and lakeside environment. Pupils can learn about the local biodiversity, the importance of trees for habitats and nutrient cycling and wildlife conservation.

The nature trail is about 600 metres long and includes a lakeside walk through our woodland containing over 20 species of trees. The lakeside area provides habitats to over 45 species of water birds and numerous small mammals and insects.

You can explore this wildlife haven by following the signs by the play area, and the posts marked 1-7 along the nature trail path. In order to protect our nature trails and wildlife we ask that you please follow our countryside code.



Learning about Wildlife

Post 1: Looking back along the path you can see the four magnificent oak trees *Quercus robur* that the field is named after (four oak field). These trees form part of an ancient hedgerow that has been growing for hundreds of years. Oak trees are vital for conservation because they provide habitats for over 300 different species of insect and mammal! These trees have grown so tall and spreading because they are out in the open and have no competition for light from other trees.



Post 2: On entry to the woodland, the trees become dense and the canopy blocks out a large proportion of the light. The shrubbery on the woodland floor competes for the light and can struggle to grow. One plant that does flourish in these dark conditions is the bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*, it has developed the ability to flower early in the spring before the leaves on the tree appear.

To your right you may see a half-made fence which is known as a 'dead hedge'. This is an ancient barrier made of fallen dead branches to protect the quiet nature woodland beyond. It also prevents people from cutting corners and disrupting the wildlife there.

Post 3: This area has many young trees in it, mainly oak, ash, poplar and willow. Woodland trees are taller and straighter than the oak trees at post 1. This is because they are competing against each other for light as if they were in a race. Trees growing on their own with light and space will grow tall and reach out further. Within woodlands, fast growing and tall species will have an advantage.

Post 4: The reservoir at Aldenham was finished in 1797 and was dug by French Napoleonic prisoners of war in order to maintain the water levels in local rivers after the Grand Junction Canal was built. Today it provides an excellent habitat for bird life; amongst the many species that can be seen are mute swans *Cygnus olor*, grey heron *Ardea cinerea* and great crested grebe *Podiceps cristatus*.

Post 5: Try and spot the twin oak trees on the left hand side of the path. These trees appear to be growing from the same stump but are really two entirely separate trees whose roots have fused together over the course of about 150 years. This is an older area of the woodland. You can tell by the large oak trees which have developed full spreading crowns blocking out most of the light onto the woodland floor and preventing anything other than small scrub plants such as bramble growing.

Post 6: This massive fallen oak is about 300 years old and was likely killed by a fungal disease which damaged and weakened the roots causing the tree to blow over in the wind. This dead tree still provides food and habitat for a variety of insects, fungi, and animals. The carvings you see were completed by a local artist Dan Cordell using a chainsaw and the images tell a story of the park.

Post 7: Woodland trails like this one provide a specialised habitat for certain birds and insects; one type of butterfly that only lives in woodland is the speckled wood *Pararge aegeria*. Try and spot the holes high up in the tree trunks which are made by our woodpeckers. These holes are used as nest sites for the birds. Our most common varieties of woodpecker are the great spotted and green woodpecker.

Wildlife Spotting

Ecosystems

An ecosystem represents all the living and non-living things within a particular area. An ecosystem can be as small as a leaf or as large as the whole of Aldenham Country Park. The nature trail can be described as a broad leaved woodland and wetland ecosystem.

Insects

Woodland trails provide a specialised habitat for certain insects; one type of butterfly that only lives in woodland is the speckled wood *Parage aegeria*. Look out also for the emperor dragonfly *Anax imperator* as it flies up and down the trail on the hunt for smaller prey. This insect is unmistakable as it is the largest and most colourful of our dragonflies. During the late spring period you may see the bees emerging from our hives on the farm. These honey bees are vital for pollination of many species of flowers and crops and honey production.



Fungi

Look out for various forms of fungi particularly on trees and in shade...Autumn is a great time to see some spectacular shapes like the Chicken of the Woods pictured right. Fungi thrives on dead trees, as well as living ones. As part of our nature programme we preserve all dead and fallen trees to maintain the delicate ecosystem.



Woodland Birds

Our policy of leaving dead wood to rot naturally creates a haven for woodpeckers. The two varieties mostly seen are the great spotted and green. Some of the trees along the nature trail holes in them which have been made by woodpeckers. See if you can spot any; you will have to look high up the trunks of trees. The holes are excavated by the birds as nest sites. You may also spot our local pair of bright green parakeets; these are thought to have escaped from London Zoo!

Bird of Prey

On our farm we have a beautiful breeding pair of white barn owls. These birds have incredibly good hearing which they need to hunt for mice, voles and shrews. You may also see Red Kites flying above our park; these birds are often mobbed by crows to deter them from their nesting sites.



Trees

Trees are vital for habitats, shade, food, soil structure and the circulation of water, nutrients and air.

Tree Spot: Look out for the horse chestnut tree *Aesculus hippocastanum*, it gets its name from the horseshoe shaped scars that are visible at the base of the twigs and branches. In winter it forms large sticky buds and its palmate leaves open around March. In May the tree will bloom and produces candle like flowers. After the flower has been pollinated it develops into a fruit with a shiny green casing covered in spikes which will usually contain two seeds called conkers!



Mammals

Along the nature trail, if you are really quiet, you may spot some of our wild rabbits and squirrels. At night we also have resident bats. Bats use echolocation to find their food and this method also allows them to detect objects and direct themselves at night.

Nature trail activities for schools

Pre-school and primary

Look out for signs that indicate the season.

Spring – trees will begin to form buds

Summer – flowers are blooming and the woodland is lush. The biodiversity of insects are high in this season, how many insects can you spot? Think about how they live; are they predators or carnivores? Are they fast or slow?

Autumn – The leaves begin to change colour, losing their green and turning to red, oranges and browns. Towards the end of autumn the deciduous trees will begin to lose their leaves. Try and spot the coniferous trees that keep their leaves all year round. What feature can you spot on the leaves of these coniferous trees? Why do you think they have those features?

Winter- All the leaves of the deciduous trees are fallen, the forest will be looking sparse and bare. Much of the wildlife will be hibernating within tree holes and buried leaf piles. The Yew tree and Holly trees may still have their leaves and spines upon them. You may see some winter birds such as robins and Canadian geese around the lake.

Get to Know a Tree

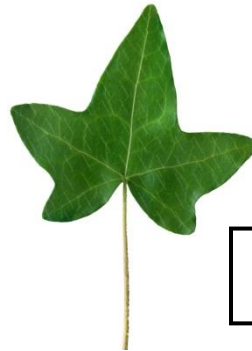
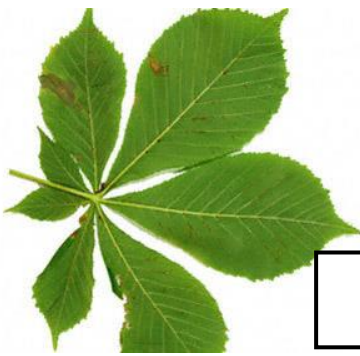
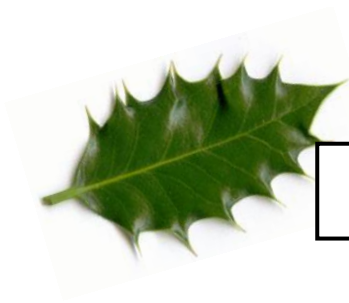
Trees and green plants need light, water and nutrients to survive. If you look carefully at the different leaves, structure and bark of the trees, you will notice they all have different shapes and textures. Try and find as many different leaves/ buds/ bark as you can and see if it matches any of the tree species below (in order of their pictures on the next page).

- Ash
- Holly (evergreen)
- Horse Chestnut
- Yew (coniferous)
- Sycamore
- Poplar
- Willow
- Oak
- Ivy
- Silver Birch

Each group may try and find the trees above as they walk along the nature trail. Each group may also be assigned a tree, and get to know it. Measure its width, is it straight up or big and branched out? What colour is its bark? What wildlife may it provide a habitat for and what food may it provide for different creatures?

Tree Identification

You may tick off the leaf which you find. Who can find the most?



Word Search

H	I	P	Y	E	W	B	A	J	N	C	M	T	U	C
K	O	W	C	I	H	G	L	L	W	I	L	L	O	W
V	E	R	Q	T	Z	E	D	U	F	Y	C	A	E	Q
A	H	I	S	I	L	V	E	R	B	I	R	C	H	X
P	O	C	B	E	P	P	R	V	A	X	C	I	T	E
O	E	H	U	T	C	Z	C	T	E	E	B	K	N	E
P	D	E	N	W	E	H	S	T	Y	K	V	I	M	N
L	B	H	O	R	N	B	E	A	M	J	P	T	B	G
A	H	A	G	P	V	G	J	S	E	S	R	F	A	L
R	K	W	O	B	R	F	C	O	T	C	Z	E	K	I
C	T	T	D	I	C	S	J	O	X	N	P	O	U	S
E	S	H	S	F	P	B	C	R	P	S	U	X	N	H
Y	H	O	L	L	Y	S	C	P	H	L	M	T	I	O
B	Y	R	T	H	G	I	E	R	E	B	M	U	N	A
K	T	N	B	K	L	Y	A	S	H	F	U	T	O	K

Find the following trees found around the park:

1. Birch
2. Poplar
3. Yew
4. Silver Birch
5. Ash
6. English oak
7. Hawthorn
8. Scots pine
9. Holly
10. Willow
11. Alder
12. Hornbeam
13. Horse chestnut

Conserve nature at Aldenham Country Park: Get Involved!

If you have a keen interest in protecting wildlife and want to help to preserve nature then why not volunteer at Aldenham Country Park or set up a regular 'Nature group'? For more information on the topic please contact us on the details below or ask at the main office.

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Find us on the web: www.aldenhamcountrypark.co.uk