

Spring

In early spring when the trees are still bare, it is easy to spot the occasional tree creeper, a small bird which will move up a tree trunk in search of food, while the more colourful nuthatch is quite able to feed in a similar manner moving head up or down trees or branches. Already in February the hazel and occasional willow will be bright with yellow catkins swinging in the breeze. Woodpeckers start drumming loudly and by mid March the lesser celandine opens its buttercup like flowers. Along the edges of the woods the inconspicuous flowers of dog's mercury appear like spikes set in a whirl of fresh green leaves.



The colourful Nuthatch

In April and May the trees slowly unfold their new leaves and below them bluebells, wood anemones, wood sorrel, yellow archangel and the greater stitchwort come into flower. Bumblebees can be seen patiently patrolling just above the ground searching for nesting holes amongst the vegetation.

The first migrant birds appear all the way from their winter quarters south of the Sahara, including chiffchaff, blackcap, garden warbler and the rarer wood warbler. They join with our locally over-wintering birds in the amazing sound of the dawn chorus.



Bluebells flower in abundance during springtime

Summer

By late May and early June the woods are clothed in their deep green foliage and birds are busy feeding their young. In hedges bordering on neighbouring gardens long-tailed tits like hiding their suspended nests. Wood pigeons construct untidy looking platform nests quite high up in the trees and might have to defend them against marauding magpies.

At the height of summer the woods are shady and cool. Ferns are flourishing, some of them like the hart's-tongue fern, preferring a site next to a ditch or stream. Bracken is distinguished by its branched fronds and smooth green stems, whereas the other ferns have single fronds often arranged like a shuttlecock with scaly or hairy stems. Where the sunlight can penetrate the deep shadow of the tree canopy, honeysuckle opens its blooms and spreads its sweet perfume. Blackberry bushes flower, offering scarce pollen and nectar to insects at this time of year in the woodlands, although they rarely fruit.

In late July and the greater part of August most birds are silent. They experience a time of rest and renewal while their feathers are moulting.

Lady fern



Autumn

In September the robin starts singing again and his wistful notes and the vigorous, rattling song of the wren can usually be heard all through the winter and into spring.

Acorns, beechnuts and sweet chestnuts cover the wood floor and footpaths in October. Grey squirrels and jays rival each other collecting and burying their favourite food for winter. On rotten logs and tree stumps clumps of fungi appear and on the wood floor the pretty red and white spotted fly agaric fungus (poisonous), pushes through the gathering leaves.



Fly Agaric fungus

Foxes and badgers have their territories in the woods, but are rarely seen.

Long-tailed Tit



Badger



Winter

After the glorious show of autumn colour the trees soon stand bare and stark again. Now the evergreen holly comes into its own with its glistening spiky leaves. Few of the many bushes carry berries, probably due to a lack of sunlight, or a preponderance of male trees. About 1 in 3 holly bushes is a hybrid with less spiky and shiny leaves. The ivy climbing up walls and trees at the edge of the woods offers its tiny, sweet smelling flowers to hungry insects on mild days and last year's bluish-black berries are a favourite food for blackbirds and wood pigeons in winter time.



Flocks of tits (great, blue, coal and long-tailed) are on the move through the tops of alder, birch, oak and larch, and in the conifers goldcrests can sometimes be spotted.

The slowly brightening and lengthening days of January and the plentiful moisture suit the mosses on the woodland floor. Their cushions are glowing golden green and some are producing scores of tiny fruit capsules held on flimsy stems, ready to spread to new locations.

Soon the tight brown catkins of hazel will lengthen and turn golden to greet the spring.



Ecclesall Woods

Ecclesall Woods are situated in the south west of Sheffield: they cover 320 acres and are one of the largest ancient woodlands in South Yorkshire. There are many paths and bridleways which offer some wonderful walks and include an 'Easy Going' trail suitable for the less able bodied and wheelchairs. This leaflet has been made possible with the aid of generous funding provided by the Local Heritage Initiative.



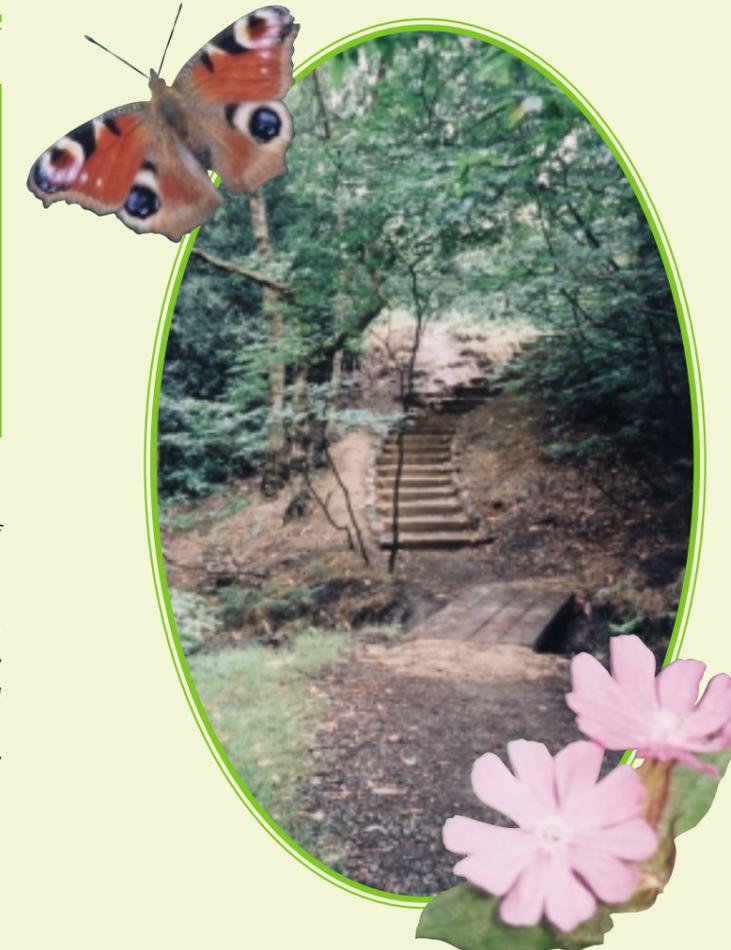
Local Heritage initiative

LHI is a partnership between the Heritage Lottery Fund, Nationwide Building Society and the Countryside Agency



Ecclesall Woods are owned and managed by Sheffield City Council

For information on the Friends of Ecclesall Woods, please contact Parks, Woodlands & Countryside on tel: (0114) 2500 500



A Seasonal Walk around Ecclesall Woods



A typical woodland glade in Ecclesall Woods

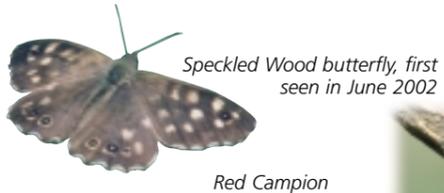
During the 19th century non-native trees like beech, Spanish chestnut, larch, sycamore and pine were planted into the woods and flourished. Coppicing declined and was eventually discontinued. The woods became what is called a 'high forest', that is an ageing woodland, in which trees tend to be similar in height and age with little regeneration.

Renewed management in recent years includes controlled tree felling to create glades, which let in more sunlight and enhance the wood as a diverse natural environment.

Plants and Wildlife in Ecclesall Woods

Ecclesall Woods are classed as ancient woodlands, that is they have existed at least since the 16th century. Originally the dominant trees were birch, oak and rowan with alder along the sides of the streams. Hazel, hawthorn and holly provided an understorey of bushy growth. Many woodland plants like bluebell, wood anemone, wood sorrel and yellow archangel testify to the long history of the woods.

At least from medieval times until the mid-19th century management was under a system called 'coppice with standards', most trees being cut back at regular intervals to ground level to provide young, straight stems, while certain valuable hard woods like oak were left to mature (standards).



Speckled Wood butterfly, first seen in June 2002

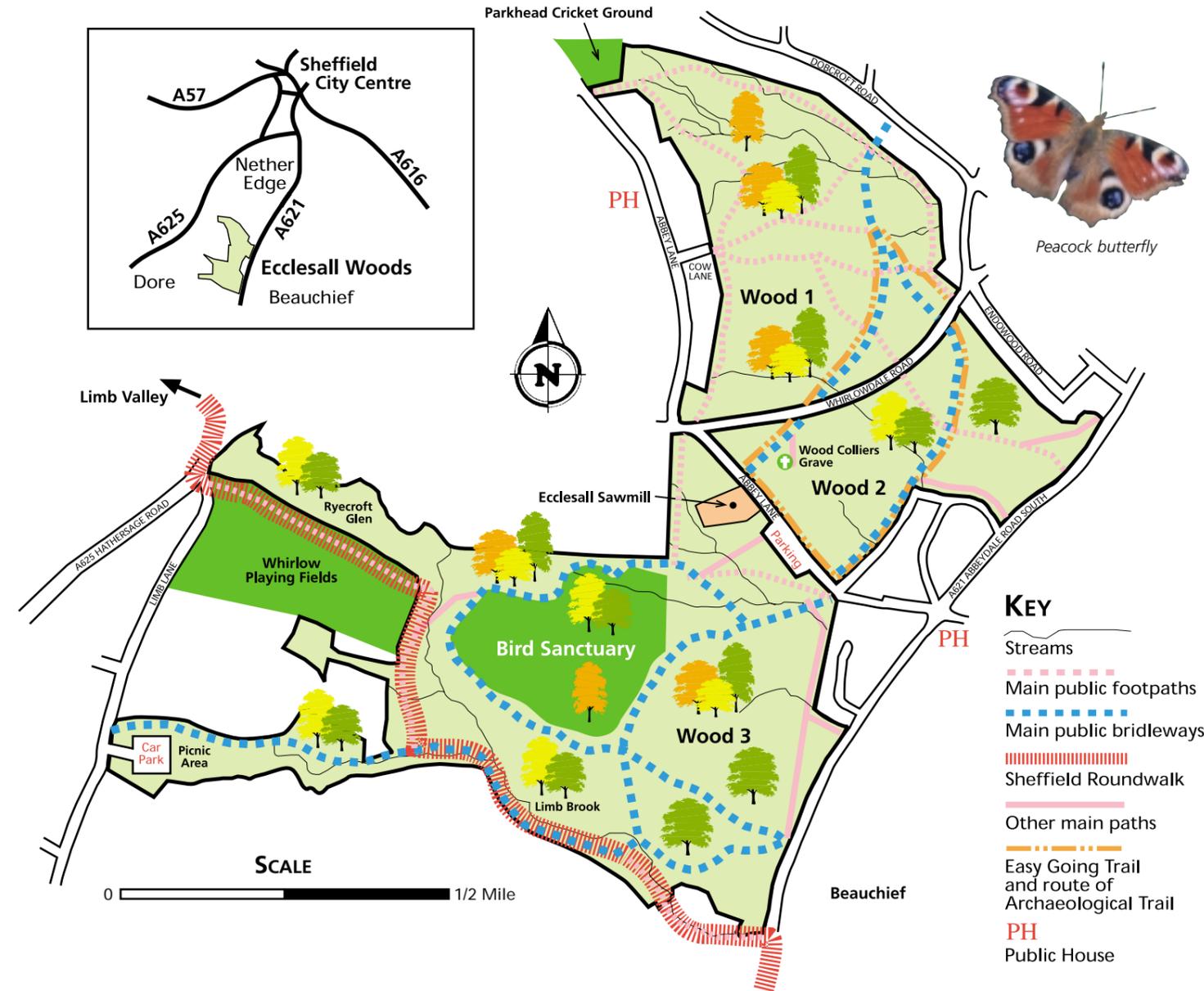
Red Campion



Cardinal Beetle



Greater Spotted Woodpecker



Local geography

The map shows how Ecclesall Woods stretch in a crescent shape from Parkhead Cricket Ground in the north to Abbeydale Road in the south and Hathersage Road and Limb Lane in the west.

The Limb Brook, the only named stream in the woodlands, partially forms the southern boundary of Ecclesall Woods. This historically important water course was one of the ancient boundaries between Northumbria and Mercia. The source of the brook is near Ringinglow, where it originates from a very wet area at the head of the Limb Valley. After flowing through Whirlow Park it joins Ecclesall Woods near the stone stile at the bottom of Whirlow Playing Fields.



Peacock butterfly



You can follow its course through the woods on well made paths until it reaches Abbeydale Road South. This path is part of the City of Sheffield Round Walk. In Spring a rich carpet of lesser celandine, wood anemone, wood sorrel, greater stitchwort, yellow archangel and bluebells lines the sides of the Brook.

When walking in Ecclesall Woods it is worth taking your favourite identification book on trees, wild flowers or birds with you. Binoculars are useful for bird watching or identifying butterflies, which can be seen in spring before the tree canopy becomes too dense. The woods are recognised as a Local Nature Reserve because of their high wildlife interest.



Jay



Cow Parsley

Many fungi can be seen mainly in autumn



Bluebells in a glade