

## Characteristics of Sycamore

### Native or not?

General view is that it is a naturalised species introduced possibly by the Romans but probably in the Middle Ages initially to Scotland. Maple pollen, however, does not preserve well in peat and sediments and where it does survive is hard to identify. The pollen of Sycamore is identical to its native relative the Field Maple making it impossible to ascertain whether one or both species are in fact native to Britain.

### Soil

Prefers moist and rich but will grow on everything from “poor and wet” through to “moderately dry and carbonate”. Can tolerate aluminium and other toxins and high levels of acidity although nutrient uptake diminishes. This may make it a candidate for improvement of degraded sites. Sycamore is a shade bearer when young whereas most native species are light demanding. It is probably in effect a gap species.

### Climate

Wide tolerances and can survive in areas of considerable exposure. Is found up to 460m (Lake District and Pennines), in the North of Scotland (Castle of Mey) and near the sea.

### Biodiversity

#### Birds and insects

Whilst Sycamore supports a relatively small number of insect species it can support a large number of insects per tree. A study at Hamsterley of the foraging habits of 6 species of arboreal passerine birds showed a marked preference for Sycamore by all species. This was thought to be because of the vast numbers of aphids supported by the tree. A study in Oxfordshire described Sycamore as being more important in providing a food source for birds than Beech, Ash or Hazel. Only Oak was more important as a food source with a combination of aphids and caterpillars. Sycamore aphids support the very rare ant *Lasius fuliginosus* Latreille. The importance of aphids may be more important in the food chain as the numbers peak in late summer when populations of invertebrates have largely disappeared.

### Lichen

Sycamore supports a relatively large number of Lichen species including some very rare types. This is because the bark has a high Ph often likened to Elm.

### Predation

Grey squirrels can be a problem with Sycamore. Squirrels strip away the bark of trees to eat the phloem tissue underneath. Most damage is concentrated on trees between 10 and 40 years old as the bark on the stems of older trees becomes too thick to strip.