

Transcript of Shenley Wood Sound Trail

Sound Station 1 – History of Shenley Wood

Hi, I'm Sarah and I'm part of the Outdoor Learning Team at The Parks Trust. I'm going to tell you a little bit about the history of the wood.

Shenley is one of three ancient woodlands cared for by the charity The Parks Trust. It's probably over a thousand years old, meaning Shenley Wood provides very special and rare habitats. That's why we ask visitors to keep dogs on leads and to stick to the main paths. We want Shenley Wood and the animals that live here to be protected.

At one time, Shenley Wood in Shenley Church End and Howe Park Wood in Shenley Brook End were part of the same woodland, but by the medieval period they were separated. While the woodland is now about 24 hectares, which is the equivalent of 33 football pitches, we think it covered a larger area in the medieval period because of notes in the Domesday Book. Back then, they didn't measure the size of the woodland but estimated how many pigs it could support. This was called panage. Shenley Wood was big enough to support 150 pigs. Imagine all those pigs snuffling about amongst the trees, rooting out acorns and other food to eat.

As well as helping the pigs to fatten up, the animals loosened the soil with their snouts, making it less compacted and easier for plants to grow. The wood provided a huge amount of resources for people in the medieval period. As well as food and fuel, it was the source of much of the building material.

Access to the woods by the vast majority of people, who were peasants at that time, was strictly controlled by the Lord of the Manor. Laws were introduced to prevent the hunting of deer and other animals, often with severe punishments. Thankfully, our laws now focus on protecting the woodland, and the wood is open to the public 365 days a year.

Sound Station 2 – Tree Work in Shenley Wood

Hello, I'm Justin, the Direct Works Manager here at The Parks Trust, and I'm going to talk to you a little bit about how the team looks after the woods.

Look around you at the lower canopy of trees. Can you see any stumps with multiple stems sticking out? These are probably hazel that have been coppiced.

Coppicing is a traditional woodland management practice that people from the Middle Ages onwards carried out to create wood quickly. If you cut the tree close to its base, it regrows, but with multiple stems rather than one slow-growing trunk. You can keep cutting it back on rotation and the tree can live for hundreds of years because of this practice.

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Some of the stumps here could be hundreds of years old. The Parks Trust continues this practice, not to create wood for use but to create a lower canopy. This provides more varied habitat for animals to live, enhancing the biodiversity of the wood.

Compartments will generally be coppiced every 15 years. It can look severe at first but don't worry, the hazel quickly regrows.

Sound Station 3 – Wildlife in Shenley Wood

Hi, I'm Alison. I'm the Nature Projects Officer at The Parks Trust and I'm going to talk to you about our woodland creatures. During the daytime, most of our larger woodland animals are hiding amongst the leaf litter, high up in the trees, or are tucked away sleeping and will only appear at night.

However, if you look carefully, you'll see signs on the paths. Look out for scrapings in the soft soil. That could be signs of badgers hunting for earthworms and grubs, or the distinctive V- and droppings can also occasionally be seen.

Foxes roam about in the early morning, and of course, you'll be able to hear most of the birds that hunt or live here as well. While the call of the magpies can dominate, listen out for the twit-twoo of tawny owls, the tapping of woodpeckers, and the tweets of finches. You may also see soaring buzzards and sparrowhawks.

At night, you could catch a glimpse of tiny, winged creatures darting up and down the woodland rides. Those are bats that are hunting for insects. We're now going to play some sound recordings from Shenley Wood. At the end, we'll tell you what you've heard.

You will have heard the constant chirps of a robin and a loud triple call carrion crow. In the background, there was a wren, a song thrush, and the screech of magpies.

The last recording? That was the sound of bats, and in this case a soprano pipistrelle. The detectors turn their high-frequency calls into something that the human ear can hear. Now that you've listened to the clips, just spend a moment to listen to the sounds around you and see if you can hear any wildlife.

Sound Station 4 – Wellbeing in Shenley Wood

Hi I'm Laura from the outdoor learning team at The Parks Trust and we're going to take a moment to focus on wellbeing and awakening our sense of sight.

Firstly, look out into the distance, focus your eyes on the object that you can see that's furthest away. It might be a tree, a signpost, or a bird. Spend a few seconds letting your eyes adjust and notice the shapes and colours.

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Now move your eyes to the mid ground. Scanning along the horizon, come back about halfway between that furthest point and where you are stood. Perhaps this time, you're picking out a tree, but can you see more detail? Perhaps the shape of the individual leaves or the catkins that are hanging down. Can you see moss or lichen on the branches?

Lastly, focus your eyes right in front of you on the foreground. You may want to crouch down or take a step forward to get closer to a piece of bramble or a stick. Really pay attention to the close details. Perhaps you can see a dew drop on the end of the leaf or an insect crawling up the stem. You may have an overwhelming urge to reach out and touch what's in front of you. That's because your eyes are just one part of the puzzle.

We need our senses to work together to really understand the texture. As long as it's not something that's going to sting or harm you, reach out and touch it. Does it feel like you expected?

Now that your eyes have been awakened, turn around to find a new viewpoint. Now create a picture frame with your hands. Put both hands out in front of you, palms together, arms straight out at shoulder height. Very slowly, separate your palms so that you're letting in just a small amount to your frame. I find it easier to close one eye when my frame is really small, and then very slowly make your frame wider. Eventually you'll get to the point where you can have both eyes open. As you let the new sights into your picture frame take a mental note of what's coming in. It might be initially all you can see is a path but as your frame gets wider you start to let in a tree trunk or branch. Stop when you get to an image that you like. There's nothing right or wrong about what makes a good image. It's about what makes you feel happy.

Put your arms down by your side and briefly close your eyes to see if you can hold the image from your picture frame in your mind. Think about how you feel in this moment. Hopefully, calm and relaxed. Over the next few hours, days, weeks, if you're having a moment when the day is running away with you or you can feel yourself getting worked up, take a moment to find yourself somewhere quiet. Close your eyes and see if you can bring this calming image back into your mind.

Sound Station 5 – Oak Trees in Shenley Wood

Hi, I'm Jay, the Landscape Officer for Shenley Wood. My role is to help keep an eye on the wood and arrange for any work that needs doing to protect its habitat and keep it safe for the public.

One of my favourite features of the wood is this ancient oak. Take a closer look at the oak in the central ride. Did you know that oaks support more life than any other tree? An oak during its lifetime can support over 2,000 species.

Invertebrates like caterpillars and aphids will feast on the leaves and flowers. Beetles will eat its bark and the acorns provide food for mammals such as woodmice, deer, badgers and birds such as jays and woodpeckers. The tree also provides shelter for numerous species including bats.

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Most of the oaks at Shenley Wood, including this one, are English oak. The short stalks on their leaves and long stalks on their acorns mark them out as different from the other common natives like the Cecil oak.

Sound Station 6 – Ash Dieback in Shenley Wood

Hello, I'm Justin, the Direct Works Manager here at The Park Trust and I'm going to talk to you about one of the challenges that Shenley Wood is currently facing.

Look up at the top of the canopy that surrounds you. Can you see anything odd? Skeletal trees are starting to appear, trees with few or no leaves, even during late spring and summer. These are native ash trees. This fast growing and abundant tree makes up over 60% of Milton Keynes' ancient woodlands and is being affected by ash dieback.

The disease is caused by a fungus that travels in the wind and cannot be stopped. It will affect over 90% of the country's ash, weakening or killing the trees. The Park's trust removes ash that is near paths to keep people safe, but we're also trying to maintain the woodlands by gradually taking out sections of ash to enable areas to be replanted with other native species.

In 2020 we launched a project to encourage people from Milton Keynes to grow oaks from acorns to be replanted in the ancient woodlands, and more than a thousand have now been planted by the citizens of Milton Keynes. We will continue to remove ash over the years and replant with other native species to help restore the woodland.

Sound Station 7 – Plants in Shenley Wood

We're stopping here so that we can talk about some of the woodland plants at Shenley Wood.

Ancient woodlands provide rare habitats for native plants and animals. Some of the plants only really thrive in ancient woodlands and we call these indicator species. They include bluebells, wood anemone, primroses and dog's mercury. These plants rely on the loamy soil and the relative cool and damp conditions in the wood.

Climate change is obviously a huge threat to maintaining the right conditions for our native woodlands. The balance of light and shade is also really important in enabling these flowers to grow. Tall trees with large canopies can block out the sunlight from the woodland floor. To prevent this, specialist teams at The Parks Trust manage the woodland by periodically removing a number of taller trees, which is called tree thinning. Doing this allows more sunlight to filter through, which encourages growth in the understory. If you want to find out more about the species to look out for, there's lots of information on theparkstrust.com

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