

Black Poplars *Populus nigra* subsp. *betulifolia* in Hanley Swan

Simone Mansi

During the summer of 2024, while on a site visit to a farm in Hanley Swan, myself and a colleague noticed a row of mature Black Poplars *Populus nigra* subsp. *betulifolia* lining the side of a field. Upon closer inspection we found they were following a brook that partitioned the field, typical for Black Poplars which thrive in wet soil.

According to Roger Maskew's '*Flora of Worcestershire*' Black Poplar are concentrated in the north-east and along the flood plain of the Severn, especially south of Worcester and in the south-east of the county. They are usually found as single standards or pollards, or occasionally as small groups or lines in lane and field hedges, along ditches and the margins of commons, by ponds, on river and stream banks (Maskew 2014).

In 2002 and 2003 surveys were carried out to record the county's Black Poplar trees, building on earlier surveys carried out before 2000, with the Worcestershire Biological Records Centre (WBRC) currently holding 530 records. While previous studies produced great results, it is most likely that all the recorded trees had to be publicly accessible. The farm I was surveying was private land, so I knew these specimens would not have been previously recorded. With the land-owner's permission I returned on a sunny day, to measure and photograph the trees (01,02,03).



01. 22 Black Poplars were recorded at Hanley Swan, Worcestershire, 2024. Simone Mansi.



02. One of the Hanley Swan Black Poplars, summer 2024. Simone Mansi.

After a lovely afternoon of wading through hawthorn and falling into the brook a couple more times than I'm willing to admit, the grid references and trunk measurements for each tree were submitted to WBRC. A total of 22 trees were recorded at Hanley Swan, several of them veterans, with their circumferences ranging between two and a half meters all the way up to seven meters – meaning the oldest of these specimens would have been over 200 years old. One tree had split completely down the middle with part of its trunk lying horizontal on the ground (03), yet still growing, demonstrating the incredible resilience of this species.



03. One of the poplars had split completely down the middle with part of its trunk lying horizontal on the ground. Simone Mansi.

Over the past century Black Poplars have been rapidly declining, with only about 7,000 mature trees known to be left in the UK with only about 600 of those specimens being female.

I took some cuttings on the day, but all were male trees so I am still searching for a female tree in the hope of taking more cuttings and planting both male and female trees in future woodland creation projects.

Reference

Maskew, R. 2014. *The Flora of Worcestershire*. Privately published by Roger Maskew.

Images

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Editor's note

Simone Mansi is a Trees and Woodland Advisor at Worcestershire Wildlife Trust for Severn Treescapes, a partnership project between Worcestershire, Gloucestershire and Herefordshire Wildlife Trusts. The project is working with landowners to increase tree cover across the three counties, from the Wye to the Wyre, through woodlands, hedgerows, orchards, agroforestry and other tree systems