

Tree Walk 12/11/22

1 Vale Border

The hedge on the left of the Vale Border path in Field 1 contains 9 tree species that can be identified at this time of year. In the overspill car park is an Apple ¹ – probably a garden escapee as the fruit is much too big to be a Crab Apple. The dominant shrub in the hedgerow is Bullace ² (Wild Damson) identified by its tangled looking black twigs. There also are Field Maple ³, identified by the green buds in opposite pairs, and Turkey Oak ⁴ with strange hairy buds very different from those of the English Oak. There is Sycamore ⁵ with distinctive leaves, a bit like Field Maple but larger, Blackthorn ⁶ with black sloes, Spindle ⁷ with its strange pink and orange berries and Hazel ⁸ with next year's catkins developing. In the northern corner of F2 is a small Cotoneaster ⁹ with red berries - presumably a garden escapee.

2 Up the edge of F2 and then through wooded section to F3

Up the side of F2 the lower part of the hedge is mostly Privet ¹⁰ with little black berries and semi-evergreen leaves. Also in this hedgerow are a few Wayfaring Trees ¹¹ - with cauliflower-like buds and several Whitebeams ¹² with leaves attached that still appear whitish in colour. Copper Beech ¹³ can be seen in this strip of wood although its striking colour is less obvious at this time of year as it blends with the autumnal leaves of other trees. The bare Ash ¹⁴ trees do stand out though. Many of these are dead or dying from Ash Dieback. Cutting through the strip of wood a large Beech ¹⁵ can be seen. In most years there is much mast on the ground beneath ("mast" is a name for the nuts and husks) but that is almost absent this year. Beech has bright smooth grey bark and buds that are brown, long and slim with a cigar-like roll. Often dead leaves remain on the trees. At the exit from the wood into F3 is a Hornbeam ¹⁶. In many years this will still have keys attached but there have been few if any fruits on this tree this year. On leaving the strip the Red Osier Dogwood ¹⁷ can be seen in the hedgerow to the left. This has distinctive red twigs that stand out all through the winter. In the opposite hedgerow on the east of F3 the Common Dogwood ¹⁸ is less showy with purple twigs and black berries.

3 Entering the north wood, following the paths Broad Walk, Beech Grove and then back along Avis Gove

The dominant tree in this part of the wood is English Oak ¹⁹ with its distinctive leaves, deeply grooved bark and twisted branches. The bark is relatively soft and corky and flakes can be broken off. The buds are brown and stubby, alternate and grouped into a cluster at the end of the twig - very different from the buds of the Turkey Oak. The ground is littered with millions of acorns this year, although last year there was hardly a single acorn to be found.

The understorey is dominated by coppiced Hazel. In Beech Grove are two massive Yews ²⁰ which once formed part of the Addington Boundary. There is also a large Cherry ²¹ identified by its shiny, flaking bark with horizontal striations.

At the start of Avis Grove are two Norway Spruce ²² - evergreen conifers identified by their scaly bark and long cones. They are the traditional Christmas Tree and some of their needles and cones may be seen on the ground.

4 Across the field enter Steven's Larch

On entering the dogleg of the Great Field the Larch ²³ can be seen at the eastern end of Steven's Larch. Larch is a conifer with small cones that can be found around the base and reddish deeply grooved bark. Larch is the only conifer found in Britain that is not evergreen - it sheds its needles each autumn.

In Steven's Larch are many Pines ²⁴ - evergreens with large oval cones. Three other evergreens may be spotted in this woodland: Holly ²⁵, Laurel ²⁶ and Yew. Holly is dioecious which means that there are separate male and female plants with only the females producing berries. Laurel is dispersed throughout Selsdon Wood being most common in the northern section. However it is less widespread than it was as the Friends of Selsdon Wood are working to control or eradicate it. Laurel is a Mediterranean species, probably introduced into Court Wood to give cover for game birds. It is spreading steadily by suckering, layering and seeding and it is inhibiting the growth of other plants, poisoning the ground beneath it. The Yew here is relatively young compared to some of those in the wood. Also here there are Birch ²⁷ with distinctive silvery bark and slender green twigs which may have tiny catkins at the ends and a large Cherry.

5 Leave Steven's Larch cross the field and go down Smith Grove

Entering Steven's walk there is a large Hawthorn ²⁸ with thorny stems. There may also be some berries still attached. This tree is one of the first Hawthorns to flower in the spring when it is covered with snow-white blossom. Along Smith Grove are a number of Sweet Chestnuts ²⁹ the spiky nut cases of which can still be seen on the ground although many of the larger nuts have already been collected by foragers. This tree has grey bark with a deep, latticed pattern that often appears to have been twisted round.

The name Linden Glade comes from the 6 Lime ³⁰ (or Linden) trees that form an arc around the rock pile. These have flaky bark and slender twigs with reddish buds. The old pond here disappeared when vandalism and cost caused the water to be turned off.

In Linden Glade is a large Holly that is especially resplendent with berries this year. Beside it are two evergreen Corsican Pines ³¹ which drop cones in the Autumn although these are buried amongst the Brambles and hard to find.

6 Turn right down Pool Grove

To your right is a Rowan ³² with shiny bark and a triangular outline. Only a few of the red berries remain as most have now been taken by birds. Along the length of Pool Grove are many trees already seen. Oak is dominant in the canopy and Hazel in the understory beneath. There is also Hawthorn, Sycamore, Holly, Birch, Ash, Sweet Chestnut and Yew.

7 Emerge into David's Crook

To your left a little way into the meadow is a single White Poplar ³³ behind a large patch of bracken. The bark is silvery grey with distinctive diamond shaped markings known as rhomboid lenticels.

Following the path along the easterly edge of the field there is a vigorous Blackthorn hedge to your left. Just past the bench in the corner, 4 Juniper ³⁴ saplings can be seen - 2 protected by fencing to prevent deer grazing. These were donated to the FSW and planted by our work team a few weeks ago. Even the unprotected ones seem not to have been attacked by deer so far.

On the northern edge of David's Crook is a single Mirabelle Plum ³⁵ which bears tasty fruit often collected by foragers. This species too has borne very little fruit this year.

8 Past the Jubilee Plantation into F2

At the junction with Vincent Avenue is a large Yew to the left and a rather sickly Elder ³⁶. At one time this was resplendent with blossom in the spring and berries in the autumn, but it seems to be dying. This hedgerow also contains a Wild Rose ³⁷ with red hips.

The Jubilee Plantation (originally Oak and Beech) was planted in 1977 by the Croydon Girl Guide Association in commemoration of the Queen's Silver Jubilee. In 2012 the Brownies/Guides planted a further 60 trees to plant to commemorate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee.

To the left of the path by the Jubilee is one of the few Elms ³⁸ in Selsdon Wood - identifiable at this time of year by the pitted appearance of the bark and the three-pointed ends to the terminal leaves a few of which are still attached.

Cutting through into F1 the path leads diagonally down the field and back to the car park.

38 species seen.

Not seen:

Alder
Buckthorn
Buddleia
Bird Cherry
Gorse
Horse Chestnut
Wild Service
Willow