



# Cannock Chase AONB - unique habitats and species

**Lowland heathland** only occurs in north and west Europe. Historically it developed on sandy, nutrient poor, acidic soil mainly as a result of man clearing woodland for animal grazing. Subsequent increases in agriculture, commercial tree planting and urban development have reduced the amount of lowland heathland. It is now a rare and threatened habitat, yet supports a rich and diverse variety of wildlife.



Here on the Chase, the heathland includes a mosaic of heather, bell heather, crowberry, cowberry and the rare "Cannock Chase berry" as well as grasses, scrub, such as gorse and bracken, and scattered silver birch trees. Our heathland habitat supports birds like the endangered nightjar and skylark as well as four of the six British reptiles - slow worm, grass snake, adder and common lizard.

**Cannock Chase berry - a rare hybrid between bilberry and cowberry. Leaves are finely toothed, they are more 'waxy' and slightly thicker than bilberry, but less so than cowberry.**



**Nightjar - visits Europe in summer from Africa to breed. Only becomes active at dusk, hunts insects on the wing catching them with its open beak. Has a "churring" song which sounds like a motorbike!**



**Semi-natural ancient woodlands** are old woods with mainly British species which have not obviously been felled or planted. Within Cannock Chase AONB, they are generally oak, birch and holly woodland with a ground cover dominated by brambles, bracken and bluebells or, on the most acidic and nutrient poor soils, heather and bilberry. This is an important habitat which would have covered most of Britain before man's intervention.



**Forest and woodlands** cover around 40% of Cannock Chase AONB. Tree species are predominantly Corsican pine, Scots pine, silver birch and beech. The woodlands include habitats such as open clearings, grass rides, scrub, woodland edges and wet woods. These all provide important shelter and food sources for a wide range of birds, mammals, insects and reptiles including eight different birds of prey, three types of woodpecker and six species of bat. Appropriate woodland management ensures a range of tree species, ages and structures are maintained to increase the opportunities for wildlife.



**Woodlark - a rare bird which needs a mosaic of bare ground or short vegetation for feeding and areas of taller vegetation or woodland edges for nesting sites.**



**Lowland wood-pasture** and parkland developed when animals were grazed in medieval forests and, later, parks and commons. In wood-pastures, trees were 'pollarded' or cut for timber at a suitable height above ground level to prevent browsing animals eating the re-growth. This prolonged the tree's life and gave it a very distinctive shape, producing characteristic old or 'veteran' trees. Such veteran trees provide

important habitats for roosting bats and birds and often have a lot of dead and decaying wood providing homes for a large number of fungi, lichens and insects.

**Brocton Coppice - former woodpasture, now 85 hectares of oak and birch woodland with around 600 veteran sessile oak trees, between 200 to 600 years old.**



**Agricultural land** is another important and often forgotten habitat within and surrounding Cannock Chase AONB. Positive farming management methods encourage the maintenance, restoration and creation of flower-rich grasslands and field margins, as well as woodlands, wildlife ponds, ditches and hedgerows. Improving these vital links and 'corridors' between different habitat areas will increase the range of species they support.

**Skylark - mainly feeds on agricultural land. It is a rare, ground nesting bird with nests located amongst the Chase grasslands from April to July. Nesting skylarks are difficult to see and can be easily disturbed by the dogs of unaware owners. Such disturbance can cause the birds to abandon their nests. Adult skylarks have a distinctive song and can be seen hovering high in the sky.**



**Wetlands** are wide in variety on the Chase, although few and far between because of the mainly free-draining soils. The wetlands range from rivers, canals and streams to lakes, ponds, flushes (where nutrients accumulate due to water in-flow) and mires (areas of permanently wet peat). As well as supporting a large range of plants, wetlands act as drinking points and breeding grounds for a

variety of birds and insects. The AONB has some wetland species which are nationally rare, like the water vole and otter.

**Otter - member of the weasel family which includes badger, polecat, stoat and mink. It's a secretive and nocturnal animal, rarely seen.**





## Cannock Chase AONB Nature Conservation Information

### Cannock Chase Council

Countryside Service, Deavalls Farm, Hawks Green Lane, Cannock, WS11 2LP.

Tel: 01543 450018. Fax: 01543 459946.

Website: [www.cannockchasedc.gov.uk](http://www.cannockchasedc.gov.uk)

### Forestry Commission

Birches Valley, Rugeley, Staffordshire, WS15 2UQ.

Tel: 01889 586593. Fax: 01889 574217.

Website: [www.forestry.gov.uk/england](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/england)

### Lichfield District Council

Countryside Officer or Biodiversity Officer, Lichfield District House, Frog Lane, Lichfield, WS13 6YZ.

Tel: 01543 308000. Fax: 01543 308200.

Website: [www.lichfielddc.gov.uk](http://www.lichfielddc.gov.uk)

### South Staffordshire Council

Architectural & Landscape Services, Council Offices, Codsall, South Staffordshire, WV8 1PX.

Tel: 01902 696408. Fax: 01902 846553.

Website: [www.sstaffs.gov.uk](http://www.sstaffs.gov.uk)

### Stafford Borough Council

Sustainable Development/Local Agenda 21 Team, Environmental and Health Services, Civic Centre, Riverside, Stafford, ST16 3AQ.

Tel: 01785 619000. Fax: 01785 619219.

Website: [www.staffordbc.gov.uk](http://www.staffordbc.gov.uk)

### Staffordshire County Council

Principal Ecologist, Development Services, Riverway, Stafford, ST16 3TJ.

Tel: 01785 277254. Fax: 01785 277364.

Website: [www.staffordshire.gov.uk](http://www.staffordshire.gov.uk)

### Staffordshire Wildlife Trust

Wolseley Bridge, Stafford, ST17 0WT.

Tel: 01889 880100. Fax: 01889 880101.

Website: [www.staffs-wildlife.org.uk](http://www.staffs-wildlife.org.uk)

## How You Can Help

- Act as the eyes and ears of the AONB
- Consider ways of conserving and enhancing the AONB
- Act in environmentally friendly and socially responsible ways when visiting the countryside

***If you want advice or feel you can help, please contact:***

Cannock Chase AONB Unit,  
Shugbrough Park Farm,  
Milford,  
Stafford, ST17 0XB.

Tel: 01889 882613. Fax: 01889 883912.

Website: [www.cannockchaseaonb.org.uk](http://www.cannockchaseaonb.org.uk)

Email: [cannockchase@staffordshire.gov.uk](mailto:cannockchase@staffordshire.gov.uk)

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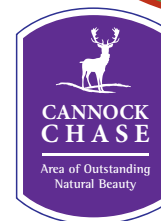
***Should you or someone you know require it, this leaflet can also be produced, on request, in large print. Please telephone 01889 882613 or fax 01889 883912.***

Cannock Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is supported by: Defra, Staffordshire County Council, Cannock Chase Council, Stafford Borough Council, Lichfield District Council, South Staffordshire Council, AONB Parish and Town Councils, British Horse Society, Cemex UK Operations Ltd, Country Land and Business Association, Forestry Commission, Friends of Cannock Chase, Hanson Aggregates, National Farmers Union, Natural England, Ramblers, CASS Young Carers, Staffordshire Parish Councils' Association, Staffordshire Wildlife Trust, Swinnerton Cycles Forest Centre Ltd, Walton Chasers, West Midland Bird Club.



## Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

### Nature Conservation



## Cannock Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)

In England and Wales, there is a huge variety of scenery and landscapes and those considered most valuable are protected as National Parks or AONBs. Cannock Chase AONB (6,800 hectares) was designated in 1958 because of its beautiful landscape, its wildlife and its history. Today, as well as being a living and working environment, the area is of vital importance from a nature conservation point of view. There are a wide variety of nature conservation designations in such a small area. This leaflet gives a flavour of some of the key habitats and species which help to make Cannock Chase AONB special.



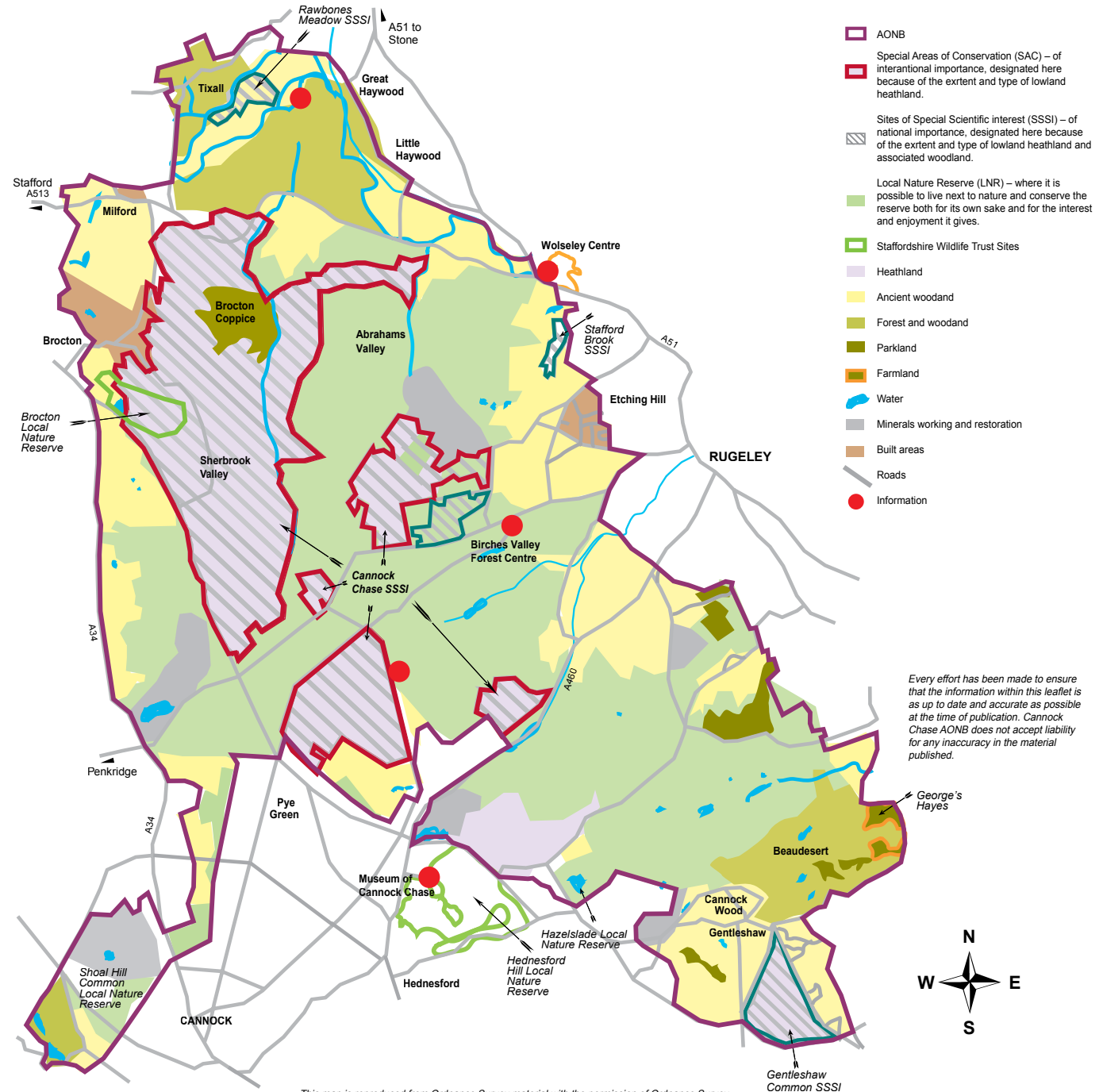
**Sherbrook Valley,  
Cannock Chase  
Special Area of  
Conservation**



**Stafford Brook,  
Site of Special  
Scientific Interest**

**Shoal Hill Local  
Nature Reserve**

## Nature Conservation Designations



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