

Hazel - *corylus*



The best time to spot Hazel is when catkins appear on bare twigs as a sign of the coming spring.

Hazel catkins are the first sign of spring in Selsdon Wood, appearing in February when the trees are bare and the ground is cold (top right 12/2/12). Hazel is widely distributed throughout the wood and the most common shrub in the understory.

The long catkins are the male flowers. The tiny, red, female flowers (see below) are difficult to spot. They protrude from the buds before the male catkins on the same bush are ripe to facilitate cross-fertilisation.



The Hazel is subject to coppicing in the eastern border of the wood - along The Wend and Noakes way. This is done in the winter months on a 9-year cycle (see below 21/11/11). The only payment received by the contractor (and Friend of Selsdon Wood) who carries out this work is in the form of the wood he cuts, which he sells as stakes, pea sticks and charcoal.

Temporary high fences are erected around newly coppiced sections to prevent deer from eating the new shoots and plastic sheaths are used to protect newly planted trees (*whips*).



The distinctive leaves are almost round with pointed tips. The fruit, showing in the early autumn is a round nut, green at first then ripening to brown. This cobnut is enclosed within a leafy sheath, which is the origin of the Latin name of the Hazel, *corylus*, derived from the Greek 'horys' meaning helmet. The nuts are edible and a favourite food of squirrels and other small rodents.



Take a walk in early spring to see hazel catkins everywhere as a harbinger of the spring to come.
In early autumn look out for cobnuts before the squirrels eat them all.
Look for signs of nibbling on nuts found on the ground.



Hazel is common and widespread throughout Selsdon Wood.

The map shows the location of the snowy photograph overleaf and the strip of wood that is subject to a commercial 4-hectare hazel coppicing regime with standards. Plots are coppiced on a nine-year rotation to produce pea sticks, beanpoles, hedging and tree stakes and binders. Coppicing is a traditional woodland craft and involves cutting a bush or tree back down to its base, which results in the re-growth of straight shoots. This management practice creates a more open habitat benefiting butterflies and nesting birds, which enjoy the mosaic of light and shade.

