



Ash - *fraxinus excelsior*

 The best time to spot Ash is in early spring (March) when the flower buds are bursting but the trees are not yet in leaf. The buds show up as knobbly, black lumps at the end of the bare branches.

The Ash is common and widespread in Selsdon Wood although nowhere near as frequent as the Oak, the dominant tree species, which outnumbers the Ash by more than 10:1. The most dramatic Ash tree stands alone in the middle of The Gorses (see right 5/7/10) but because of the impenetrable nature of the ground cover (bracken in this photo but now gorse) this is difficult to study closely.

Ash can be seen flanking the western edge of Green Hill and at the top of this field an Ash tree bears the name board for Greenhill Way (see below 23/3/12). The pale grey bark shows the typical rippling lattice pattern and the characteristic stout twigs are tipped with black buds that burst into knobbly purple lumps in the springtime. Once fully open the flowers are purply-green and fluffy (see bottom picture below) and give a mauve tinge to the trees when viewed from a distance.



The leaves are formed of 4 - 7 pairs of leaflets with a terminal one at the end.



The fruit is a single winged key with a twist in the blade, which causes the key to spin in the wind and reach the ground seed-end first. Clusters of keys can often be seen well into the winter after the leaves are shed.

A particularly striking, although rather atypical, Ash can be found in the coppiced area on the western side of The Wend (see below 24/3/12). This tree has 11 trunks and looks as though it may have been coppiced at some time. Another notable specimen is in the northern corner of David's Crook. Atypically, this has drooping branches that hang low beside the path and can thus easily be inspected at close quarters.

The Oak and Ash come into leaf at around the same time in late April/early May and according to folk law:



*If the Oak comes out before the Ash then the summer will be a splash.
If the Ash comes out before the Oak then the summer will be a soak.*

In other words, if the Ash develops leaves before the Oak, this saying predicts it will be a very wet year. This year (2012) the Oak leaves developed first - so a dry summer is predicted.

Take a spring walk around the red trail. Look up to the high branches to spot the Ash trees with the knobbly black buds. Take a look at the bark of those trees. Is it pale grey and rippled?

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Ash is common throughout Selsdon Wood.
The map shows the locations of some notable specimens mentioned overleaf.

