

Richmond Park's Shape Shifters



*'Her skin is lichen and her flesh is moss and her bones are fungi, and she breathes spores.
She is wired into the world. There are miles of her in each pinch of soil'
'Ness' - Robert McFarlane 2019*

When you look at this, do you think 'that tree is dead'? Well it is - and it isn't!

- It's a **SNAG** or **Wildlife Tree** – a tree at the end of its life but still of great value as part of the Park's biodiversity.
- Dead wood is home to insects, fungi, and the small creatures that feed on them, like bats and birds.
- These in turn are food for larger animals, and larger birds like owls and kestrels.
- This is why the Park asks us all not to move dead wood or build dens.



The Life of an Oak Tree

- When you walk in places like High Wood you are among trees which were growing in medieval times
- Many of them are **veteran oaks** - over 500 years old
- An oak tree is not mature until it is about 40 years old when it starts producing **acorns**
- Many of the oaks here are **pollards** - i.e. until 1637, they were pruned above head height to produce wood for general use. This stunted their growth
- It also made a tree less likely to be damaged in storms, and so helped extend its life
- You can see a video about the life cycle of an oak tree here

<https://www.tigtagworld.co.uk/film/life-cycle-of-an-oak-tree-PRM00013/>

In what sense are these dead or dying trees Shape Shifters?

As you walk amongst trees in High Wood or other wooded places in the Park, you may feel you are being watched! There are eyes on you- also gaping mouths and wild arms! These dead and dying trees have become something else entirely. They are natural sculptures, often taking on animal or other forms, which can change, even as you observe and walk around them. And, different people see different shapes, which is fun!

If you are able to visit the Park, you can look for your own Shape Shifter

Take its photograph – give it a name

Later, we will tell you how to send it to us

AND PLEASE REMEMBER!

KEEP YOUR DISTANCE FROM OTHER PEOPLE

AND FROM THE *DEER* WHO ARE ABOUT TO START GIVING BIRTH

STAY SAFE!