

WILDLIFE IN THE VALE OF LORTON: VALLEY WOODS

Written by Alan Gane

Compared to other nearby forests, such as those at Ennerdale and Whinlatter, the wooded areas in the valley are small, but are nevertheless invaluable habitats for plants, birds and animals. Each is mixed woodland, with pedunculate or sessile oak, beech, silver birch and some alder, with understorey including holly, hazel and bramble.

Holme Wood extends along much of the south eastern shore of Loweswater, part of Lanthwaite Wood borders the north eastern shore of Crummock Water, while Burtness Wood runs along the south western shore of Buttermere. The smaller area of Flass Wood lays below the northern end of Mellbreak, while Long How and Nether How at Buttermere are too good to miss. Although Holme Wood and Burtness Wood border lakes, Lanthwaite Wood has the added attraction that it also borders the upper reach of the river Cocker, which adds interest. Lanthwaite probably has the most extensive flora. In spring, there are primroses and bluebells, but the Holme Wood display of bluebells is especially striking.



There is wood anemone and wood sorrel, woody nightshade and the delicate and very attractive enchanter's nightshade. There is sanicle, herb Robert, the occasional yellow pimpernel, ransoms or wild garlic and by the river is some guelder rose. There is honeysuckle or woodbine and, between the weir and the pumping house at the end of Crummock, there is dyer's greenwood, sometimes skullcap and many more.

The woods are home to lots of species of birds too, although in many cases the numbers of individuals have fallen over

the last twenty years. There are blue tits, coal tits and great tits; wrens flit among the understorey and in summer there are substantial families, parents and young flocking together. There are a number of warblers, not least chiff-chaff. Tree



creepers are to be seen hopping up the tree trunks and probing the bark with their delicate curved beaks, while among the hole-nesters are the pied flycatchers and sometimes redstarts with their brick-red plumage. Great spotted woodpeckers may be seen, too, the male with that scarlet crest, while buzzards soar overhead. Alder attracts that beautiful ornithological confection, the long tailed tits, with their black, white and pink plumage, surely one of our prettiest birds.



Needless to say, there are sometimes surprises too, such as a woodcock, a pair of tawny owls sharing a branch perch, and even a goosander nesting in a hollow tree.

There are also animals to be seen. Each of the woods is visited by red squirrel, fox badger and deer, any one of which may be seen, but especially at dawn or dusk. On making such a sighting, stand still at once, keep still, keep quiet and this will often provide unforgettable minutes of mutual inspection. Other, less frequently seen inhabitants include the common toad, slow worm, the common lizard, wasp nests, forest bugs on foliage, hover flies and moths. Oak trees are home to some 260 species of insect, so there is plenty to look out for.





Then there are the fungi, such as the scarlet 'mushrooms' of the poisonous fly agaric, the black and white ink caps and the stinkhorn, with its pungent smell which can be detected from yards away. All these, and many more examples of forest life are here to be hunted for, studied and photographed.

Walk early, walk late, walk softly and LOOK - and many of the secrets of the forest will be revealed!



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