

# GERNON BUSHES NATURE RESERVE

Gernon Bushes is a 32-hectare nature reserve managed by Essex Wildlife Trust. It is a remnant of the ancient Coopersale Common and part of the Epping Forest Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), a national designation protecting important habitats. As well as supporting wildlife, the forest helps to buffer the noise and air pollution from the nearby M11 motorway.



**HORNBEAM** is a native tree that is commonly managed by pollarding. This is the traditional practice of cutting back a tree's upper branches to encourage new growth. Hornbeam responds well to this and often live longer when pollarded. Over time, ancient pollards develop gnarled and twisted bark with crevices that shelter mosses, insects, bats and owls. **1**



**STAG BEETLES** depend on rotting wood for their life cycle. Old stumps, logs, and dead trees may seem lifeless at first glance, but they are crucial habitat for thousands of invertebrates. Stag beetle larvae spend around 5 years feeding on rotting wood before emerging as adult beetles.



**BADGERS** are shy, nocturnal mammals. Emerging at dusk, they forage for earthworms, insects, fruits, and nuts. Living in family groups called clans, they dig extensive underground burrows known as setts. Badgers play an important role in nature, helping to aerate soil and disperse seeds.

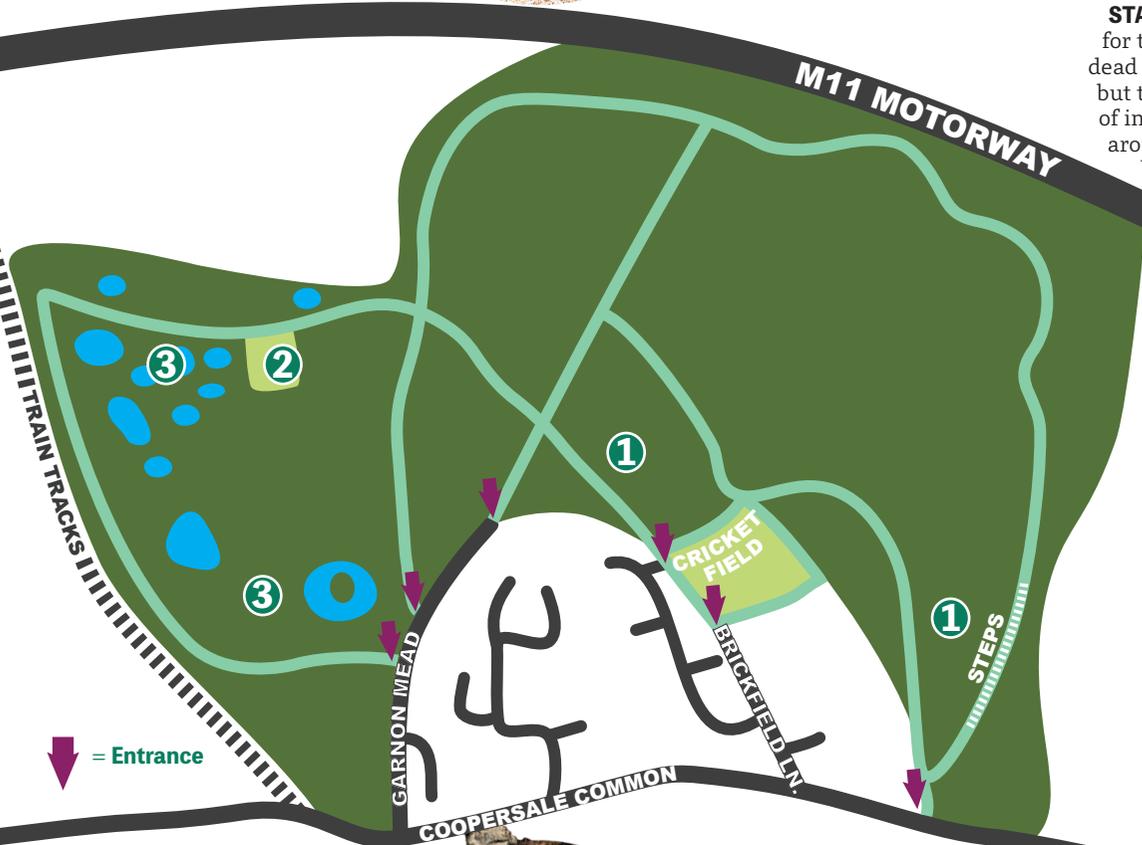


**MUNTJAC DEER** are the UK's smallest deer. They were introduced to British deer parks from China in the early 1900's, but escaped into the wild. They are also known as 'barking deer' because of their dog-like calls.

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**YELLOW MEADOW ANTS** build the bumpy mounds you find in the grassy areas. Each nest can house 10,000 ants, with workers farming aphids for food. Their mounds act as lookout posts for rabbits and the ants themselves are food for green woodpeckers. Be careful not to stand on the mounds, many animals depend on them. **2**

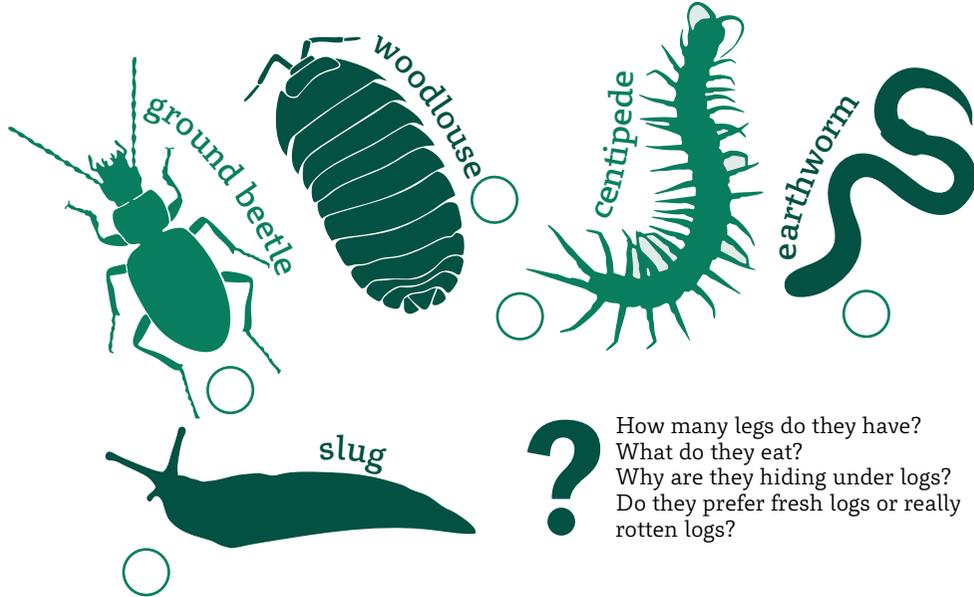


**BOGS AND PONDS** that are found today are the remains of old gravel pits, which have been transformed into a mosaic of wetland habitats. These areas are especially important for water-loving plants such as bogbean (pictured), sphagnum mosses, and the rare Marsh Fern. **3**



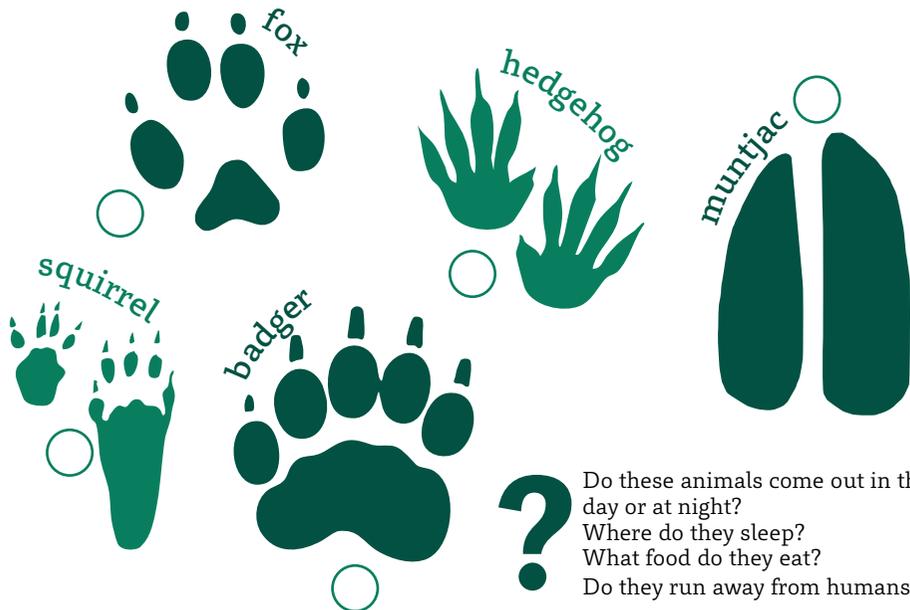
**LICHEN** can be found growing on the trunks of trees. It is a type of fungi which contains symbiotic algae, allowing it to photosynthesise. Lichen can be used as an indicator of air pollution. Some lichens love pollution from car exhausts and some only grow in clean air. Forests help to protect us from air pollution by absorbing harmful chemicals from the air.

Rotting wood is a home for many invertebrates.  
Gently roll over a log and see how many you can find?  
Remember to roll it back when you are finished.



? How many legs do they have?  
What do they eat?  
Why are they hiding under logs?  
Do they prefer fresh logs or really rotten logs?

Become a detective and search for footprints in the mud.  
How many animals can you find?



? Do these animals come out in the day or at night?  
Where do they sleep?  
What food do they eat?  
Do they run away from humans?

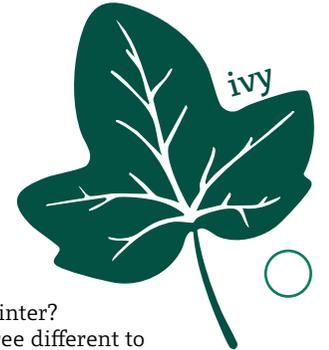
As you explore,  
use your senses  
and find something  
that is:

- shiny
- smooth
- rough
- furry
- stinky
- perfumed
- hard
- squidgy
- hidden
- buried
- fast
- slow
- loud
- quiet
- tiny
- huge
- up high
- down low
- yellow
- red
- blue
- pink
- black
- white
- spotty
- stripy

Search up and down.  
How many of these  
plants can you find?



hawthorn



? Do the leaves smell?  
Are they sharp or soft?  
Do they stay on the tree in the winter?  
Are the leaves at the top of the tree different to those at the bottom?

