



# Wyre Forest

National Nature Reserve



## Welcome to Wyre Forest National Nature Reserve

Spread out over nearly 550 hectares of rolling countryside, the Wyre Forest NNR is fantastic space for walking and enjoying England's nature at its best.

The Reserve, which crosses the borders of both Worcestershire and Shropshire, is part of one of the largest ancient lowland oak woods in England, and features a tremendous mixture of different habitats from forest to open grassland, old orchards and stunning, steep-sided valleys.

And it's this variety that wildlife just can't resist, with the Reserve boasting a fantastic record for birds, as well as some nationally important colonies of bats, rare butterflies and a truly massive collection of fungi!

In the past the area was intensively managed to produce charcoal and timber and Natural England is working to restore the coppice system, and bring some structure back to the woodland.

The Wyre Forest NNR is jointly managed by Natural England and the Forestry Commission.



Dowles Brook



© John Robinson

Pearl Bordered Fritilliary

## Seasonal spectacles

The Wyre Forest a great place to visit all year round.

**May** – a great time to see and hear many of the birds that breed on the Reserve, such as woodpeckers, redstarts, pied flycatchers, wood warblers, tree pits and cuckoos.

**June** – the many butterflies and dragonflies that live in Wyre Forest are at their best in early summer.

**October** – the wood and grasslands can be carpeted with troops of colourful fungi, especially after a few days of rain.

**December** – the winter visitors start to arrive from northern Europe, including fieldfare, redwing, siskin, redpoll and if you're lucky, the fabulous crossbill.

## History

The 'Foresta de Wyre' is mentioned in the Domesday Book, but the area is known to have been wooded since at least 900AD.

The forest was popular for hunting throughout medieval times but gradually the wood began to be coppiced in order to produce charcoal, which was used to fire up the furnaces in the new, local iron works.

Coppicing is an ancient woodland practice whereby trees are periodically (every 15 to 20 years) cut down to ground level to produce a renewable harvest of poles for charcoal, firewood, hop-poles etc

Small clusters of charcoal burning hearths can still be found throughout the woodland as well as distinctive earthworks that were once 'bell pits' used to mine coal from beneath the forest floor.

Oak was the coppice species of choice in the forest, although by the late 1700s coppice management meant that there were few mature trees left in the wood.



Dry Mill Lane

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In the early decades of the twentieth century the demand for oak bark for tanning and oak casks for the potteries industry went into steep decline, along with the need for charcoal, which saw large areas of coppice abandoned.

At around this time, the Forestry Commission began operations in the area, planting fast growing species such as spruce, western hemlock, Scots pine and European larch for the timber industry.

The Bewdley to Tenbury railway line ran through the forest for nearly 100 years until it was closed in 1963. The track bed is now one of the main visitor access routes through the forest, and a national cycleway (Route 45) also runs along it.

## Wildlife

### Plantlife

Among the woodland specialists to look out for are the mauve flowers of wood cranesbill, sweet smelling lily-of-the-valley, and the delicate bobbing heads of columbine.

In the valleys and alongside the streams, plants such as the shrubby tutsan, with its yellow flowers, have taken hold, along with fragrant agrimony, and saw-wort, with its serrated leaves. Marsh fragrant orchid and great burnet also enjoy the damper ground.

On the pockets of grassland dotted around the Reserve, you've a good chance of spotting the small bunches of yellowy green flowers on lady's-mantle, as well as moonwort and green-winged orchids.

Both the woodlands and grasslands are also rich in fungi – over 1,400 species have been recorded – and given the right conditions they can produce an incredible display, with a huge array of shapes, sizes and colours.

### Birdlife

The forest is home to many classic woodland species such as chiffchaff, nuthatch and tree creeper. Both tawny owls and sparrowhawks patrol among the tress, while buzzards and ravens are common in more open areas.



© John Robinson



© John Robinson

Nuthatch

Among the forest's coniferous trees there's the chance to see some real English rarities, including the crossbill and powerful goshawk. You may also catch a glimpse of the tiny goldcrest flitting among the treetops.

By the larger streams look out for the unmistakable blue flash of a kingfisher as well as the fascinating dipper, which can literally 'swim' under the water.

In fact, these excellent woods are home to a whole list of other birds too, from redstarts and rare wood warblers, to breeding pairs of woodcocks, linnets, bullfinches and all three species of English woodpecker.

## Mammals

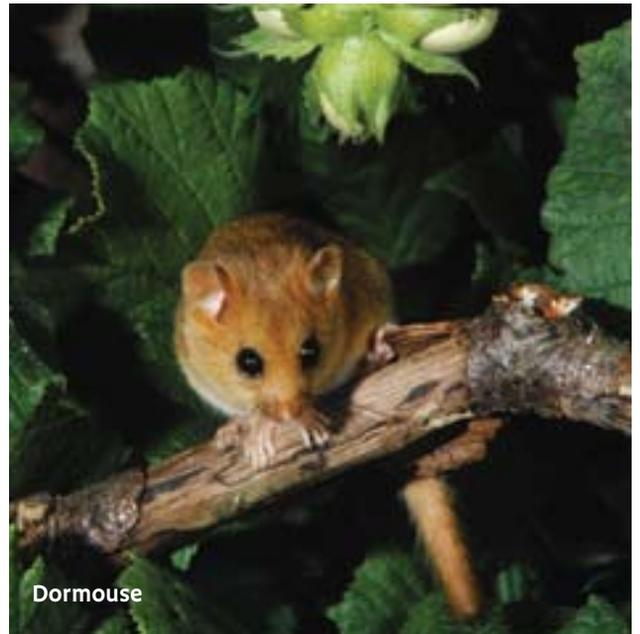
The forest is home to two very elusive and hard to see mammals. One, the sleek, elegant polecat is common across this area of England but it's also nocturnal and only rarely seen. Dormice also live on the Reserve but are also very hard to spot.

Easier to see are the wood's herd of fallow deer, many of which sport their famous white spots and otters too have occasionally been spotted in the woodland's brooks and streams

The Reserve is also home to several colonies of bats, including brown long-eared and pipistrelle.

## Amphibians and reptiles

Many of England's reptiles live on the Reserve, including the adder, with its distinctive pattern of yellow diamonds along its back, the common lizard, grass snake and slow-worm. The best time to see them is early morning, basking in the sun along dry ground on south-facing slopes.



© John Robinson

Dormouse



Fallow Deer

The forest ponds are also home to many amphibians, including great crested and smooth newts, as well as common frogs and toads.

### **Invertebrates**

Not to be out done, bugs and insects love the Wyre Forest, too. In fact, it's now considered to be one of the most important places in England for certain species of butterfly. In recent years, 33 types of butterfly and over 1,150 types of moth have been recorded.

Some of the most spectacular species include the pearl-bordered fritillary, the beautiful white admiral that seems to literally glide through the trees, and the dainty wood white.

Around the brooks and streams look out for golden-ringed and club-tailed dragonflies, as well as the white-legged damselfly.

## **Education**

There are a wealth of educational opportunities on the Reserve and we can cater for any age and any subject area. We also welcome enquiries from any other groups who might like to partake in activities on the Reserve.

Uncllys farm is a Natural England educational access farm with a classroom, situated within the Reserve, which can be booked for farm visits.

For further details contact Tabatha Leigh, the Reserve's Community Outreach Adviser on 01299 400686, 07595647709 or [tabatha.leigh@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:tabatha.leigh@naturalengland.org.uk)



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Adders

## Events

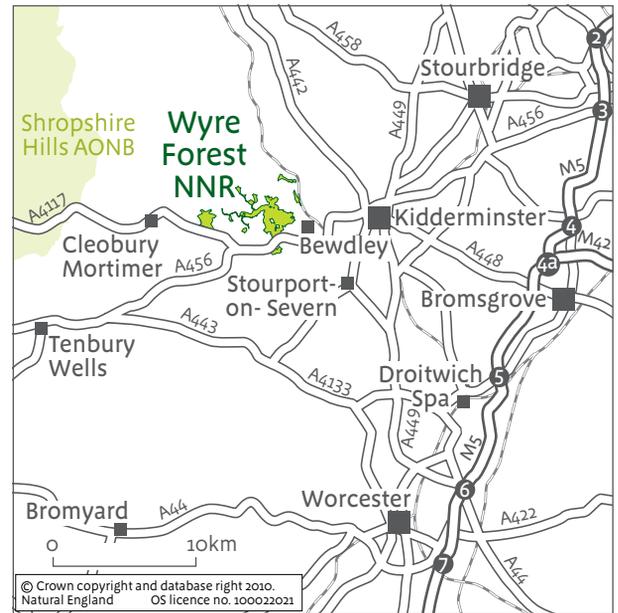
For full details of all the events held at the Reserve please visit: <http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/conservation/designatedareas/nnr/events/westmidlands/default.aspx>

## Access

The main path across the Reserve is a bridleway following the line of Dowles Brook. A series of footpaths connect this central route with the main access points around the forest.

There are also a number of way-marked trails, some of which are suitable for wheelchair users. Natural England is working to improve access by developing a number of new, wider woodland trails.

There are also family cycle routes through the Reserve and the national cycle trail (Route 45) crosses the forest, connecting Bewdley and Buttonoak. The disused railway line forms a part of the cycle route and also provides a popular 'all ability' route from the car park on Dry Mill Lane.



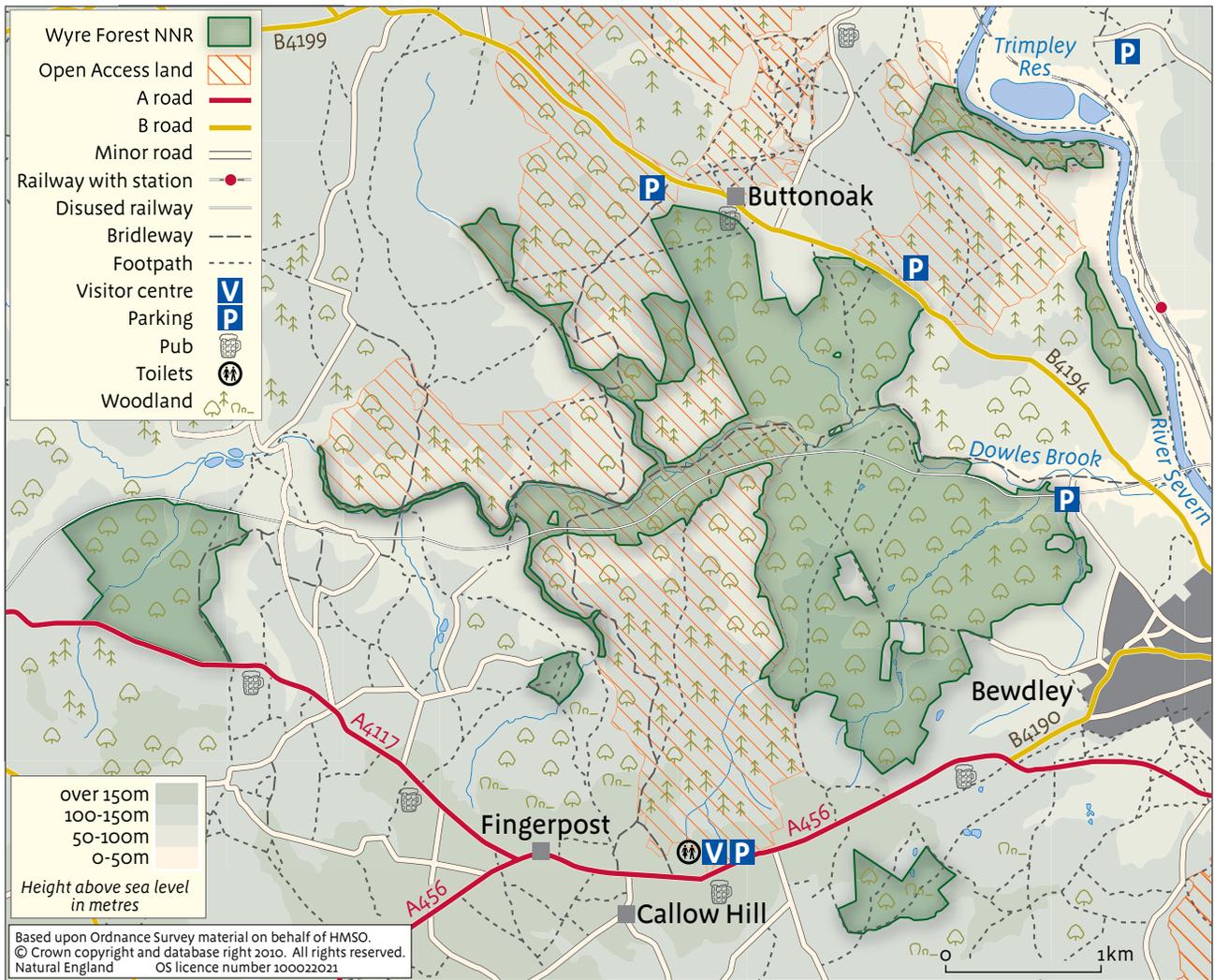
## Location

Wyre Forest is 1km from Bewdley on the A456, and 7km from Kidderminster.

By road, the forest is accessed via the A456 and B4194. There is only one car park on the NNR itself, at Dry Mill Lane.

Other car parks are along the B4194, 0.5km west of the village of Buttonoak, and at the Forestry Commission's Wyre Forest Discovery Centre at Callow Hill on the A456.

The nearest mainline train station is in Kidderminster. Local bus services between Bewdley and Kidderminster are provided by First Group (0871 200 2233).



## Facilities

Wyre Forest is a true nature reserve and the chance to experience nature at first hand. As a result there are no visitor facilities on the Reserve.

Toilet and refreshment facilities can be found in local villages and at the Wyre Forest Visitor Centre and Discovery Centre. The centre has a restaurant, toilets and disabled facilities, and runs regular activities and craft days for children.

## Please follow the Countryside Code

- Be safe, plan ahead and follow any signs.
- Leave gates and property as you find them.
- Protect plants and animals and take your litter home.
- Keep dogs under close control.
- Consider other people.

## For further information please contact the NNR team:

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Tel: 01299 400686

**Front cover image: Wyre Forest Oaks**

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Catalogue Code: NE279

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