

FLEET POND LOCAL NATURE RESERVE

A LOOK AT SOME OF FLEET POND'S TREES AND SHRUBS

Fleet Pond has specimens of almost all of Britain's native trees. There are also a few non-native trees that have, never-the-less, been in the British Isles for many years. Trees offer a number of clues to help you to identify them and the following will show you how to find clues to their identity.

Many British trees and shrubs lose their leaves in winter. These are called deciduous trees. Those that keep their leaves are called evergreen trees. We have both kinds at Fleet Pond.

One of the easiest to identify is the **Silver Birch** because it has very distinctive white bark with dark lines or stripes across it.

The shape of the leaf is another clue. Each ends in a sharp point.

At Fleet Pond we have another birch – the **Downy Birch**. The best way to tell which birches are the Downy ones is to feel the leaves. Downy Birch leaves are not as bright green and have a softer feel to the fingers. A mature Birch tree will produce many thousands of tiny seeds each year in catkin-like bunches.



One of our most common trees is the evergreen **Scots Pine**. This can be identified as it is evergreen and keeps its needle-shaped leaves all year. Another clue will be found around the tree on the ground – the small cones which hold the seeds of the tree between the scales.

Shake a whole cone over your hand; some of the seeds might fall out for you to inspect. They are like dried tadpoles: a hard dark seed with a “tail” that is designed to help wind carry the seed away from the tree.



Another common tree at Fleet Pond is the **Alder**. This tree likes wet soil, so Fleet Pond is an ideal place for it to thrive. The best clue to identify an Alder is the tiny seed cones, which it keeps on its branches throughout the winter. New cones are hard and green.

Small birds like Blue Tits, Great Tits, Chaffinches and Siskins eat hundreds of the Alder seeds and scatter the tiny cones around below the trees.

Look among the leaf litter and see if you can find some.

The tree that provides home to very many different insects and provides food for many birds is the **English Oak**. A mature Oak is a very handsome tree, but we only have a few very old Oaks at Fleet Pond. Most of our Oaks are quite young.



Oak leaves take a long time to rot down, so look around the base of the tree for the long, lobed, brown winter leaves. If you are lucky you might find an acorn, but Grey Squirrels and Jays have probably eaten most of them. Oaks can be attacked by insects that lay eggs in leaf or flower buds. The insects cause the buds to become swollen and distorted. Examples of these misshapen buds are Oak apples and leaf galls. Look among the leaf litter to see if you can find any of these clues to insect attack.



The **Sweet Chestnut** is quite a rare tree at Fleet Pond. This is not considered a native tree to Britain, but has been with us since the days of the Romans. There is a large one by the lower path just below the Picnic Site. It is deciduous, so in winter you will need to look for other clues on the ground. Most noticeable is the prickly “hedgehog” seed case, which can hold four chestnuts. The leaves are long and glossy with “saw-tooth” edges

Squirrels enjoy eating the nuts, but you should be able to find some of the broken, prickly cases among the leaf litter.

The other tree that is quite rare at Fleet Pond is the **Beech**.

There is one on the steep bank, opposite the Sweet Chestnut below the Picnic Site. There is a group of these smooth-barked trees in Brookly Wood, close to the main footpath on the western side. Like Oak leaves, Beech leaves take a long time to rot. The Beech is a tree that is often planted as a hedge as the leaves, bronze-brown in colour, stay on the tree all winter. The seed cases are very hard and covered in bent and twisted spines. These are called Beech Mast. Squirrels like to eat the small nuts. In autumn look among the leaf litter for the hard seed cases. They are smooth and silky to touch inside, rough and prickly outside.



One of our specialities at Fleet Pond is a shrub called **Bog Myrtle** or **Sweet Gale**. The flowers, like small yellow/brown catkins, form in very early spring before the leaves grow. In winter the buds are bronze in colour. This shrub loves wet soils and we have cleared a special glade for it near to Westover Road, called Bog Myrtle Glade.

The best way to identify this shrub is from its pungent smell. Take a leaf between your fingers and rub the bud gently. A pungent smell, like a menthol inhaler will be released. This smell is much stronger when the leaves have fully formed and on a hot day the plants release the aroma from the leaves.



A tree that provides a valuable food source for our birds is the Rowan or Mountain Ash. White flowers in spring are followed by bunches of bright red berries in autumn. These are much

enjoyed by Blackbirds, Song Thrushes, Starlings and other birds when insects are becoming hard to find.

The soft green leaves are set opposite each other along a thin central stem.



A tree that is most often seen at Fleet Pond as a shrub or tight group of tall, woody stems is the Hazel. Hazel trees at Fleet Pond have been coppiced in the past and are being coppiced again as part of our management programme. Coppice is the practice of cutting a tree down to soil level to encourage the growth of a thick group of long, narrow stems. These stems were used in fencing, hurdle making and for poles to support garden or farm plants like hops, beans and peas.

Hazel produces a nut that is a favoured food of many small mammals. It provides a nutritious food that can be stored over winter in their burrows by voles or mice or buried in the soil by squirrels. In spring

hazel produces long, golden-green male catkins full of pollen.

Some examples of the bark of our more common trees follow.



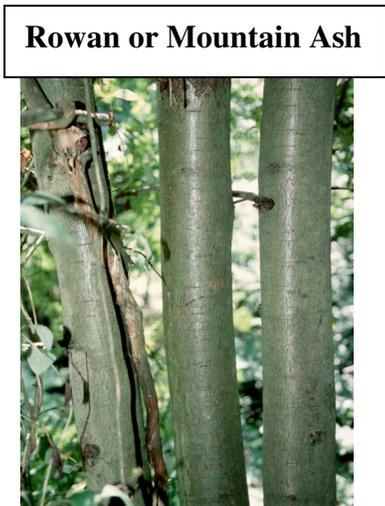
English Oak



Silver Birch



Scots Pine



Rowan or Mountain Ash



Alder



Sweet Chestnut



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