



Hornbeam - *carpinus betulus*



The best time to spot Hornbeam is in summer or autumn when it bears the characteristic fruits.

Hornbeam is widespread and dominant on both sides of the strip of wood between Fields 2 and 3 - see map. One of the most distinctive trees is in the path that crosses the wooded strip between the fields. This has branches that hang low over the path so that walkers must duck to get under them. Here the tree is seen with catkins (right 30/3/12).



Like the Beech the Hornbeam has grey bark and the leaves are very similar to Beech leaves - oval with finely toothed edges. However the Hornbeam leaf (below 17/5/12) is less symmetrical than those of the Beech and of a rougher texture with more pronounced ribbing.



Hornbeam is much easier to distinguish from Beech when in fruit or flower. The catkins (above centre 30/3/12), are very different from rounded Beech flowers and appear in March, before the leaves open. The most distinctive feature of the Hornbeam is the fruit, which is unlike the fruit of any other native tree. It is an elongated cluster of between 10 and 20 seeds, each having a leaflike, papery bract (right 31/5/12). These are green at first turning to brown as autumn approaches. The bracts have 3 lobes and are assymetrical which means that the seeds spin as they fall and thus travel further from the tree.

The name Hornbeam reflects the hardness of the wood which is sometimes called ironwood and is very difficult to work with. It is thus not much used for carpentry but is valuable for items where hardness and durability is required such as gear pegs in traditional windmills, parquet flooring and chess pieces.

Take an autumn walk and look for the Hornbeam along the borders of Vale Meadow and Great Hill.

