

15. FAIROAK VALLEY AND FAIR OAK COLLIERY



The foxglove, *Digitalis purpurea*, flowers from June to September. Look out for it in woodland areas.
Image courtesy of Thomas Mueller

The forest

Cannock Chase is predominantly a pine forest of mostly Corsican pine, with larch and broadleaf trees adding diversity. Pine trees provide shelter and homes for birds such as siskins and goldcrest, and shelter for animals such as deer.

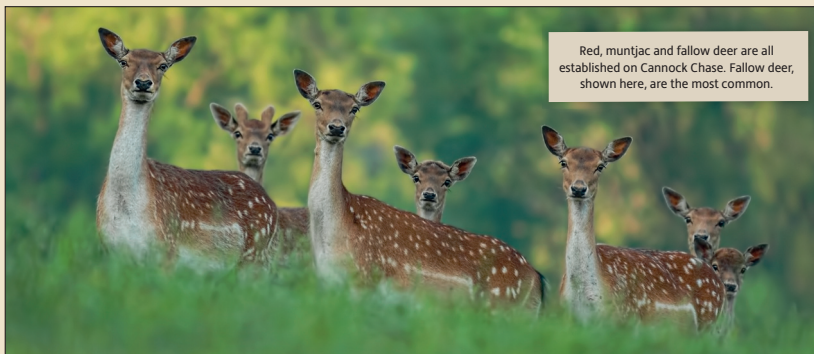
Dead trees are left where they fall to provide a habitat for insects, mammals, and birds including owls, buzzards and woodpeckers.



The crossbill, *Loxia curvirostra*, is a type of finch. Its hooked bill is crossed over at the tips, which helps it to extract seeds from conifer cones. You might spot a crossbill in this area fluttering from cone to cone, or flying at treetop height in family groups or larger flocks.



The adder, *Vipera berus*, is found on heathland areas and at the edge of woodlands on Cannock Chase. Adders are cold-blooded. You might see them raising their body temperature by basking in the warm early-morning sunshine.
Image courtesy of Mike Lane



Red, muntjac and fallow deer are all established on Cannock Chase. Fallow deer, shown here, are the most common.
Image courtesy of Martin Kubik

Fairoak Valley is a rich and important habitat that is home to many wildlife species. The Forestry Commission manages this area with great sensitivity to help conserve and enhance its special features for future generations.

The area has an interesting coal mining past and was the location of a colliery in the late 19th century.



The siskin, *Carduelis spinus*, is a member of the finch family. The male, shown here, has streaky yellow-green plumage and a black crown and bib.
Image courtesy of Argument



Mallards, *Anas platyrhynchos*, are a duck species that enjoy wetland habitats such as Fairoak Pools. Their varied diet includes seeds, acorns, berries, plants, insects and shellfish.
Image courtesy of Argument

Wetland habitats

Fairoak Valley includes Stony Brook and Fairoak Pools, the largest water bodies on Cannock Chase. These pools are linked together by a stream system, which sources from underground springs at the top of the valley.

The wetlands and surrounding habitats encourage amphibians such as frogs, toads, newts (including great crested newts), snakes (grass and adder) and common lizards. Herons and water fowl such as Canada geese, mallard, tufted ducks and coot can all be seen here. There is also a rare and native white-clawed crayfish population within the Stony Brook.

Of the species of bat that can be found on Cannock Chase, three species (daubenton's, brown long-eared and pipistrelle) are attracted to the wetlands in this area. You might notice bat boxes on pine trees throughout the forest.



You might see a grey heron, *Ardea cinerea*, standing motionless for hours as it watches for food.
Image courtesy of Lella Coker



The comma, *Polygonia c-album*, named after a white mark on the under side of its wing, is one of the first species of butterfly to be seen in the spring.
Image courtesy of Andy Jukes

EXPLORE AND DISCOVER

Fair Oak Colliery

The Fair Oak Colliery Company was formed on 1 September 1871. It acquired a 60 year lease on 5,500 acres of mineral rights under Cannock Chase, but crucially, the company had not sunk a bore-hole to test the geology of the area.

On January 1st 1872 work began on the two shafts of No 1 Plant, on the opposite side of Stony Brook. The workmen immediately ran into problems. Dynamite was needed to blast through layers of sand and gravel, and water needed to be pumped away. The rocks serving as stepping stones over Stony Brook and other rocks in the dam walls of Fairoak pools came from these shafts.

No 1 Plant failed to yield any coal and was eventually abandoned in 1875. The company was more successful with its No 2 Plant, which began to produce coal in 1877. This was about 750 metres south west of here, near to the top of Jockey Hill.

By 1880 the colliery was producing 2,000 tons of coal per week and employed almost 400 people. Workmen and their families were housed in two rows of cottages and a few houses close to Stony Brook. But the cost of unproductive years had taken its toll, and in 1884 mining operations ended. Company liquidation soon followed.

The nearby spoil mounds and the excavated rocks in the brook are all that remains of this short-lived but once thriving colliery.



The spoil heap of Fair Oak Colliery Company's No 1 Pit, one of the few remaining signs that a colliery once operated near here.

CANNOCK CHASE HERITAGE TRAIL

Cannock Chase Heritage Trail is a 10-mile route linking the towns of Cannock, Hednesford and Rugeley. It passes through, or close to sites of historic or environmental interest, with interpretation boards along the way that tell the story of each location. Intended to support a healthy lifestyle, the trail is a facility for walkers and cyclists, offering walks and off-road cycle routes. The trail was initially funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and several project partners in 2008.

The trail passes close to wildlife sites of international importance. Cycle wheels, horse hooves, and feet, can severely damage these sites, and out of control dogs disturb wildlife. Please help us to protect wildlife by remaining on designated routes and by keeping dogs under close control.

Remember to follow the Cannock Chase Code.



Scan the QR code to download a map of the Cannock Chase Heritage Trail



Take on the
Cannock Chase Heritage Trail Challenge
with the **Cannock Chase Can App!**

Cannock Chase Can is an exciting health and wellbeing programme to help you make healthier lifestyle choices. It hosts a variety of wellness challenges which can be undertaken as an individual, group or family. Here's how you can get involved...

Download the App for **FREE** today by visiting **Google Play** and the **App Store** and searching for '**Cannock Chase Can**'.



Scan the QR codes on each interpretation board to bring to life elements of the Trail. Content has been created by local schoolchildren alongside professional artists and The Birmingham Repertory Theatre.



Collect all the QR codes for each themed trail to complete the challenge and gain points and rewards for your efforts.