Notable, Veteran and Ancient Trees

Notable trees are large trees without veteran features or those that are showing the beginnings of veteran features; they are the next generation of veteran trees. Veteran trees are those that are displaying veteran features such as decay, decorticated wood, broken branches, splits, rot holes or hollowing. Ancient trees are those that are in the final stage of life (though this may go on for hundreds of years) and tend to have a shrinking crown and often have significant hollowing.

The measurements given below are a rule of thumb as to the kind of class sizes that would fit each of the categories for trees such as Oaks, Ash and Beech (though Ash and Beech may show veteran features when the diameter is just 1 m and girth 3.1 m). Smaller trees / shrubs such as Field Maple, Hawthorn and Cherry may be potentially interesting at a much smaller size such as those with a diameter of 0.5 m and girth of 1.5 m.

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| Girth (m) | Diameter (m) at 1.5 m | Classification |
| 3.1 – 4.2 | 1 – 1.3 | Notable |
| 4.3 – 5.0 | 1.4 – 1.6 | Veteran |
| 5.1 + | 1.7 + | Ancient |

These trees are important for the features that they display with progressive aging, providing habitat for many organisms, and known as ‘veteran features’. As the tree ages, weak areas and any wounds are progressively colonised by fungi that change the nature and condition of the wood resulting in an accumulation of dead woody tissue. This often results in the shedding of branches, which, in turn, may result in branch cavities and shattered branch ends. Other important features include loose bark, sap runs, a range of rot types and eventually the hollowing of the tree. As the tree ages the number of specialist niches increases, each with a diverse food web. The dead wood and the fruiting bodies and mycelia of saproxylic fungi may be colonised by specialised invertebrates such as beetles, flies, hoverflies and soldier-flies. Many saproxylic invertebrates have limited powers of dispersal, and so the greater the length of time a group of trees have persisted in an area, the greater the chance that this habitat has been colonised by such species. These features, in turn, provide niches for other invertebrates and animals that may not feed on dead material associated with the tree, such as solitary bees and wasps utilising the holes left by wood-boring beetles. Larger creatures, such as bats, roost beneath loose bark, in fissures and in hollows, and nesting birds also use these features. Due to the decrease in the number of such trees and the clearing and tidying of dead wood, many species associated with this habitat, particularly invertebrates, are very rare.