

I-Spy on Hocombe Mead in November 2020



Grey Squirrel

Sciurus carolinensis

The grey squirrel is the easiest of our mammals to see, it was introduced into the UK from North America in the mid-19th century and became established in the wild by the beginning of the 20th century. The grey squirrel eats acorns, beech mast, leaves, shoots, buds and flowers, it's nest called a drey, which can be seen high in trees, is the size of a football and is made up from twigs and dead leaves, lined with dry grasses.

Can you spot a squirrel's drey in the trees?



Alder

Alnus glutinosa

Alder is a common tree of riversides, fens and wet wooded areas and as they have long tap roots they can also survive when there is a drought. The tree is the only tree to display catkins and fruits (cones) at the same time. In the past the wood was for the making of clogs, posts under bridges and charcoal for gunpowder.

Why do you think Alder was used to make clogs and the posts of river bridges?



Woolly Milk Cap

Lactarius torminosus

Hocombe Mead is an ideal environment for this fungus as it favours damp, acid soil woodland containing Birch trees. Hocombe Mad provides all of these features. The fungus, which grows on the woodland floor in Autumn, has a rounded cap at first which gradually flattens and then becomes depressed with a dip in the middle.

If you find one of these can you see birch trees nearby?



Cushion moss

Leucobryum glaucum

Mosses hold water for long periods of time and release it slowly into the soil to the benefit of other plants. Mosses help to prevent soil erosion and the loss of nutrients in the soil.

When you find some Cushion Moss do you think it is one big plant or many small ones?



Sweet Chestnut

Castanea sativa

The Sweet Chestnut is a member of the same family as Oak and Beech; it is thought to have been introduced to the British Isles by the Romans. The nuts of the Chestnut are very nutritious and are rich in vitamins and minerals. Roman soldiers were given a chestnut porridge before fighting a battle.

Why do you think Roman soldiers were given chestnut porridge before a battle?



Common Earthball

Scleroderma citrinum

This is a fungus that likes oak, beech and birch woods which have acid soils. It likes to live on compacted paths. It is best not to touch this as they can be poisonous. If you find one of these, can you see oak beech or birch trees nearby.



Common Stump Brittlestem

Psathyrella piluliformis

This fungus, as its name suggests lives on old tree stumps and broken branches on the ground. Fungi are useful as, together with bacteria, they return dead material to the soil in the form of nutrients and minerals so that other plants can use it. One could say that they are nature's recyclers. What would happen if fungi and bacteria did not break down dead matter and return it to the soil?



Heather

Calluna vulgaris

An alternative name for this plant is Ling. It has been conserved and propagated on Hocombe Mead in an attempt to re-establish the heathland that once covered much of the area.

Its Latin name comes from a Greek word that means beautify or sweep clean – can you suggest a reason why that is?