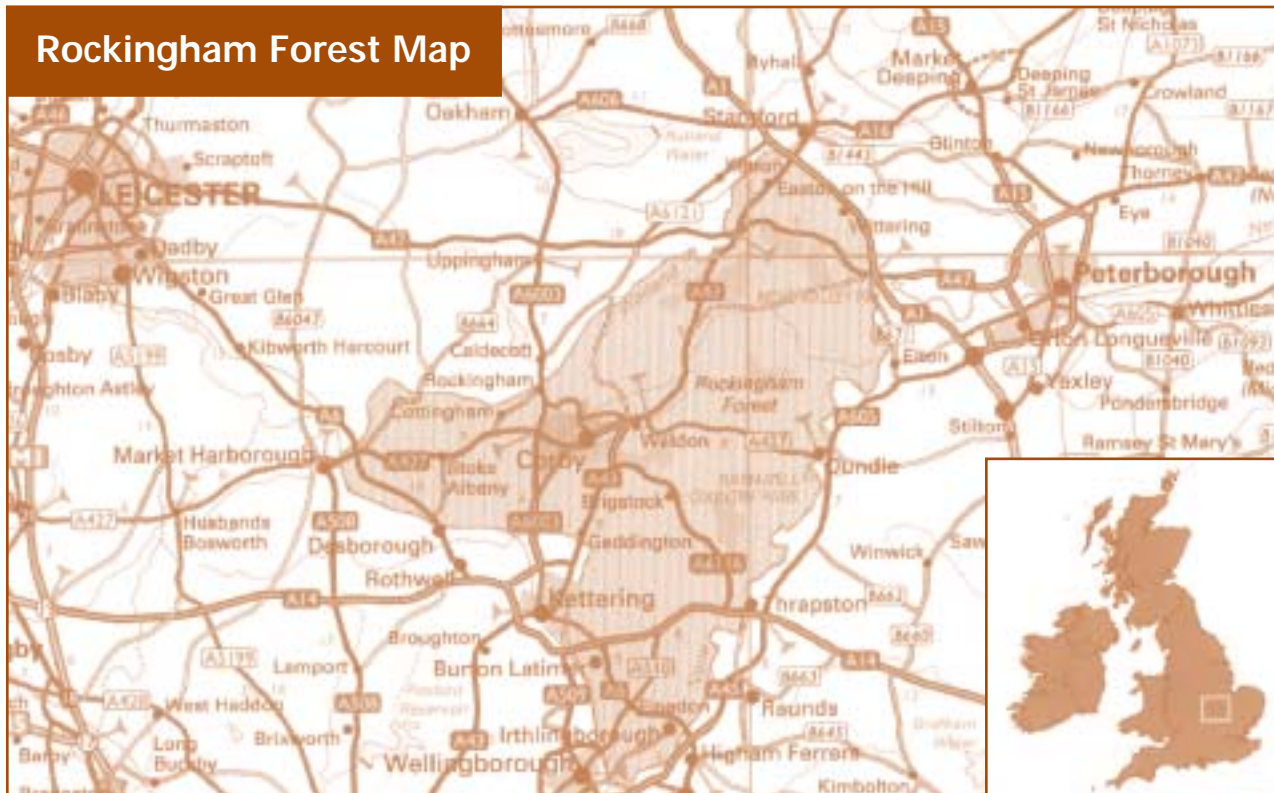


# The Rockingham Forest

## Rockingham Forest Map



Rockingham Forest was once part of a great prehistoric forest, which stretched from Peterborough to Oxford. This area was not only covered by trees, but also included farmland and numerous small villages.

The East Midlands area has always been well populated because of the natural resources it contains. Archaeological remains in Rockingham Forest date back to the Bronze Age.

The forest was a centre of industry as long ago as the Iron Age. Ironstone rocks were quarried to make tools and weapons. To extract the iron from the rock, the people needed to heat the rock in large fire ovens called furnaces. Charcoal was produced by very slowly burning wood from the forest, and they used this to fire the ovens.

In *medieval* times, Rockingham was a Royal Hunting Forest. Men on horseback

would have hunted large animals such as deer and wild boar here.

Since then, approximately half of the woodland areas have been lost, but Rockingham Forest today is much the same as it was, with wooded areas divided up by farmland and small villages. The landscape is gently rolling, and the soil is mostly heavy clay. There are also areas of limestone rock, which are still quarried today.

Rockingham Forest lies on a plateau of clay soil between two river valleys. The rivers are the Welland and the Nene.



# The Rockingham Forest



## Rockingham Forest

- The woodland areas of Rockingham Forest that remain are all 'ancient woodland'. This means that trees have been growing on these sites for at least 400 years.
- In the *ancient woodland*, ash and field maple are the most common trees with plenty of oak. There are also some rare trees such as the small-leaved lime and wild service tree.
- The woods were managed for many centuries by *coppicing*. This involves cutting the trees and shrubs close to the ground. The remaining stumps or 'coppice stools' would then produce many new branches which would grow for about 10–20 years before being cut again. Local people would have used the cut branches for everything from house building to fencing, and for firewood and charcoal.
- Some trees were left to grow to full height, such as oak trees. These would have been cut down for timber, which was used for ship building, building materials and making furniture. The bark was also used for leather tanning. Many people were employed to turn wood in pole lathes to make chair legs or spindles for chair backs.
- It is now cheaper to get wood from abroad, so the Rockingham Forest woodlands are mainly managed for nature *conservation* and public enjoyment, although some still produce timber.
- Many wild flowers grow in woodlands. These include bluebells, St John's wort and meadow cranesbill. These flowers grow best in places where light reaches the woodland floor. Red kites nest high in the trees. Woodpeckers, finches, tits, nuthatches and treecreepers also live in the woods, along with foxes, badgers, dormice and other mammals. Dormice are rare throughout the UK and are found only in woods that have been coppiced and in overgrown hedgerows.
- Some animals cause damage to the trees, and have to be carefully managed. These animals include grey squirrels, rabbits, edible dormice and deer.
- Many insects live in woods, especially where there are lots of dead trees and fallen wood. Butterflies can be seen in clearings and on the woodland edges and bees collect nectar from the wild flowers.

# The Rockingham Forest

## Wildlife in Rockingham Forest

One of the most important features of Rockingham Forest is the mosaic of wooded areas and open farmland.

Farming in this area is mainly arable, with crops of oilseed rape and wheat. You can also see livestock such as sheep.

Within the forest there are wild flower meadows, which support a huge variety of plants and insects. Among the grasses there are green-winged orchids, cowslips and yellow rattle. Sheep are used to graze the meadows in the winter months to prevent rough grasses and *scrub* bushes from growing.

Butterflies also thrive in the forest. Mature oaks are the ideal *habitat* for the rare purple hairstreak butterfly, whereas in the open areas of woodland grizzled and dingy skippers can be found.

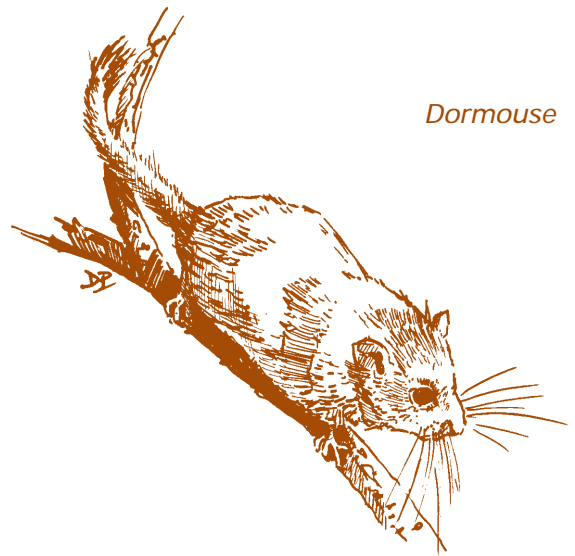
The meadows and grasslands support marbled whites and common blues. Along the woodland paths brimstone, speckled wood, ringlet and comma butterflies are commonly seen.



Comma butterfly

The *understorey* shrubs found beneath the tall trees in the wood are also important for wildlife. Many birds and insects find food and shelter in the hawthorn, blackthorn and hazel, and it is also home to dormice.

Within Rockingham Forest, there are many places where we can see into the past, to look at the lives of the people who lived here centuries ago.



Dormouse

The *archaeology* of the forest is very important. You can see Bronze Age burial mounds, *medieval* stone hunting lodges and evidence of ancient deer enclosures. Ditches and banks mark the boundaries of woodland areas owned by different landowners. You can also see more recent history, like a runway dating from World War II.

All the different areas of the Rockingham Forest are valuable to people too, as many visitors come here to follow the woodland paths, to exercise dogs or to use the mountain bike trails. The many different plants, birds and butterflies are another reason why people like to walk within the forest and learn about its wildlife.

# The Rockingham Forest

## Traditional building in the East Midlands

With such a large supply of wood, buildings in the Rockingham Forest would originally have been constructed with a timber frame. Medium-sized oak beams were used for the frame, and the spaces filled with a mesh of woven sticks called 'wattle'. A plaster-like substance known as 'daub' was used to fill in the gaps. This building method is therefore known as 'wattle and daub'.

The traditional coppice management of hazel would have produced long, straight sticks, which were bent into thatching spars and used for thatching cottage roofs with reeds from the local area. Thatched cottages can still be seen

in some of the villages in the Rockingham Forest area. Hazel and other coppice wood was also used to produce wooden fences called hurdles. The Royal hunting forest of Rockingham was only one day's horse ride from London, which made it a favourite place for rich people and royalty to have a second home. Because of this, there are many grand country houses and parks in and near the Forest area, such as Boughton House, Deene Park, Kirby Hall, and Lyveden New Bield.

In the more recent centuries, many of the buildings in the East Midlands were built with limestone quarried from the Rockingham Forest area, and were tiled with slates from Collyweston, a village at the northern end of the forest.



*Traditional slate and thatched buildings*