




Bullace - *Prunus insititia*

 The best times to spot Bullace are in spring when the hedgerows are filled with white blossom and in autumn when they bear pendulous black fruits.

Bullace was only identified in Selsdon Wood in 2015 when two members of the FSW noticed that the fruits of the bushes along Vale Border in Fields 1-3 were large and tasty. These bushes had always been assumed to be Blackthorn as the flowers are very similar, but on close inspection were clearly seen to be a different species. No mention of Bullace was made in the 1978 publication by Jack Penry-Jones on behalf of the Croydon Natural History and Scientific Society that listed all known species in Selsdon Wood so they seem to have made the same error.

The differences from Blackthorn are as follows:

1) Leaf - The photo of the two twigs shows how different the leaves are. The one with the fruits on the right is the Blackthorn with sloes - the other Bullace twig has much broader leaves that are more coarsely toothed. The photo shows extreme examples. Some of the bushes along Vale Border have leaves that look half way between these two and it is possible that there is some hybridisation between the two species.



2) Stem - The same photo shows the very black Blackthorn stem and the more reddish-brown stem of the Bullace - this is quite a subtle difference but does show in the lower part of the photo. Blackthorn stems are more twisted and the Bullace straighter and although there are spines on both there are far more on the Blackthorn. Both of those features should be easier to spot in the winter once the twigs are bare.



3) Fruit Appearance - The Bullace fruit is shown in the second photo compared with a sloe and scaled with a 20p piece. The Bullace fruit (left) is larger than the sloe (right). As the third in situ photo shows, the Bullace fruit hangs down from the twig like plums rather than standing above and around it like sloes do and it is solitary not clustered like the sloes.



4) Stone - The Bullace stone - shown left in the 4th photo - is lemon shaped (oval and pointed) as opposed to the more rounded stone of the Blackthorn.



5) Fruit Taste - The ripe fruits are sweet and have the texture of a plum although they do have a slightly bitter tannin finish. When unripe they are very bitter, like sloes.

6) Flowers - The Bullace flowers at the same time as the Blackthorn and the flowers look quite similar - especially when massed. Close up they can be seen to be more widely spaced than the Blackthorn and borne at the same time as the leaves rather than before the leaves as is the case with the Blackthorn.

(photo to come).

Take a spring walk along Vale Border and spot the white blossom.
Return in the autumn to see (and eat) the fruit.

Friends of Selsdon Wood

Working to improve our wood 

Bullace is found as the dominant species in the hedgerow of Vale Border through Fields 1-3

