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# Evaluation of the Specialist Survey Method for veteran tree recording

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### *Introduction*

A specialist survey method was developed as part of English Nature's Veteran Tree Initiative in 1997. It was designed to cater for three levels of complexity to accommodate differences in user expertise and survey detail. In 2002/3 a review of the use of the survey method was carried out.

### *What was done*

During the six years of its use, the survey method has been applied to over 45,000 veteran trees by Wildlife Trusts, Local Authorities and private consultants. A questionnaire was sent to a range of users, to seek their opinions on the method itself, how it might be improved and on the use of the results.

### *Results and conclusions*

Use of the method is patchy with a few consultancies making up nearly two-thirds of the records made. It has however been found to be helpful particularly in terms of:

- potential to use volunteers in collecting records;
- a consistent national framework for recording;
- a flexible method that can be adapted to circumstances;
- collection of useful data for subsequent site management.

There were some areas where the method could be improved and a major issue raised was the lack of support for the method and no central collation of results.

*continued >>>*

**Characteristic features of veteran trees that are picked up in the survey method**

- girth large for the tree species concerned;
- major trunk cavities/progressive hollowing;
- naturally forming water pools;
- decay holes;
- physical damage to trunks;
- bark loss/loose bark;
- large quantities of dead wood in the canopy;
- sap runs;
- crevices in the bark, under branches or in the root plate sheltered from direct rainfall;
- fungal fruiting bodies (eg: from heart rotting species);
- high number of interdependent wildlife species;
- epiphytic plants;
- an "old" look;
- high aesthetic interest.

In addition a tree may also:

- have a pollard form or show indications of past management;
- have a cultural/historic value;
- be in prominent position in the landscape.

***English Nature's viewpoint***

The specialist survey method has proved its worth and English Nature will explore to what extent it is able to take forward the suggested improvements. The national collation of records is a more general problem, not confined to veteran trees. English Nature considers that this is best done via Local Record Centres which will link in to the National Biodiversity Network.

***Selected references***

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***Further information***

For the full report or other publications on this subject, please contact the Enquiry Service on 01733 455100/101/102 or email [enquiries@english-nature.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@english-nature.org.uk)

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