

Chapter 12 Keeping records

12.1 Why record?

The number of veteran trees in England and Wales is still unknown although most of the major sites with many veteran trees are well known.

Tree surveys have been started for certain areas and on particular sites but it is very important to extend this. Information about tree populations and population dynamics is very limited at present. The production of a standard recording form and method of survey should improve the situation and it is hoped that future surveys will ensure that data collected is compatible with the Veteran Tree Initiative recording form. This system is equally suitable for single trees or large populations. A copy of the form for individual trees is enclosed with this publication, and can be photocopied. Forms for recording many trees can be obtained from English Nature. When more results are obtained it should start to be possible to look at regional differences and highlight potentially valuable sites. Repeat surveys are then needed to assess, and possibly model, mortality rates in key sites. Work of this type has been carried out at Duncombe Park.

As well as recording the condition of the trees at a point in time it is also necessary to record any work done and how the tree responded. It is essential that future generations of people are aware of what has been done in the past and the rationale behind it.

For the better management of the site it may be beneficial to have veteran trees mapped, especially on sites with many individuals. This can be done by compass and tape but increasingly now Geographical Positioning Systems linked to palm top computers are being used for this purpose and are able to provide more accurate positioning. There is scope here for computerised information of each tree (eg from the tree recording forms) to be stored on computer too. As with all computer systems, make sure you keep a back up copy and a paper version too.

Surveying populations of old trees can be time consuming but the information gathered is valuable today and will be especially valuable in years to come. Surveys already completed for sites can yield important information about the age structure, mortality rate and condition of trees.

Further reading: Clayden (1996), Forbes & Warnock (1996), Read, Frater & Noble (1996).

Information to record when working on veteran trees

Date.

Type of tree (ie pollard, lapsed pollard, veteran, maiden).

Species.

Approximate age of tree.

Type of tool used to do the cutting.

Method of cutting (ie slanted, rip, flush cut).

Length of stub left.

Type of bark on each stem and any other characteristics.

Number of branches removed/left.

Situation of the tree, especially the amount of light (exposed or sheltered, etc).

Response 1 year after cutting.

Response 5 years after cutting.

Take photographs before and after cutting and 1 and 5 years after.

12.2 Tree tagging

In areas with many ancient trees it may be necessary to mark or label individuals so that they can be individually identified. Knock-in timber tags are of limited value, rather better are 6 cm stainless steel tags and aluminium nails. If long nails are used, and hammered only 2 cm into the tree, the tags are able to swing freely and the tree can grow a considerable amount before the tag is engulfed in the bark. An alternative is to attach the label to 6 cm of stainless steel or plastic coated wire, and knock a 3 cm aluminium nail all the way into the tree. While the nail will quickly become surrounded by the bark the wire will not. Plastic tags can be used but become brittle and do not last well. Aluminium tags are easily damaged by squirrels, birds and people. Although other methods are available, nails are usually needed to attach tags safely to hard, rugose bark. Aluminium is less likely to prove toxic to the tree and is more sympathetic to chainsaws. Galvanised nails are suitable for the tree but are harmful to lichens.

Modern techniques such as computer chips and transponders are worth watching for in the future. None are routinely used on veteran trees and there are still problems such as securing them in the trees, locating them again and pre-selecting numbers (most use large numbers of random digits).

There is not yet a really good reliable and permanent method for tagging trees.

Further reading: Fay (1996), Fretwell & Green (1996), Key & Ball (1993).