

An Update on Iconic Tree Policy, Protection and Education



The national charity working together to...

**Fund, plant and care for
trees and hedgerows**

**WITH TREE WARDENS &
THE COMMUNITY**

COMMUNITY ACTION

**Inspire the next generation
of young
environmentalists**

**WITH EDUCATION
PARTNERS & YOUNG TREE
CHAMPIONS**

YOUNG LEARNING

**Use science to influence
policy and support best
practice on trees and the
environment**

**WITH GOVERNMENT &
ACADEMICS**

**PRACTICAL SCIENCE &
RESEARCH**

Influence tree-related policy

**WITH CHARITY PARTNERS
& TREE COUNCIL
MEMBERS**

PARTNERSHIP POWER

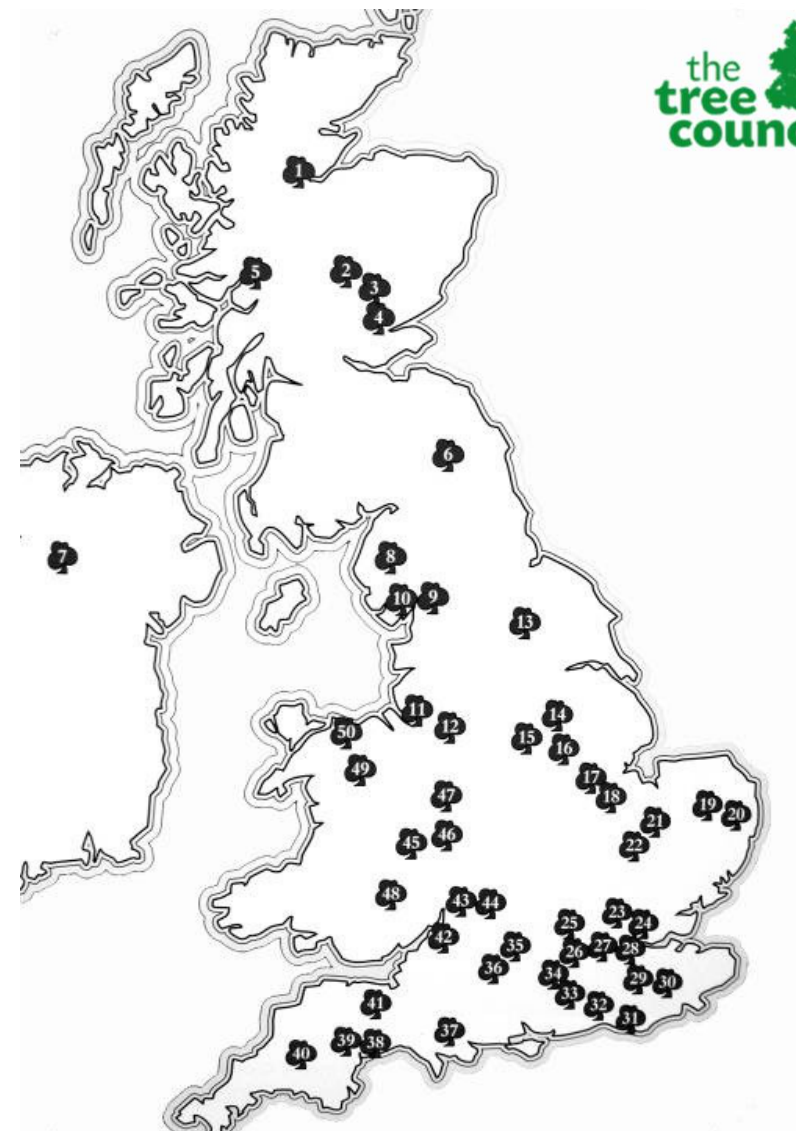
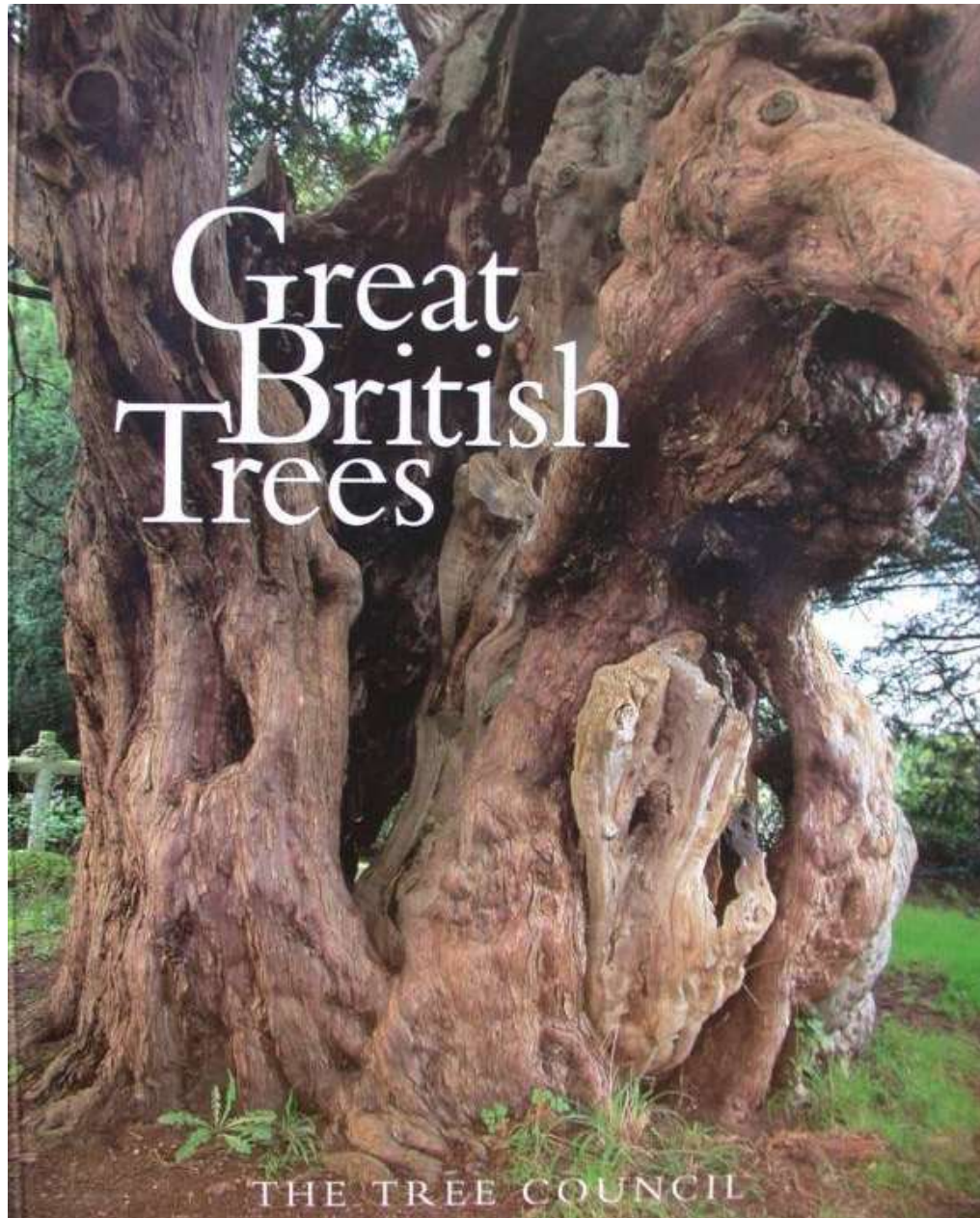


Llangernyw
Yew

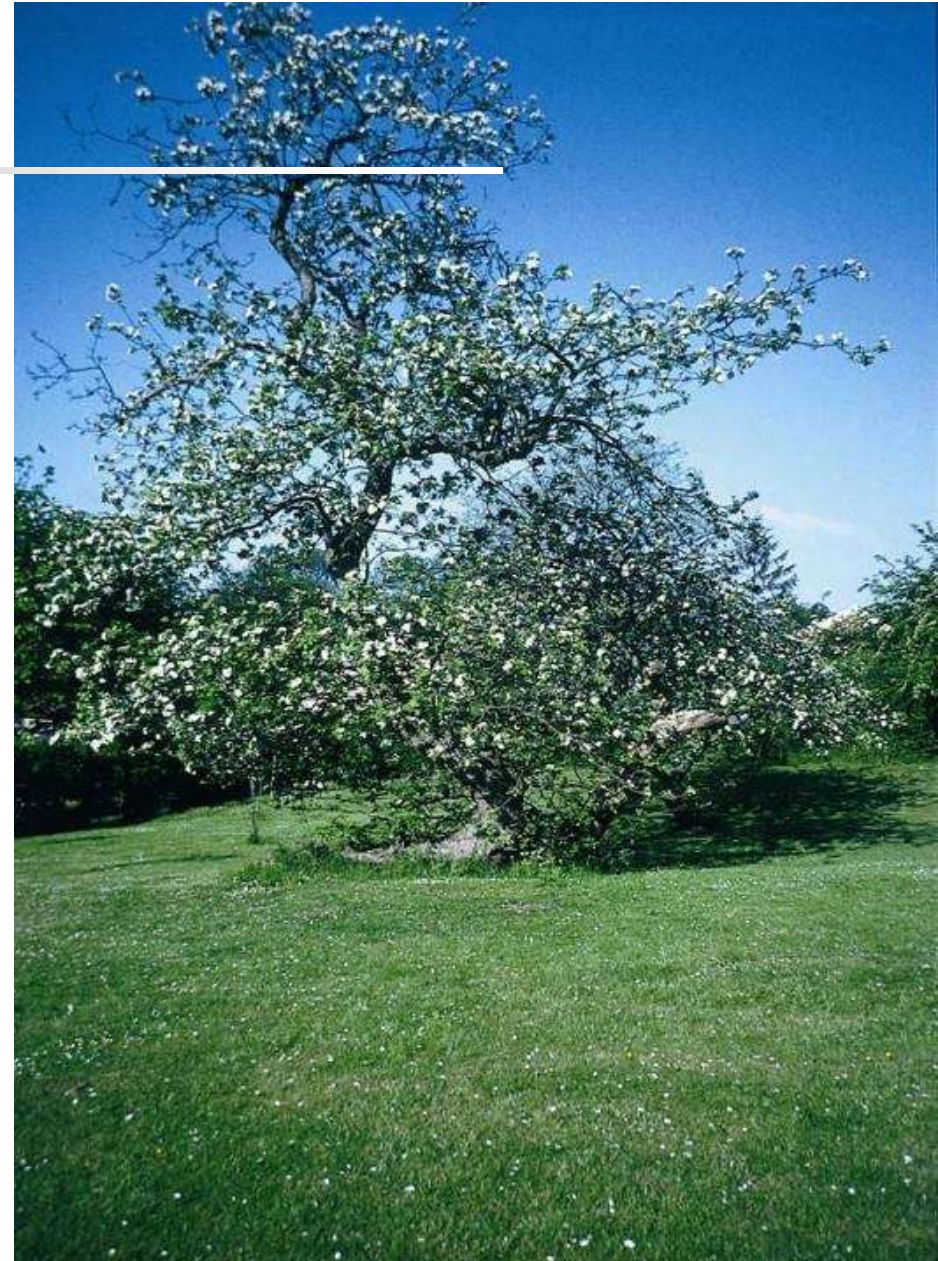
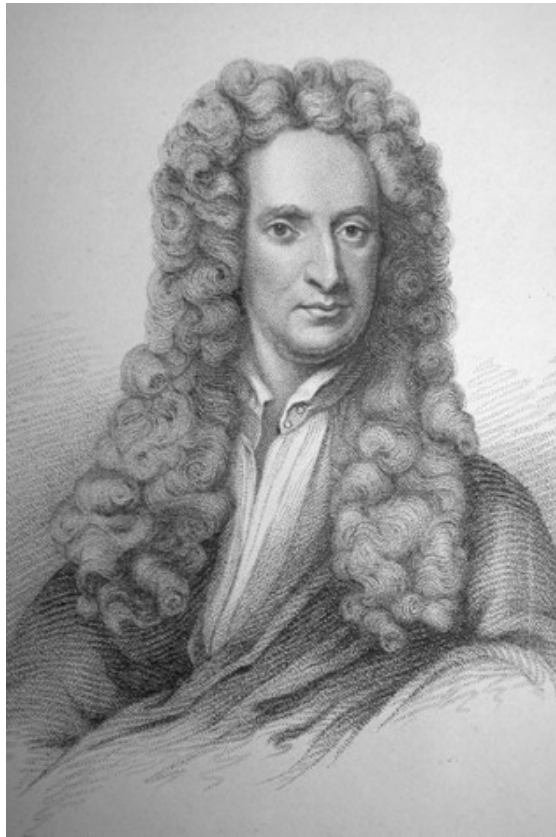


Heritage Trees!





Newton's Apple



Fortingall Yew









BIRKHALL

14th January, 2003

Dear Mr. Buchanan Mack,

I am so very grateful to you for your kind letter of 17th December and for sending me a copy of the limited edition of "Great British Trees." It is wonderful that The Tree Council has helped to draw attention to the vital importance of these unique trees. As you say, they are as important to our heritage as the great stately homes and castles. That is why, it seems to me, it is equally important to maintain for the future the provenance of these trees, so that their progeny can flourish and ensure the unique strain continues.

Yours most sincerely
Manny



East Devon Great Tree Hunt



The Great Trees of East Devon project draws support and funding from the following organisations:



sponsoring on-line nominations for the Great Tree Hunt



providing advice, images and grants to discover new Green Monuments for Britain



donating a high quality prize for the photo competition

What our Project Funding Partners say:

"The Great Tree Hunt will:



"...improve the quality of our environment and provide enjoyment for residents and visitors."



"...protecting East Devon's stunning landscape."

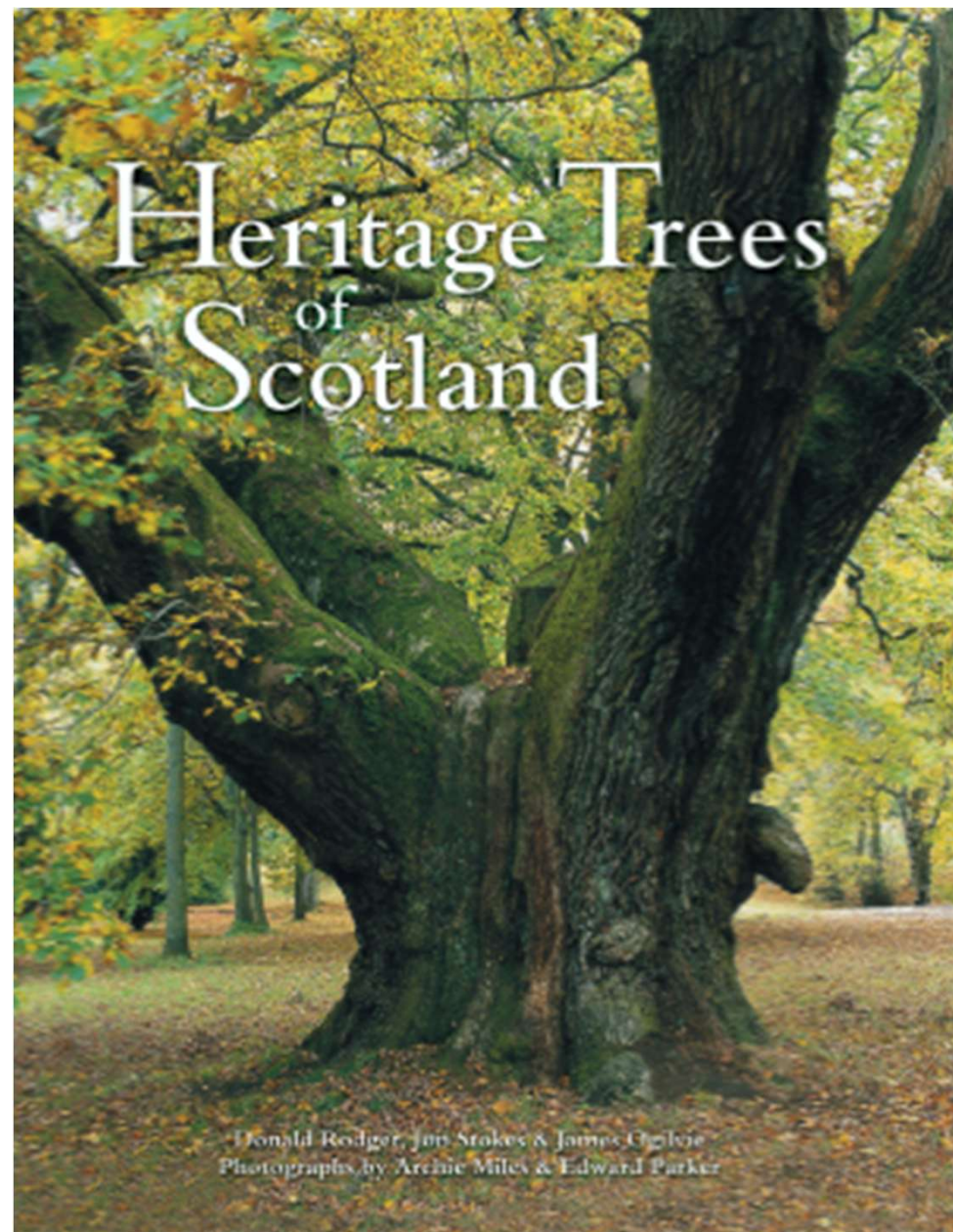
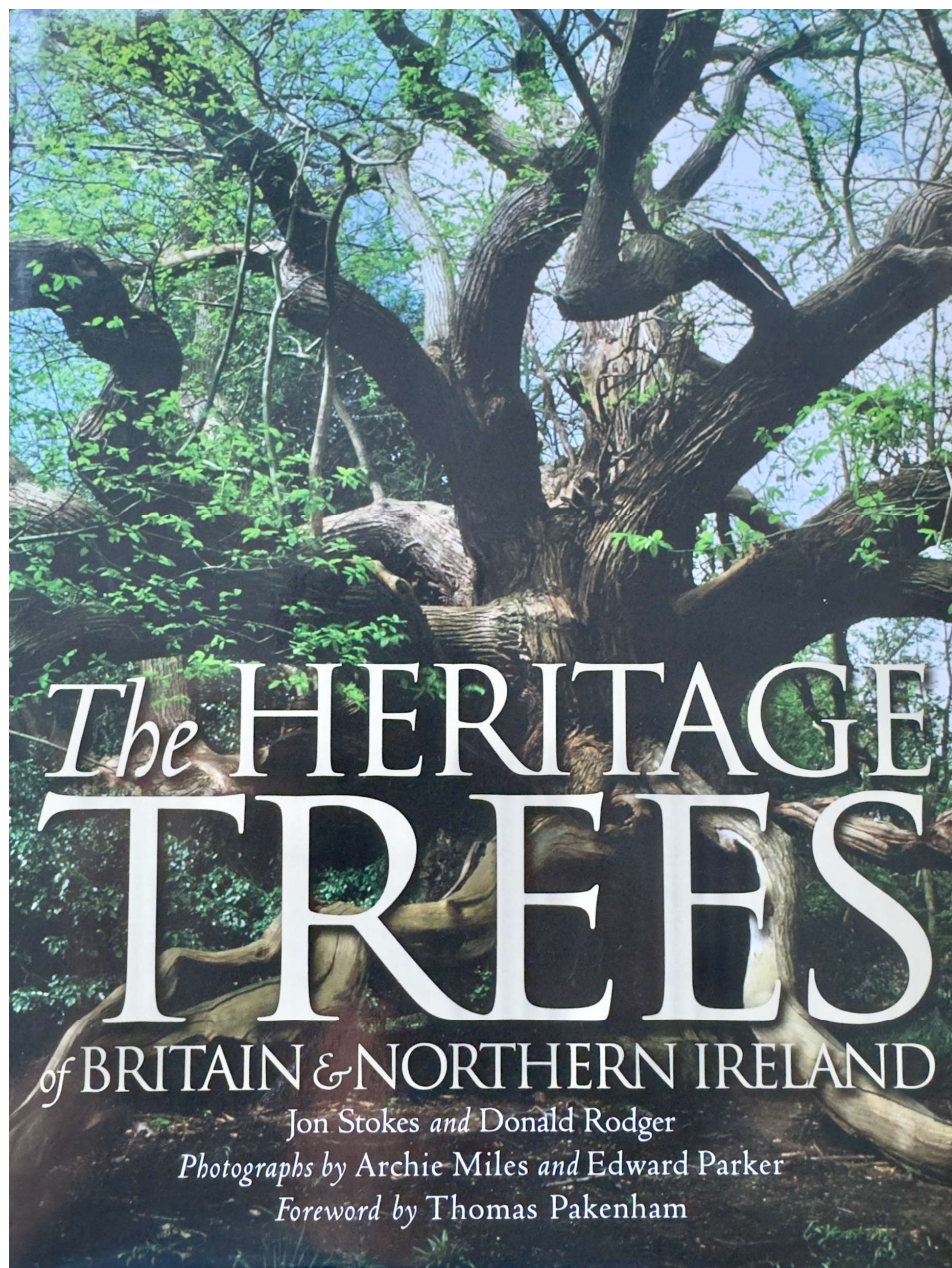


"...find out more about East Devon's biodiversity."



Supported by the
Heritage Lottery Fund

The Heritage lottery fund is providing half project costs to support wildlife and local communities























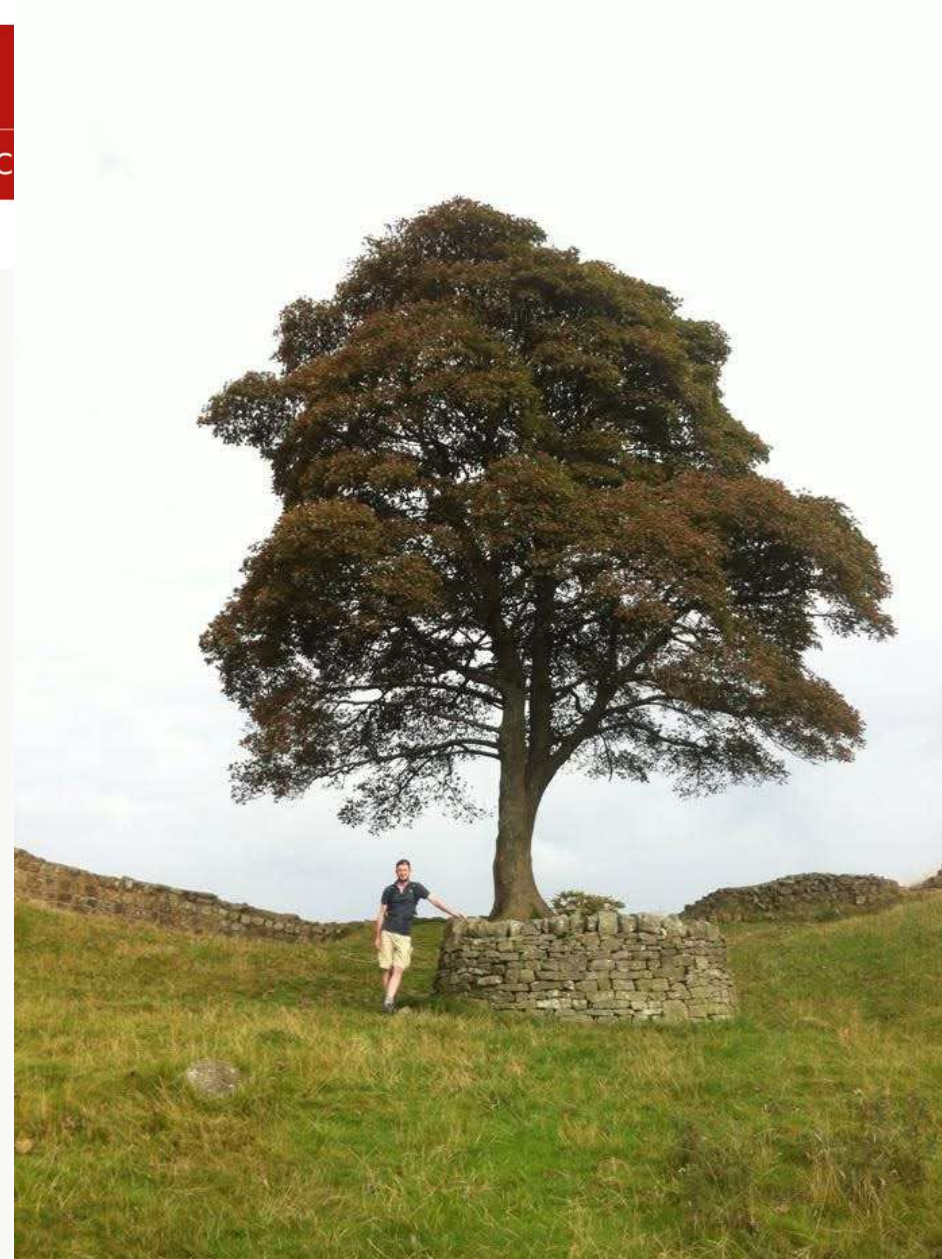


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Sycamore Gap tree: The story so far



Despite their
unique value,
important trees
are being lost

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Judge says lime trees should not have been felled



There has been a long-running campaign to save the trees in Wellington.

EUROPE

L
BI

The New York Times

Beloved Tree in England Is Felled in 'Act of Vandalism'

Local people and tourists mourned the loss of one of Britain's most photographed trees, which stood for hundreds of years in a dip in Hadrian's Wall. The police said they made a second arrest on Friday.

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Environment

Another day, another ancient tree felled: 300-year-old Hunningham Oak near Leamington is knocked down to make way for HS2

By Philip Hibble

Published 25th Sep 2020, 16:16 BST | Updated 28th Sep 2020, 14:55 BST



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Peterborough: Final parts of 600-year-old Bretton oak tree felled

30 June 2022





Research Objectives

- Review existing legal protections and financial support for ‘important trees’.
- Consult key experts and stakeholders to explore the effectiveness of protections, gaps and opportunities for change.
- Develop recommendations for future policy development on protecting trees of high social, cultural and environmental value.



Stakeholders involved

- ~50 organisations have been involved with the research, in workshops and other engagement.
- The summary of workshop participants is shown right, other engagement documented in report.
- The research focussed on engaging with experts and stakeholders with an active interest or experience in this topic.
- We were delighted with the level of engagement and willingness of stakeholders to share ideas and contribute their expertise.

Stakeholder type	Workshop 1	Workshop 2
Local authority	8	7
Landowner or manager	2	4
Independent expert	3	6
Government agency	7	10
NGO	14	11
Total	34	38

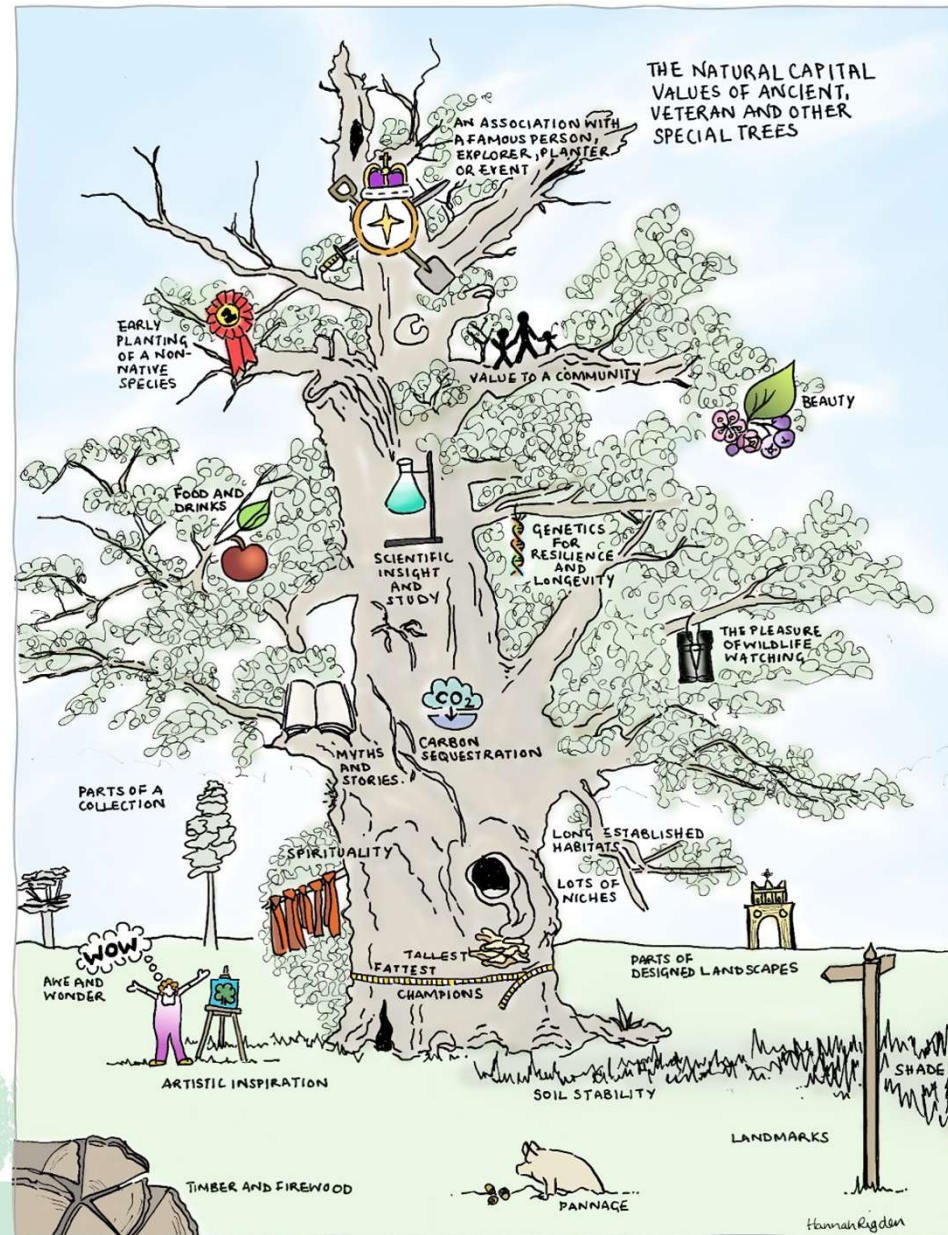
Workshop participant summary



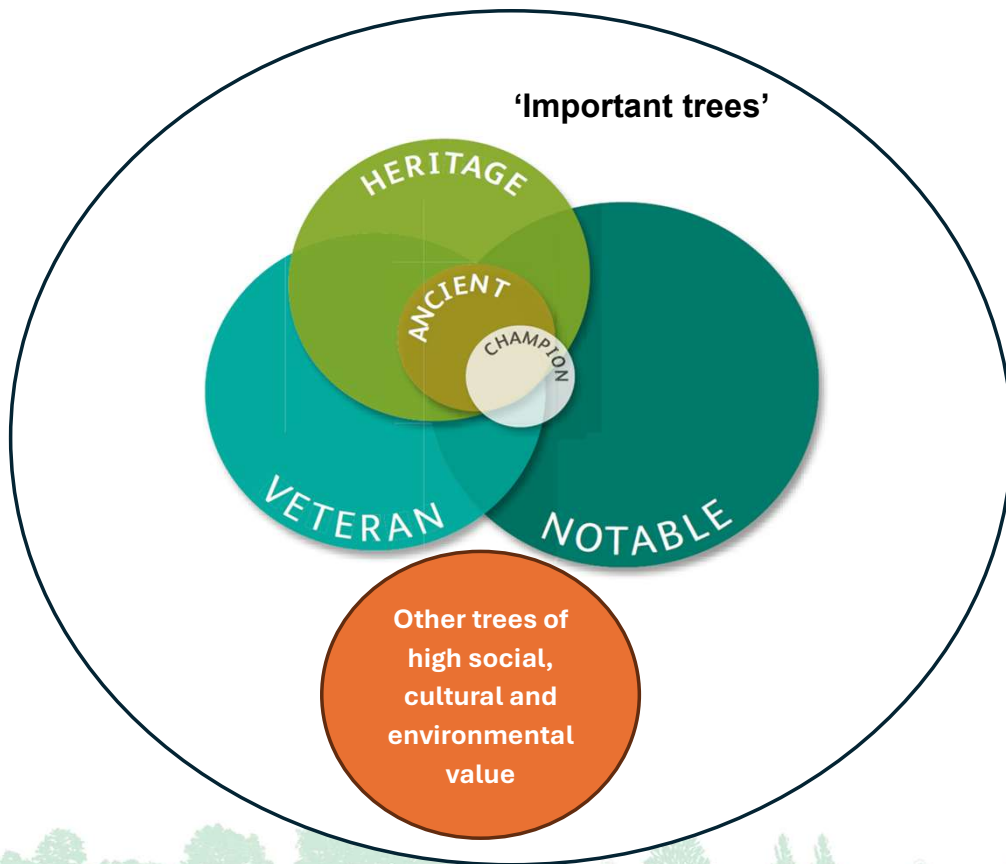
Why are these trees so important?



Image right: The natural capital values of ancient, veteran and other special trees, with thanks to Hannah Rigden and Natural England.



What is an ‘important tree’?

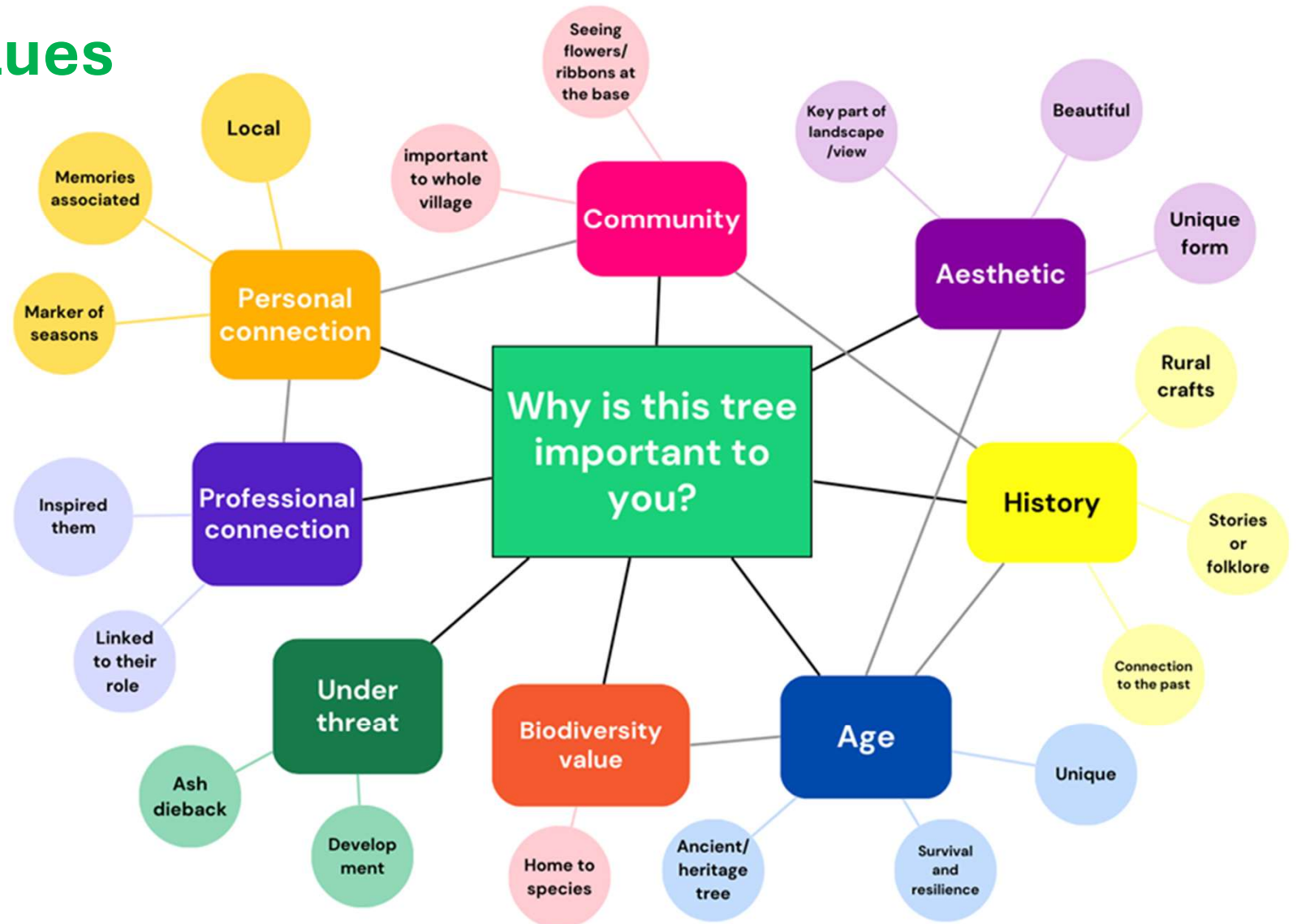


- Here, 'important tree' is used as short-hand for trees of high social, cultural and environmental value.
- This can encompass trees that fit within the terms shown left, and more.
- Our report includes key definitions and reflects on the complexities around defining 'important trees'.

Adapted from image from Ancient Tree Forum



A range of values



Visualisation of the values identified by stakeholders



Threats identified by stakeholders

Environmental threats

- Climate change – e.g. drought, waterlogging
- Pests and diseases
- Storms
- Deteriorating soil health
- Light competition

Resource pressures

- Lack of funding for tree owners to meet costs
- Lack of funding for local authorities and other key agencies
- Lack of people with the skills to provide advice and carry out works

Management practices

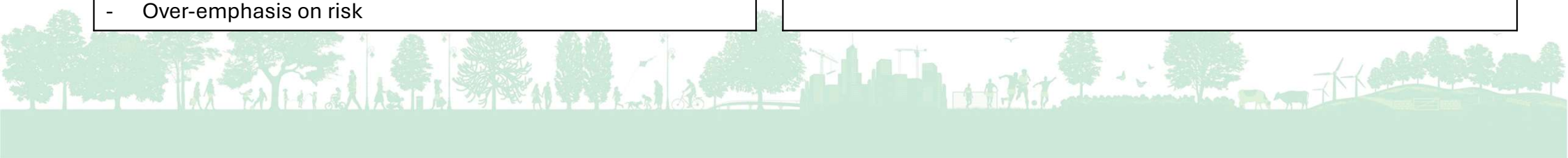
- Lack of knowledge of effective management
- Poor tree surgery
- Proximity of planting
- Lack of succession planning
- Over-emphasis on risk

Legislation and enforcement

- Lack of specific legal protection and recognition
- Lack of effective sentencing guidelines
- Planning consent overrides tree preservation orders
- Existing systems (e.g. TPOs) are used reactively
- Lack of resource to carry out compliance checks and enforcement

Human behaviour and attitudes

- Removal due to insurance pressures
- Development / housing pressure
- Agricultural practices
- Perceived financial burden
- Inadequate root protection area
- Fire damage
- Vandalism
- Lack of appreciation of the value of trees
- Need for tidiness
- High footfall leading to soil compaction
- Air pollution



Summary: emerging evidence and a call to action



Early indications are that:

- compaction, storms and poor tree surgery are causing decline and death, but more research is needed
- most impacts to important trees could be managed and remedied if resource existed to do so
- resources to survey and evaluate Ancient and Veteran Trees are needed - the Woodland Trust are working on an assessment app to record long-term condition assessments
- current legislative protection offers limited benefit over no protection at all. However TPOs are not currently effective and we need new protections for our special trees



Evidence on threats



The Ancient Tree Inventory recorded 17,499 instances of threats to specific trees, including:

- 'Compaction of root area' (31% of threats)
- 'Grazing damage' (27%)
- 'Over shading' (15%)
- 'Major tree surgery' (8%)
- 'Cultivation close to tree' (7%)
- 'Vandalism' (4%), 'Development or building' (3%)
- 'Vehicle damage' (3%) and 'Fire damage' (2%)

Nolan et al. (2020) The Ancient Tree Inventory: a summary of the results of a 15 year citizen science project recording ancient, veteran and notable trees across the UK (Biodiversity and Conservation, 29, 3103-3129).



Emerging evidence: 'Heritage Trees Revisited'



- Project to revisit Heritage Trees and assess condition.
- Early indications are that ~10% of trees have been lost in ~20 years.
- Further analysis on the causal factors is ongoing with compaction, storms and poor tree surgery causing death



Pontfadog Oak Wales



1910 (middle)

2012 (left)

2013 (right)





The Strathleven House Oak

Glasgow





The Burnham Oak

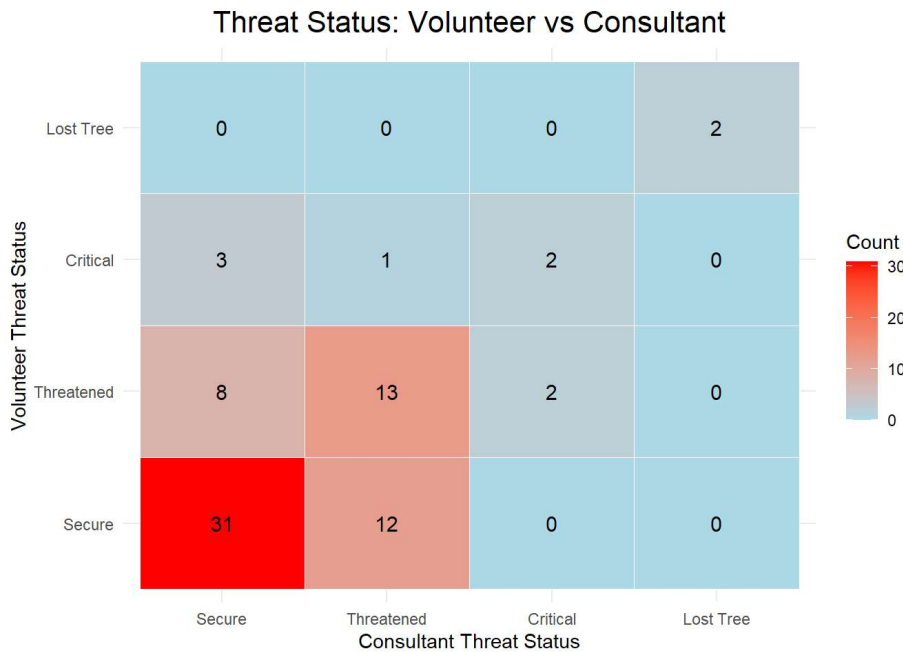
2004
and 2024



The Results

Threat Status	Volunteer Count	Consultant Count
Secure	43	42
Threatened	23	26
Critical	6	4
Lost Tree	2	2

- Volunteers were able to assess 124 trees
- The consultant verified 74
- Volunteer and consultant generally reported similar numbers of trees in each category
- Only 43% (31/72 ~ deemed secure by volunteer & consultant)

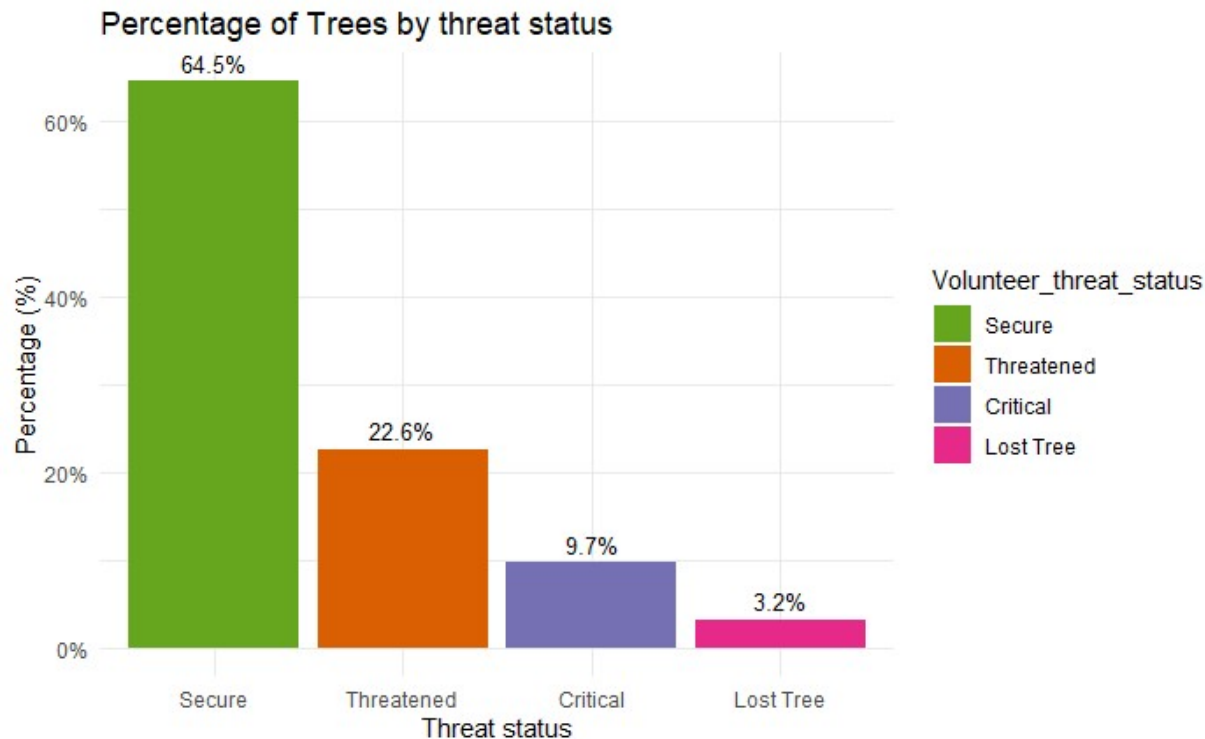




Approximately 36% of trees (124) are at risk or have been lost since the heritage trees books were published



The Results



Haven't yet shared the list of critically threatened trees but we will liaise with owners



Scone
Douglas

2004
and
2024

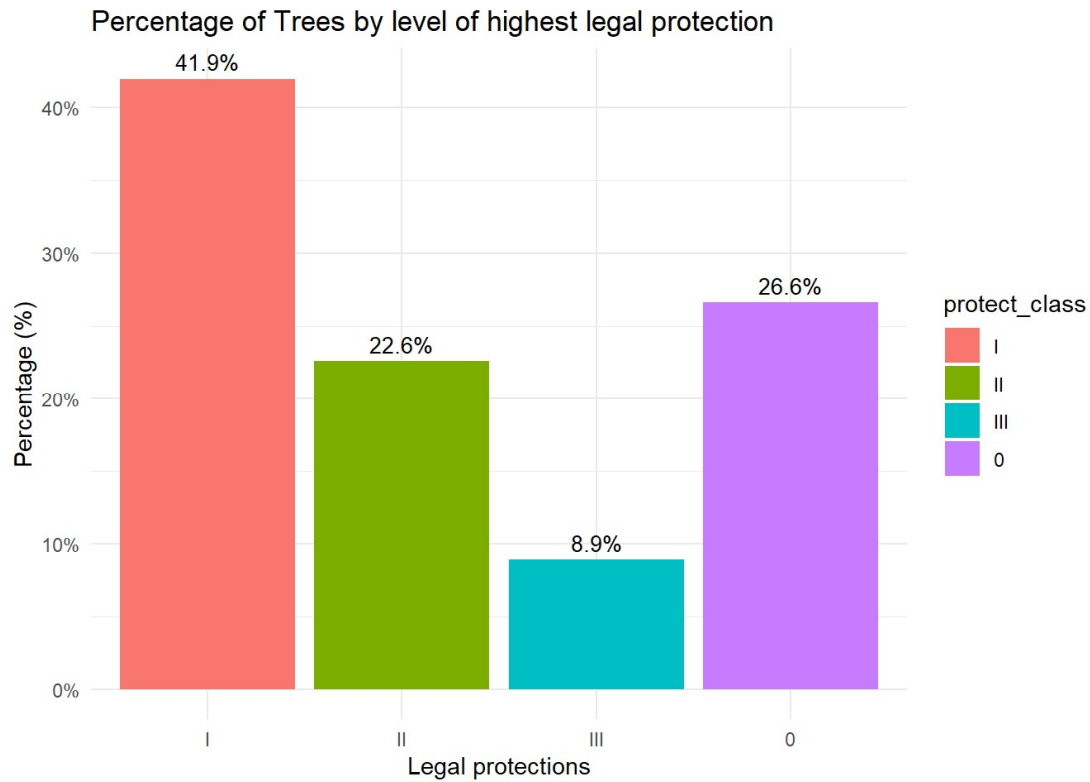


Queen Elizabeth Oak



2004 and 2024

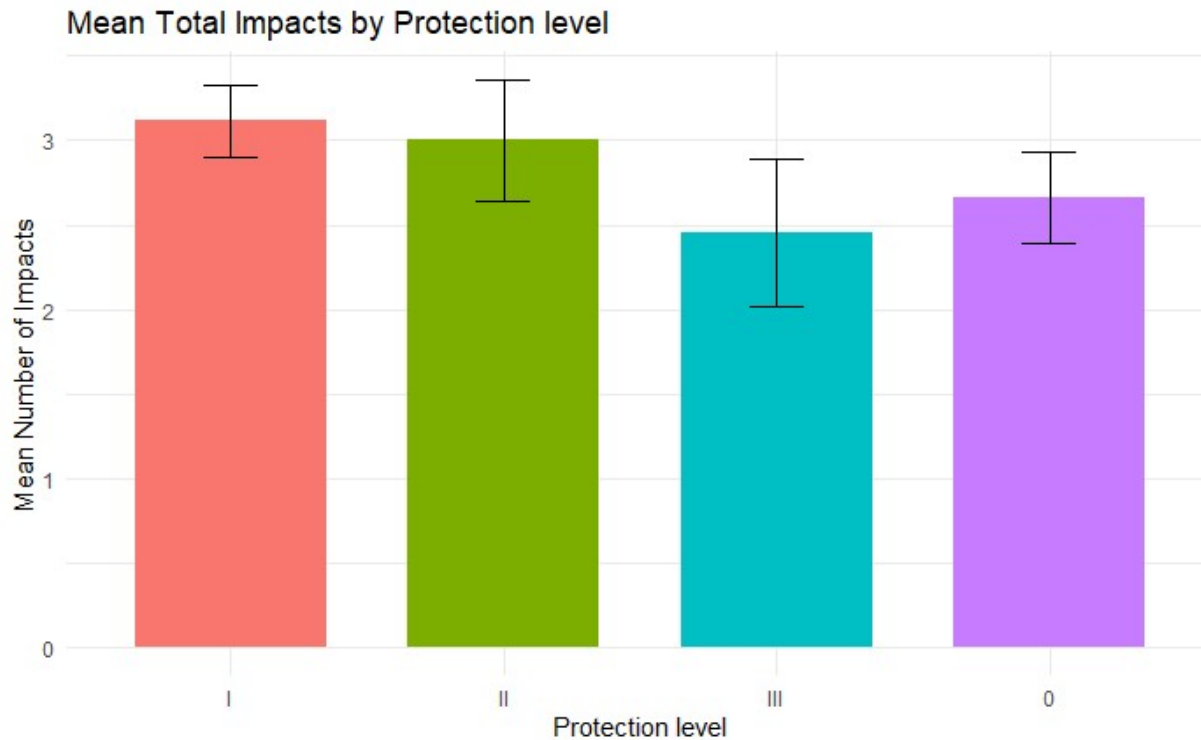
The Results



Protection/designation	Description	Protection Grade
TPO, CAs, SSSI, ASSI, SAC	Legal protection afforded to trees either directly or through woodland habitat designation	I
AWI, Parks & Gardens, SPA	Either direct consideration through planning system, or indirect legal protection to site.	II
LNR, NNR, AONB, NSA, NP	Weak legal protection through site designation or landscape designation.	III

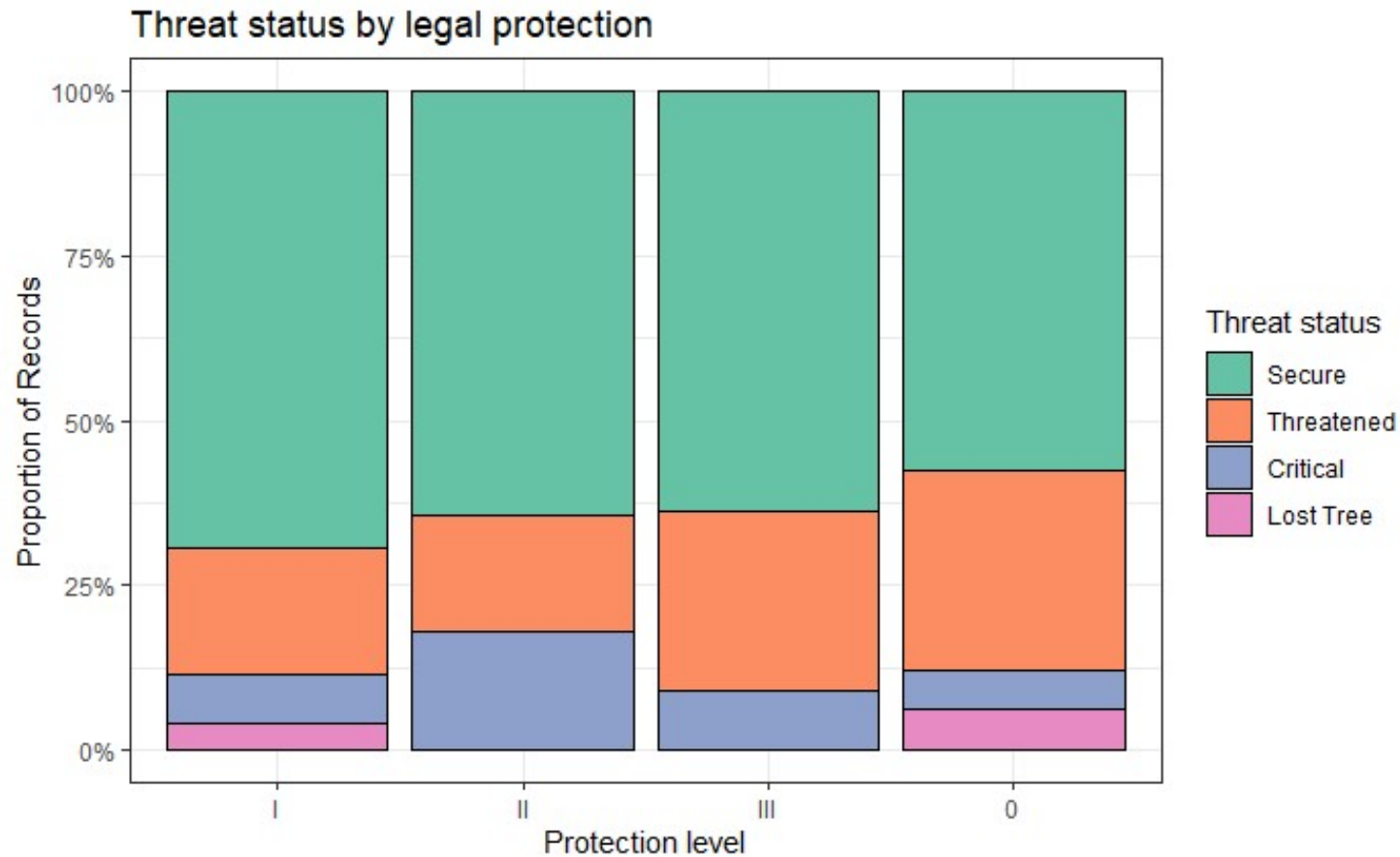
Although 41% are protected by TPOs, TPOs appear to be unsuitable for ancient and veteran trees

The Results



However trees with legal protection do not have fewer impacts!

The Results



Current legal framework offers limited benefits compared to no protections

- **Existing protections are not considered fit for purpose** by the stakeholders and do not adequately recognise the full range of social, cultural and environmental values.
- **Funding and resource constraints** undermine the protection of ‘important trees’, with LAs particularly struggling.
- **High support for new legal protection and designation of the most special or valuable trees** – but the form this would take needs further consideration.
- **International examples can provide useful insight** into developing and implementing a designation system.
- **A more active ‘stewardship’ approach was supported**, rather than ‘preservation’.
- **Training and guidance is needed to support better management and stewardship.**

Over-arching recommendations



1. Initiate and facilitate a taskforce to better protect 'important trees', within 12 months.
2. Develop an action plan for 'important trees'.
3. Improve the legal protection of 'important trees'.
4. Develop a public and private funding framework, to assist owners of 'important trees' and agencies working to protect 'important trees' to undertake necessary management, regulation and enforcement activity.
5. Enhance data on current and future 'important trees' so that protection and conservation efforts can be better targeted and monitored.
6. Appoint a Special Representative for 'important trees' to champion them at the political level.
7. Continue to lead positive engagement for 'important trees' with government and its agencies, NGOs and others.
8. Improve skills and capacity to manage and protect 'important trees'



A year on from submitting our recommendations



The sector continues to work on the topic as it is still very live with trees like the Enfield Oak being damaged and still very much in the news

The sector meets regularly to continue the work – but with Defra the progress has been slow to date

The official line from Defra is :

The Defra-funded report led by The Tree Council and Forest Research provides a range of recommendations for improving the protection and stewardship of ‘important’ trees. The Government is carefully considering its recommendations, including their feasibility and potential impacts, balancing our approach with our existing priorities and statutory obligations.

We will set out actions to protect important trees in the new Trees Action Plan, to be published in 2026





Ancient, gnarled tree in lush woodland, sun rising in background

Demand action

Better protection for our oldest trees is long overdue. Tell Government to protect our most important trees now.

[Sign the petition now](#)

Woodland Trust – Living Legends







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Ancient oak protected after two-year campaign

