

Managing trees & scrub for water voles



Wetlands and watercourses that are heavily shaded by trees are not good for water voles. Shade restricts the growth of lush vegetation on the banks and margins of the water, which water voles rely on for food and cover from predators. Branches of trees may also provide perching sites for predators, such as herons and birds of prey. In areas where water vole populations are vulnerable it is especially important to keep trees and scrub under control.

HOW DO I MANAGE TREES AND SCRUB?



A mix of trees and open areas along rivers and wetland areas is ideal for providing habitat for a wide range of wildlife. However, where trees and scrub are unmanaged they can quickly become dominant and the site becomes unsuitable for water voles.

Tree planting

Many rivers and wetlands in Hertfordshire are well populated by trees. When managing a riverbank consider whether it is necessary to plant trees and shrubs. In areas where there is little unshaded water do not plant more trees or hedgerows! Where tree planting is necessary, try creating clusters of trees and leaving open areas that would be suitable for water voles.

Pollarding

Tree pollarding is a technique traditionally used for managing trees within grazed landscapes. Branches are regularly removed above head height so that re-growth can not be browsed by stock, providing a regular supply of firewood and also increasing the life-span of trees. Today, pollarding is a useful technique for preventing riverside and wetland trees from becoming top-heavy and falling over.



The regular removal of branches also reduces shading of banks.

Willow, ash, hornbeam and oak are traditionally suitable for pollarding. Not all trees are tolerant to pollarding.

It is best to carry out pollarding on young trees and those that have been previously pollarded.



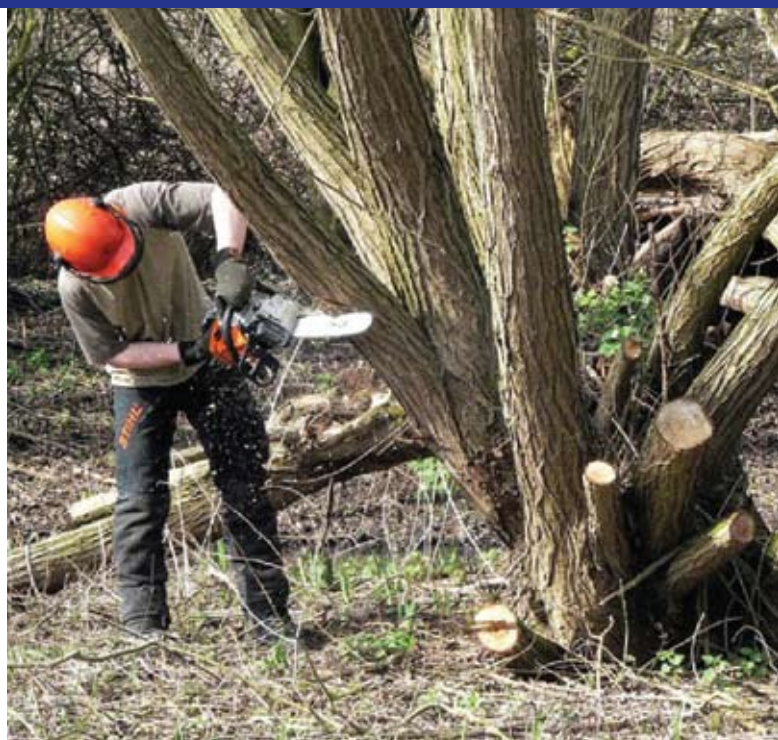


Coppicing

Coppicing is a traditional method of woodland management in which tree stems are regularly cut back to a stump known as a 'stool'. This encourages multiple new shoots to be produced from the original trunk of the tree that was traditionally harvested for firewood and bean poles. Coppicing is carried out during the dormant winter phase as new growth is produced in the spring. New growth should be protected from grazing by deer and cattle. Hazel, alder, ash, oak, willow and hornbeam are all suitable for coppicing.

Hedgerows

Do not plant hedgerows or trees directly adjacent to watercourses as this will cause shading over time. Where hedgerows exist alongside waterbodies, they should be managed routinely to prevent growth over the water. Water voles will eat hedgerow fruit, but where hedges shade the water and banks they will deter water vole presence.



WHEN SHOULD I MANAGE TREES AND SCRUB?

Tree and scrub management is best undertaken in the winter, between October and the end of February. Trees are in their dormant phase during this time and will

respond better to management. This timing will also avoid the bird nesting season.

BEFORE YOU START

- Check trees for roosting bats and nesting birds – if you disturb or damage them you will be breaking the law! For more information and advice contact Natural England www.naturalengland.org.uk
- Check with your Local Authority whether trees have a Tree Protection Order, planning conditions or constraints, or are within a Conservation Area.
- Tree felling may require a licence from the Forestry Commission. See their website for guidance www.forestry.gov.uk
- Remove non-native trees or scrub first. Rhododendron is particularly invasive and not of high value to wildlife.

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For more information contact:

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FURTHER INFORMATION

**Water Vole Conservation Handbook,
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