

# Grafton Wood

## Nature Reserve



This leaflet is intended as an introduction to the wildlife of Grafton Wood. It shows walks from Grafton Church, Kington and Dormston Village Hall car parks and the Flyford Arms across farmland on public footpaths to the wood. Please keep to the footpaths and keep dogs on leads. The wood is open to the public who may walk on any of the paths and rides.



## Grafton Wood

Grafton Wood is the largest of the remnants of Feckenham Forest. It is a nature reserve jointly owned by Butterfly Conservation and Worcestershire Wildlife Trust with SSSI status. It comprises approximately 150 acres of hazel and ash coppice with oak standards. The wood was previously owned by Croome Estate who, apart from planting two small plots of conifers and leasing the shooting rights, undertook very little management work. Coppice management has been reintroduced in the centre of the wood and rides have been opened up to allow more light to reach the wood floor. This will encourage a better flora and therefore more invertebrates.



## Ancient Trees

Grafton has about 40 ancient trees around its perimeter. These are old pollards mostly of Oak, a few Ash and Field Maple. Old trees are considered very important by naturalists as they have their own flora and fauna, particularly lichens, mosses and liverworts. Nationally rare fungi and beetles have also been found in ancient trees. It is thought that the poles from these trees were used as firewood by local people before the wide distribution of coal. The act of pollarding helps to lengthen the life of the tree. However, in recent years, the lack of coppicing has meant that these old trees have been shaded out by the more vigorous growth of the younger Ash. Recently this problem has been addressed by arboreal work around the trees to allow more light in. The Grafton specimens have been numbered and entered into a database as part of a national initiative.



## Brown Hairstreak

Worcestershire's rarest butterfly is only found in the Forest of Feckenham and attracts visitors from far and wide. The nationally endangered Brown Hairstreak is now extinct from all surrounding counties but survives in this small corner of Worcestershire. The most attractive of all Britain's Hairstreak butterflies, the Brown Hairstreak breeds on sloe bushes around the edges of Grafton Wood and also on blackthorn hedgerows in the surrounding fields. The adult butterfly is on the wing from mid-August through to the end of September and the females can be spotted often basking on blackthorn leaves between bouts of egg-laying. The male butterfly is much more elusive spending most of its life at treetop level mainly around Ash trees growing on the woodland edge or along rides. Eggs remain on the blackthorn throughout the winter and are very vulnerable to annual flailing of hedgerows. Every year some 90% of all eggs laid are lost in this way and the butterfly's long term future depends on the introduction of more sympathetic hedgerow management by local farmers. A number of hedges are already being managed on a rotation basis to benefit the Brown Hairstreak and an advisory leaflet is available from Butterfly Conservation detailing how landowners can become "Hairstreak Champions".



## Bats

In 2010 the nationally rare Bechstein's Bat was found in Grafton Wood. As a result local bat enthusiasts are embarking on a project to radio track this species to learn more about its habitat requirements.

## Butterflies

Woodland is a very important habitat for Britain's butterflies with the best woods in southern England supporting upwards of 30 species. Historically, some of the richest woods for butterflies and moths were those where regular woodland management meant that trees were cut on rotation creating areas open to the sun where wild flowers and shrubs could flourish, many of which were used for nectaring and egg-laying. Grafton Wood, which is managed for butterflies as a priority, has a list of 31 species. Many of these are Biodiversity Action Plan Species (BAP), including Brown Hairstreak, White Admiral and White-letter Hairstreak. The Pearl-Bordered Fritillary was introduced in 2011.



## Flora

The spring flora in Grafton is quite spectacular. The south of the wood has a mass of Bluebells and the north, a fine display of Ramsons (Wild Garlic). Grafton is also proud of its Orchids — Early Purple, Greater Butterfly and Birds-nest Orchids in spring and later in the summer Violet Helleborine. One of the rarities for the county is the tiny Lesser Centaury which grows on the rabbit-grazed rides. Herb Paris, a classic indicator of ancient woodland, may also be found. The broad rides and glades are the places to look for ground flora that prefer damp conditions e.g. Hairy St John's-wort, Ragged Robin and Marsh Ragwort. The trees in Grafton are mainly Ash, Field Maple and Oak. Whilst the Ash and Field Maple grow naturally, many oaks were planted at the start of the 20th Century. The under-storey is Hazel, Bramble, Spindle and Dogwood. The evergreen Spurge Laurel, which blooms in spring, may be found in several places.



## Birds

Grafton has over 40 species of breeding birds. Whilst there are no rarities, good numbers of typical woodland birds may be seen: Sparrowhawk, Great Spotted and Green Woodpecker, Nuthatch and the typical woodland warblers. It is a pleasure to have the Buzzard breeding again in this part of the country. It seems to be one of the few birds to be increasing in population in recent years. In the winter, the wood hosts flocks of foraging tits joined by flocks of Siskin and Lesser Redpoll. Woodcock may also be flushed from the undergrowth.



## Grafton Wood Waymarked Walk (Follow the butterflies on the posts)

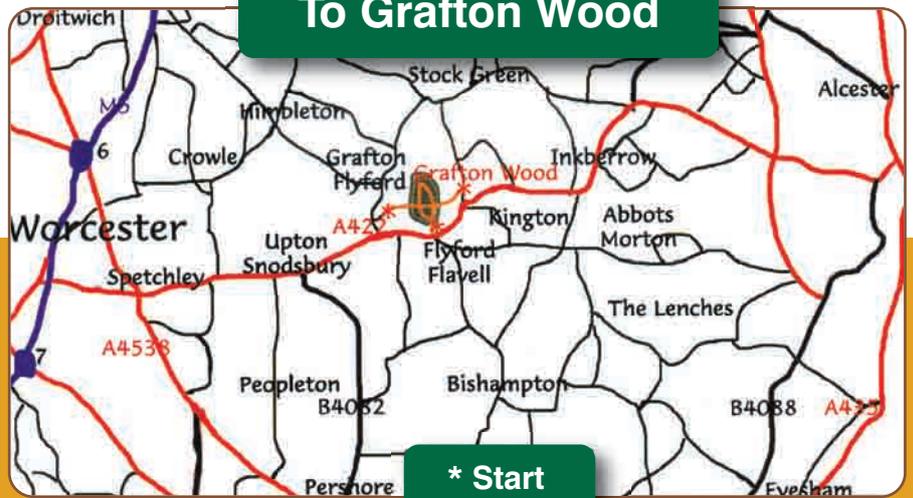


The Guided Walk within the wood is waymarked with **Butterflies and a blue ring around the posts**. The whole walk takes 1.5 to 2 hours but may be cut short at any point. Grafton Wood is on Lias Clay which can be wet at any time of the year, so heavy boots or shoes are recommended.

Public rights of way in yellow showing the access to the waymarked route around the wood. Parking at Kington and Dormston Village Hall, Flyford Arms or Grafton Flyford Church.



## To Grafton Wood



Grafton Wood is located on the A422 between Worcester and Stratford. Turn north at Grafton Mill, 7 miles east of Worcester and park at Grafton Flyford Church car park (Grid Ref: SO962557).

Butterfly Conservation is the largest insect conservation charity in the world and works in partnership with landowners, business, government and other wildlife groups to conserve our declining butterflies and moths.

Worcestershire Wildlife Trust owns and manages over 70 nature reserves that form part of our vision for a Living Landscape. By working with other landowners, managers and communities we aim to restore, recreate and reconnect fragmented natural habitats to achieve a landscape where wildlife can flourish and people can lead healthier and happier lives. The Trust is part of a national network of 47 Wildlife Trusts.



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