

Ancient, Veteran and Heritage Trees

A rough guide to what they are and how to tell them apart

Heritage Tree

This can be a tree that is especially important for any reason you care to think of. It might be historically important, culturally significant, a landmark, rare, aesthetically interesting, or particularly beneficial to wildlife, to name but a few worthy characteristics.

Veteran Tree

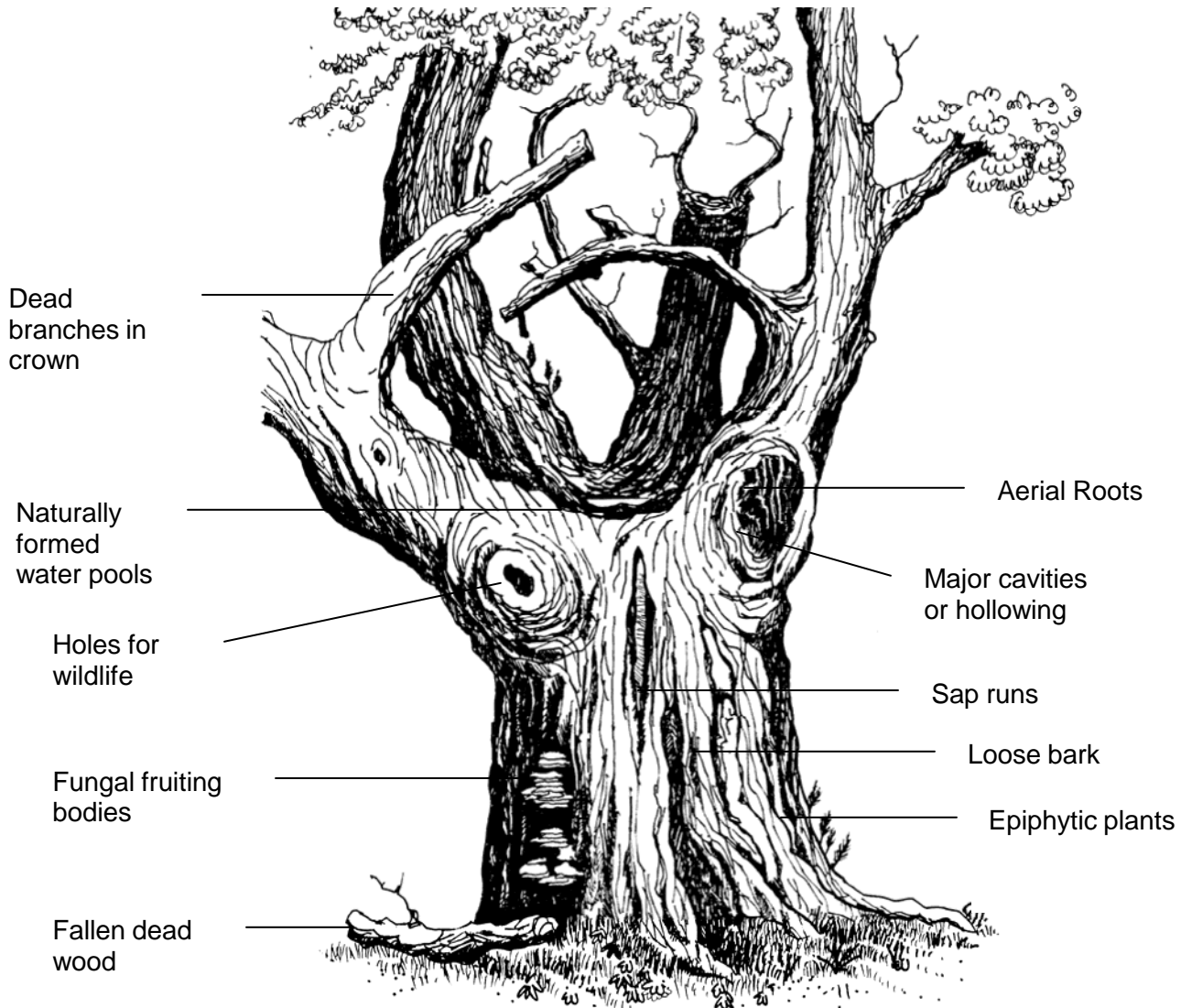
A tree that is of interest biologically, aesthetically or culturally because of its age. The age at which a tree becomes a veteran is not fixed and it also varies with the species concerned or with environmental stress. A normally short lived species such as birch might be a true veteran before a long lived one like oak is even fully grown. Pollarding or natural damage to a tree might speed up the development of veteran characteristics before the tree is truly ancient. The length of time a tree has been growing is related to the diameter of the trunk so our first rough guide is to measure the diameter at breast height (DBH) which is 1.3 metres above ground level. The table below shows how big your tree needs to be before we start to think it might be a veteran

Diameter at Breast Height (DBH)	Species of potential veteran
Over 75 cm	Hornbeam, Holly, Field Maple, Rowan, Yew, Birch, Grey and Goat Willow, and Cherry
Over 100 cm	Oak, Ash, Scots pine, and Alder
Over 150 cm	Sycamore, Lime, Chestnuts, Elm, Poplar, Beech, Other Willows, and other Pines

As well as a large diameter trunk we would expect to find at least three of the following features in a veteran tree, some of which are illustrated overleaf.

- Major cavities or hollowing of the trunk
- Naturally forming water pools
- Decay holes
- Physical damage to the trunk
- Lost or loose bark
- Large quantities of dead wood in the canopy
- Sap runs
- Crevices in the bark, under branches, or in the root plate

- Fungal fruiting bodies
- High numbers of interdependent wildlife species
- Epiphytic plants such as mosses, liverworts, and lichens
- High aesthetic interest



Ancient Tree

So what's the difference between a veteran and an ancient? Well there's no hard and fast rule but the ancient trees are those that have some of the above features but are also of truly great age and are beyond full maturity. This might be older than 400 years for an oak! And this age of tree is likely to have a diameter well over two metres, have significant hollowing of the trunk and natural dieback of the crown. Some trees are mentioned in historical records which can help us to estimate their age.

A very old **Veteran Tree** might well be an **Ancient Tree** but both will be **Heritage trees** as well!