

Flora and Fauna of the Feltham Area

To help us understand more about particularly the flora of the area which in turn also influences the animals and birds that live in the area, we need to look at the types of soil around Feltham.

As can be seen from this soil map the area is dominated by light sandy soils which means the soils are free draining and don't maintain moisture well meaning that plants that thrive here are those that thrive on a free draining soil.

The largest of our native trees such as the Common Beech are happy on light, free draining soils. Forest trees prefer lighter rather than heavier soils and beech are host to 64 species of insect including barred hook-tip and olive crescent moths. Mice and voles eat the fruit and the tree has developed a symbiotic relationship with truffle fungi. The beech tree's cousin the English or common oak is a spectacular habitat for wildlife known to support over 280 species of insect including Purple Emperor butterfly whose caterpillars feed only on oak leaves, Oak Gall Wasps, Mottled Umber and Winter moths and the Green Oak Tortrix moth. Caterpillars from these moths provide food for birds such as tits, pied flycatchers and other songbirds, at the height of the breeding season a pair of bluetits can feed up to 700 caterpillars to their young. Oak and beech trees also provide nesting platforms for these birds.

Ash, another native tree thrives well in our soil, a tree associated with mysticism the Norse believed Heaven and Earth were connected by the great ash tree Yggdrasil the roots being in earth and the canopy in Valhalla. Druids also believed the tree to be sacred and carried staffs of ash. Ash trees support a number of animals including owls and woodpeckers which use it for nesting. Because it is so long lived it supports insects such as the lesser stag beetle a deadwood specialist.

Holly is very well suited to our soils, it has thick waxy leaves that prevent water loss, it is single sexed so a tree might be male or female, only the females carry berries which provide a food supply to pigeons, collared doves, blackbirds and mistle thrushes during winter. The leaves are a food plant for holly blue butterflies.

Elder is a tree of woodland edge, hedgerows, or scrubland, it is a pioneer species growing in wasteland or cleared ground leading the way for other trees and shrubs. The flowers are a draw for pollinating insects and the berries are loved by many bird species, squirrels, and bank voles. Elder aphids will quickly colonise young shoots on elder, dot and swallowtail moth caterpillars feed on the leaves, the aphids draw in predators such as ladybird and lacewing larvae and the caterpillars are eaten by robin's and blue tits. The berries are a rich source of vitamin c and make a great pie or crumble when added with apple.

Hawthorn is another small tree that provides a great supply of nectar to pollinating insects, covered in scented white flowers in April and May also known as May blossom and probably gave rise to the popular saying "Nere shed a clout 'till the May is out." The berries are an important food source for many birds and animals in autumn and winter. Hawthorn can support up to 300 species of insect, at least 11 species of moth feed on its leaves, the fruit known as haws are eaten by migrating birds such as redwings, fieldfares and thrushes and the flowers are a favourite of dormice. The dense nature of hawthorn makes it an ideal place for birds to nest.

Blackthorn is one of the first shrubs to flower in late March and early April, a very important food source for early pollinating insects such as solitary bees. The fruit provide food in summer for mice, squirrels, and birds, also good for making sloe gin!

Green Alkanet is a wildflower related to forget me not, it grows in sandy, clay or moist soils and can tolerate drought. Often

found along rivers and streams it is a foodplant of the scarlet tiger moth and its flowers attract bees, hoverflies and moths. Once considered edible it is now known to contain carcinogens but the oil from its roots can be used as an insect repellent.

White Campion is a common wildflower of roadside, woodland edge and waste ground, at night it gives off a strong scent that attract night flying moths its principal pollinator, the seeds are important for seed eating birds such as Goldfinches. White Campion is also known as the grave flower or flower of the dead due to it growing in cemeteries.

Cow Parsley can be seen near woodlands and on roadsides, a common wild flower that gives off a scent similar to hawthorn flowers. An important food plant for the moth *agonopterix heracliana* and is pollinated by bees, hoverflies and orange tip butterflies.

Great Mullein is a plant that thrives in open, sandy soils, it can be found on soils that have been recently disturbed, its seeds surviving in the soil for many years this plant prefers neutral to alkaline soils. An important food plant for the mullein moth whose caterpillars feed on the leaves, carder bees use the down from the leaves to line their nests. Bumble bees, honey bees, butterflies, moths and hoverflies all feed on the flowers nectar. Flowers are on a flower spike that can grow up to 2m from the rosette of leaves

The old English name for mullein was *felte* from the downy leaves, this may be how Feltham received its name.

Given by Mike Dance