

Features of Cannock Chase



1. Wood warbler
Phylloscopus sibilatrix



2. Common redstart
Phoenicurus phoenicurus



3. Fallow deer
Dama dama



4. Brown long-eared bat
Plecotus auritus



5. Welsh clearwing moth
Synanthedon scoliaeformis



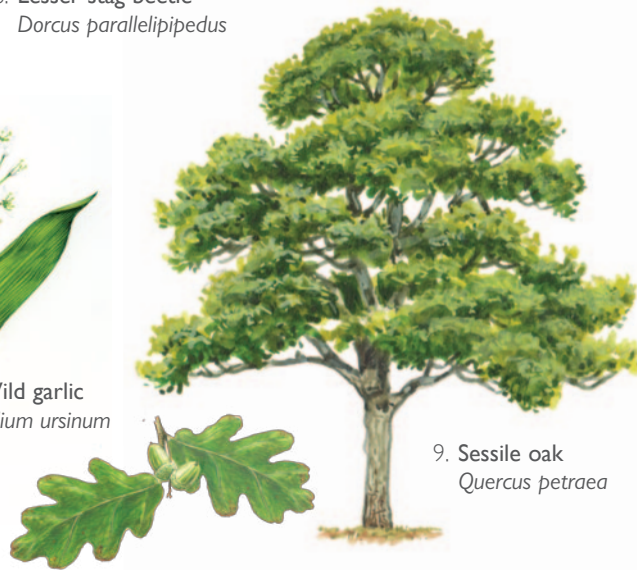
6. Lesser stag beetle
Dorcus parallelipipedus



7. Bluebell
Hyacinthoides non-scripta



8. Wild garlic
Allium ursinum



9. Sessile oak
Quercus petraea

Woodland and wood-pasture



10. Long-eared owl
Asio otus



11. Common crossbill
Loxia curvirostra



13. Chicken of the woods
Laetiporus sulphureus



14. Fly agaric
Amanita muscaria



12. Buzzard
Buteo buteo



15. Silver birch
Betula pendula



16. Scots pine
Pinus sylvestris



Forest plantations

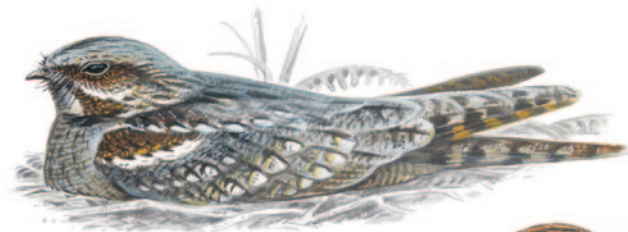


17. Japanese larch
Larix kaempferi





18. Hobby
Falco subbuteo



19. Nightjar
Caprimulgus europaeus



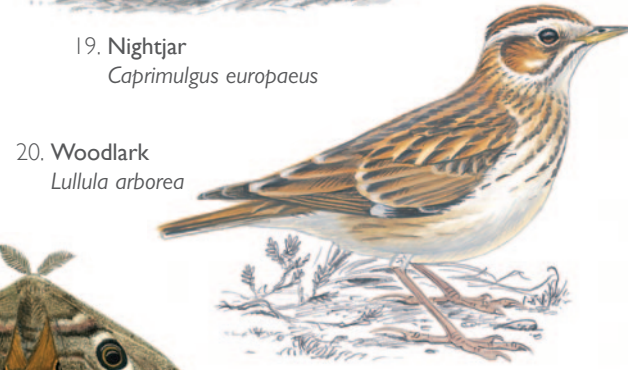
28. Stonechat
Saxicola rubicola



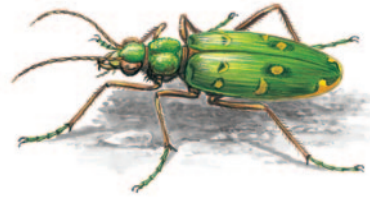
29. Adder
Vipera berus



30. Common lizard
Zootoca vivipara



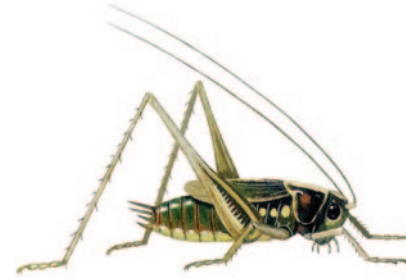
20. Woodlark
Lullula arborea



21. Green tiger beetle
Cicindela campestris



22. Emperor moth
Saturnia pavonia



31. Bog bush-cricket
Metrioptera brachyptera



32. Green hairstreak
Callophrys rubi



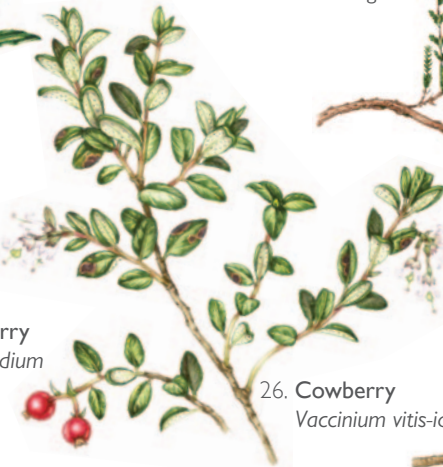
33. Small pearl-bordered fritillary
Boloria selene



24. Bilberry
Vaccinium myrtillus



25. Cannock Chase berry
Vaccinium x intermedium



26. Cowberry
Vaccinium vitis-idaea



23. Heather
Calluna vulgaris



27. Bell heather
Erica cinerea



34. Cross-leaved heath
Erica tetralix



35. Round-leaved sundew
Drosera rotundifolia



36. Purple moor-grass
Molinia caerulea



37. Common cottongrass
Eriophorum angustifolium

Heathlands

Heathlands





38. Barn owl
Tyto alba



39. Skylark
Alauda arvensis



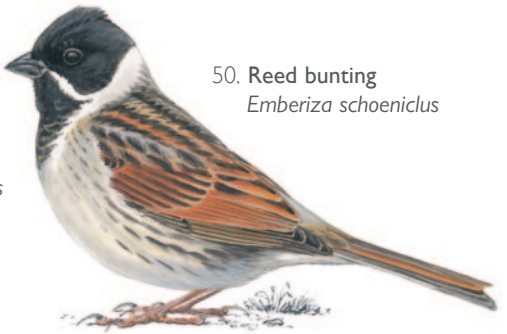
40. Brown hare
Lepus europaeus



48. Broad-bodied chaser
Libellula depressa



49. Lapwing
Vanellus vanellus



50. Reed bunting
Emberiza schoeniclus



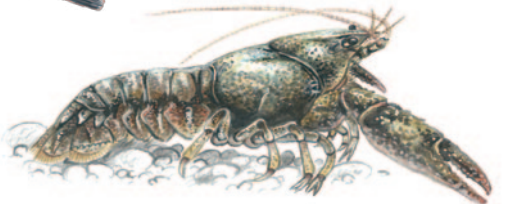
41. Meadow brown
Maniola jurtina



42. Red-tailed bumblebee
Bombus lapidarius



51. Common frog
Rana temporaria



52. White-clawed crayfish
Austropotamobius pallipes



43. Common knapweed
Centaurea nigra



44. Meadow buttercup
Ranunculus acris



46. Hawthorn
Crataegus monogyna



45. Pedunculate oak
Quercus robur



47. Alder
Alnus glutinosa



53. Bullhead
Cottus gobio



54. Brown trout
Salmo trutta



55. Marsh marigold
Caltha palustris



56. Ragged robin
Silene flos-cuculi



57. Greater tussock-sedge
Carex paniculata

Farmland

Wetland



INTRODUCTION

Cannock Chase is a beautiful wilderness in Staffordshire in the heart of the West Midlands, and one of England's finest National Landscapes. Created for William the Conqueror as a hunting forest 1,000 years ago it is rich in history, culture and wildlife, with much to explore and enjoy.

The area is a diverse living and working landscape. The mosaic of habitats includes heathland, forest plantation, woodland and wood-pasture, wetlands and farmland.



The heath and forest core of Cannock Chase © Cannock Chase National Landscape

At a glance

- At just 26 square miles Cannock Chase is mainland England's smallest National Landscape.
- It includes the largest surviving area of lowland heathland in the Midlands, designated a Special Area of Conservation (SAC).
- More than 30% of the area is of high value for nature.
- Its rich cultural heritage includes more than 1,000 cultural heritage assets.
- 51% of the Chase is open access land where the public has the right to roam on foot.
- 67% is forest and recreational land; 24% is farmland and 3% built-up land.

SHAPING THE LANDSCAPE

Cannock Chase is situated on a domed plateau landform, created by ancient faulting and folding of the underlying sandstone and coal bearing rocks. These have been eroded by rivers and streams, particularly along its northern edge by the river Trent. It offers inspiring views, both to the elevated plateau from surrounding areas, as well as from the high ground of the Chase.

The Chase we see today is largely man-made, shaped over thousands of years by communities farming, trading and protecting themselves. You can see the remains of an Iron Age hillfort at Castle Ring, which occupies the highest point in the National Landscape and has commanding views. The poor acid soils of the area were historically difficult to cultivate, and this is likely to have been one of the reasons why it was declared a royal hunting forest soon after the Norman conquest. The area continued to be a hunting preserve for the next three centuries until Tudor times, when the land we now know as Cannock Chase was carved out of the forest and given by the King to the Bishops of Coventry and Lichfield.

There is evidence of small-scale manufacture of glass and coal working from as early as the 13th century. Later, in the 16th century, coal mining and ironworking was developed on an industrial scale by wealthy local families. By 1600 substantial areas had been cleared of trees. And in the centuries that followed the area was neatly divided by industrialisation and large country estates. By the 19th century most of the Chase was treeless. Large collieries were sunk, and populations grew, turning villages on the southern fringes into mining towns. The system of canals that pass through the northern part of the National Landscape show the importance of the area for transportation during the industrial revolution.

With the outbreak of the Great War, the wide-open expanse of Cannock Chase was ideal for training the British Army. Two huge camps were established along with roads and even a special railway line to serve them. In the 1920s the newly formed Forestry Commission began to buy large parts of the Chase and establish plantations of quick-growing conifers to meet the national demand for timber. Coal mining continued to prosper, concentrated on the larger and more profitable pits. In 1993, however, mining on the Chase finally came to an end and the colliery machinery was removed and the land restored to nature.

Today Cannock Chase is a mosaic of different land uses, which together create a unique patchwork landscape of varied textures and colours. Expanses of open land contrast with the surrounding enclosed agricultural fields. The lowland heathland habitat interspersed with areas of coniferous plantation forestry creates a strong sense of place, and a feeling of peace and tranquility close to the busy surrounding West Midlands conurbation.

Cultural heritage

As well as Castle Ring Iron Age hillfort there are numerous historic sites on the Chase. Wealthy landowners created stately homes, gardens and parks on its fringes in the 17th and 18th centuries. The most intact is the National Trust's Shugborough Estate – the family home of the Earls of Lichfield. Shugborough is one of two nationally important Grade I registered parks and gardens on the Chase.



Tixall Gatehouse © Ian Marshall

Impressive surviving canal architecture on the Trent and Mersey and Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canals includes mileposts, locks, aqueducts, bridges, cottages, historic paving surfaces and wharfs.

The Chase has a long and proud military association. You can see the remains of training camps from both World Wars along with a military hospital (later turned into housing for local miners and their families) and German Prisoner of War camp. The buildings are long gone, but the road infrastructure and building remains are still visible. The German Military Cemetery (our second registered park and garden), dedicated in 1967, contains nearly 5,000 burials from both World Wars. Together with the nearby Commonwealth Cemetery and other smaller memorials, these are poignant reminders of the human cost of conflict.

HABITATS

Heathlands

Our heathlands are a link to the past, shaped by human activity – tree clearance and grazing by livestock. A mosaic of heathers, grasses, and bilberry are seen across the heath with bracken and scattered gorse, and you may discover our unique ‘Cannock Chase berry’ (25). The heath provides important habitat for birds like stonechat (28), nightjar (19) and woodlark (20), as well as reptiles and insects. Look closely and you may spot the spectacular emperor moth (22), green hairstreak butterfly (32) and green tiger beetle (21). And watch out for slow worm, grass snake, common lizard (30) and adder (29).



Gentleshaw Common © Ian Marshall

On wetter ground the vegetation is dominated by purple moor-grass (36) and cottongrasses (37). Here you may find specialities like cranberry, bog asphodel and insectivorous sundews (35).

In summer the scarce small pearl-bordered fritillary (33) may also be seen searching for marsh violets on which it lays its eggs.

Since 1800 the area of the UK covered by heathland has declined by over 80%. The heathland habitats on Cannock Chase are the most extensive in the Midlands and internationally important.

Forest plantations

Forest and woodland covers 56% of Cannock Chase, compared with 10.5% for England as a whole. The majority of this area comprises commercial conifer plantations managed by Forestry England. Here you will see mainly Corsican and Scots pine (16), with some Japanese (17) and hybrid larch. A wider variety of timber species, including Douglas fir, western red-cedar and western hemlock are gradually being introduced to help the forest environment cope with climate change and be more resistant to pests and diseases.

Woodland and wood-pasture

On the poor dry soils of the Chase, oak-birch woodlands with rowan and holly are dominant. The ground cover is typically species-poor and includes brambles, bracken and some bluebells (7) or, on the most acidic and nutrient poor soils, heather (23) and bilberry (24). In damper places alder (47) and grey willow become locally abundant with wild garlic (8).

Areas of former wood-pasture and parkland bear witness to ancient medieval management practices where trees were cut or ‘pollarded’ for timber at head height allowing livestock to graze the ground beneath. This prolonged the tree’s life and gave it a very distinctive shape, producing characteristic old or ‘veteran’ trees. These ancient trees are ‘living monuments’ providing irreplaceable habitats with their dead and decaying wood for unique assemblages of fungi, lichens and insects, which in turn support roosting bats (brown long-eared bat, 4) and birds (common redstart, 2 and wood warbler, 1). Brocton Coppice is designated as an ancient woodland and has around 600 veteran sessile oak (9) trees, between 200 to 600 years old.



Ancient woodland with wild garlic and bluebell © Steve Welch

Wetlands

The floodplains of the Rivers Trent and Sow wind through the northern part of the National Landscape forming a distinctive flat river meadowland landscape. Their seasonally flooded, damp pastures and wet ditches are dominated by rushes, grasses and sedges. In spring you will see splashes of colour from flowering marsh marigold (55), meadowsweet and ragged robin (56). The wetland is a refuge for wading birds including snipe and lapwing (49), as well as wildfowl which are often seen grazing in the floodplain during the winter months. Common frog (51), dragonflies (48) and damselflies can all be seen, whilst the main rivers support bullhead (53), brown trout (54) and the occasional visiting otter.

Farmland

Farming is restricted to the better-quality agricultural land on the fringes of the Chase. The relatively deep, freely draining soils in the west support mixed farming characterised by large, hedged fields.



Farmed landscape © Ian Marshall

In contrast, the farmland in the east comprises smaller fields, in places still supporting flower-rich grassland and field margins as well as small copses, ponds, ditches and thick hawthorn (46) hedgerows with scattered oak trees. Here you may be lucky enough to catch sight of brown hare (40), skylark (39) and barn owl (38) and insects like the meadow brown butterfly (41) and red-tailed bumblebee (42).

ECOSYSTEM SERVICES

Cannock Chase provides people with multiple environmental, social and economic benefits, called ‘ecosystem services’ but many of them go unnoticed. This is a lived-in, working landscape providing food, timber, minerals and other natural resources and supporting jobs and the local economy. The Chase also provides a stronghold for some of the nation’s most important and threatened habitats and wildlife; includes some of the country’s most important historic heritage; helps to improve people’s health and well-being; regulates the climate by absorbing and storing CO₂ and creating oxygen; and helps reduce surface runoff from rainfall.

EXPLORING CANNOCK CHASE

Cannock Chase is easily accessible for walking, cycling or horse riding. There are extensive areas to roam on foot and 157 kilometres of public rights of way, including sections of long-distance footpaths. With its dramatic scenery, the area is popular for family cycling following a network of bridleways and designated cycle trails. Cannock Chase Forest offers purpose-built trails for mountain bikers wanting to test their skills. The network of bridleways provides some of the most extensive and picturesque off-road horseback riding in England.

FURTHER INFORMATION

The Cannock Chase Code (see opposite) has been developed to help everyone’s visit to be safe and enjoyable and to protect, respect and enjoy the landscape.

There is lots of information on the Cannock Chase website, including how to get here and activities you can do.
www.cannock-chase.co.uk



On arrival at Cannock Chase the visitor centres/hubs detailed on the map opposite and on the website, can help further with what to do and where to go. Please note their opening times do vary through the year.

Further information on getting here by public transport is on www.traveline.info

Written by Ian Marshall, Samantha Hall, Julia Banbury, Richard Harris and Colin Manning. Illustrations by Lizzie Harper, Mike Langman and Chris Shields.

protect · respect · enjoy



Be a Chase Champion – Follow the Cannock Chase Code



Cannock Chase National Landscape

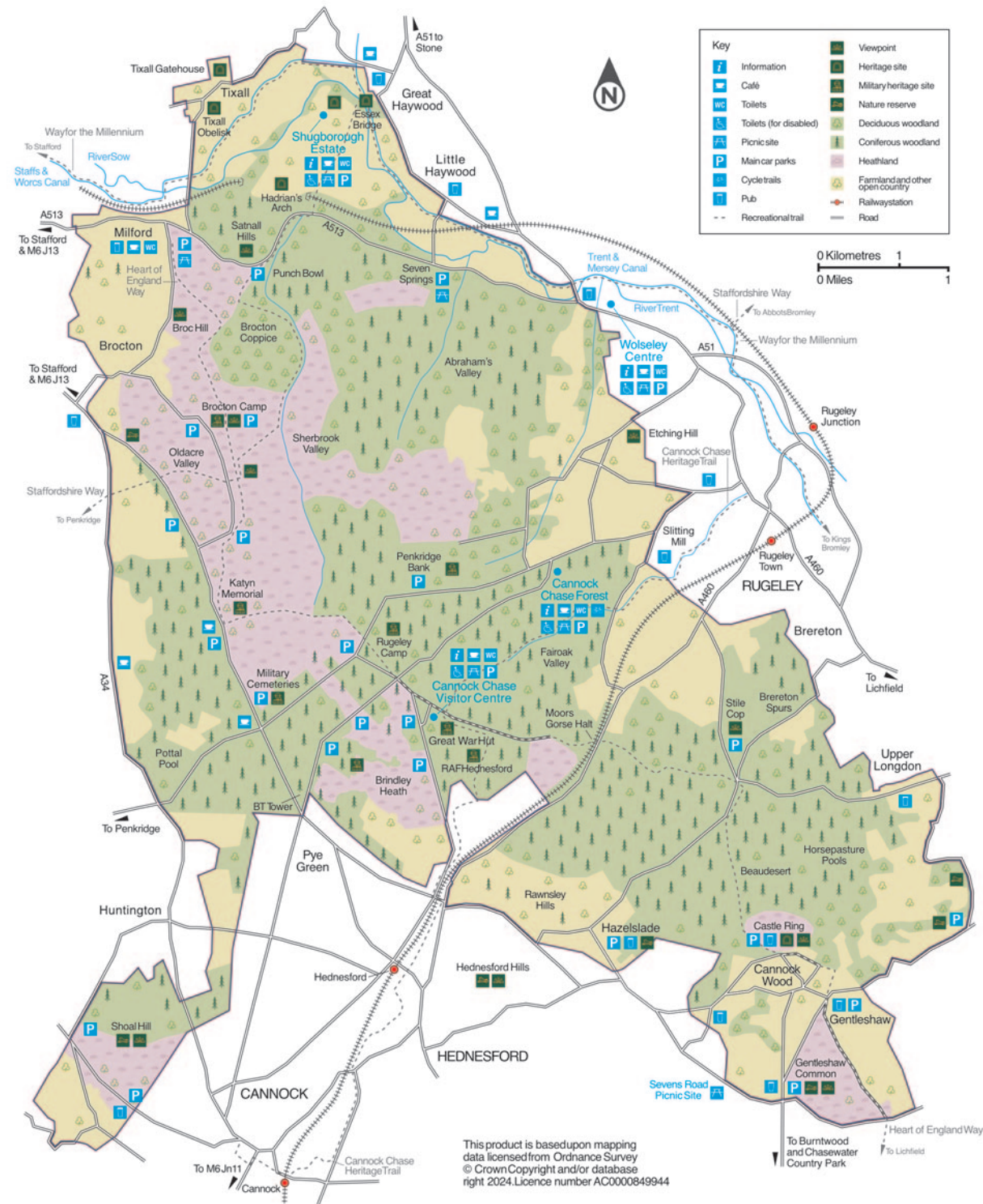
Cannock Chase National Landscape Partnership

Cannock Chase has been nationally recognised for its outstanding natural beauty. Formal legal responsibility for protecting and conserving the natural beauty of the Chase lies with the five local authorities that cover the area: Staffordshire County Council, Cannock Chase Council, Stafford Borough Council, Lichfield District Council and South Staffordshire Borough Council. They work in partnership with local communities and user groups, landowners, emergency services and the Cannock Chase Special Area of Conservation (SAC) Partnership to look after this nationally important landscape. This involves balancing the interests of all those who use and enjoy the Chase, as well as addressing the pressing issues of the day, such as, pressures from surrounding housing development, increasing recreational use, a warming climate, and the impacts of invasive non-native species, including pests and diseases.



Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs

CANNOCK CHASE



With many thanks to all our partners who helped us to compile the list of species and who help to support the work of the National Landscape Partnership. Text © Cannock Chase National Landscape Partnership 2026. Designed by Field Studies Council Publications. Artwork © Lizzie Harper, Mike Langman and Chris Shields 2023. OP208. ISBN 978 1 908819 85 7.