



# Riverside Naturally



**There is a surprising number of different tree species to be seen along the Forth in Riverside and Forthside. In fact there are more than two dozen species, plus the fruit trees in the orchard. As there is so much to take in, the guide is divided into three walks.**

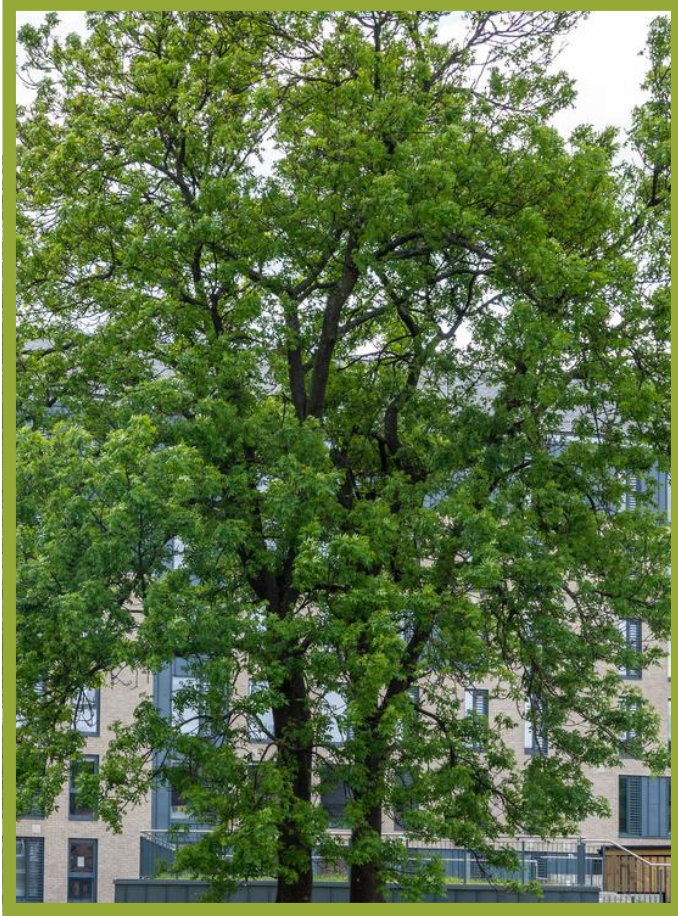
**This third stage is a circular walk providing an opportunity to refamiliarise yourself with many of the trees that you have met on the first two. It is also a first chance to be introduced to yew, horse chestnut, hazel, ash, white poplar, alder, whitebeam, guelder rose, blackthorn and holly.**

The first stage is linear walk is from the Community Orchard to Lovers Walk. It introduces you to *goat willow, weeping willow, red oak, Scots pine, lime, birch, rowan, spindle, aspen, gean, box and elm.*

*The second stage continues the linear walk from the Community Orchard to Lovers Walk. You are introduced to sycamore, maple, hornbeam, elder, cockspur thorn and the mighty oak.*



**Start at Riverside Quay. The walk will take you along the path beside the river and back along the road. Step through path between the pillars.**



Beside Riverside Quay there are two imposing ash trees. Ashes are common along the river in Riverside but may become rare in future as ash die back disease is sweeping through the area.

Ash is a member of the same family as the olive tree. When fully grown, ash trees can reach a height of 35m and can live for 400 years.

Ash wood is tough and doesn't splinter easily, and so it is traditionally used for tool handles, oars and for sports equipment like hockey sticks.

Ash leaves are eaten by many species of moth. The canopy of ash trees is not dense and allows light to reach ground level, allowing wild plants and flowers to thrive.

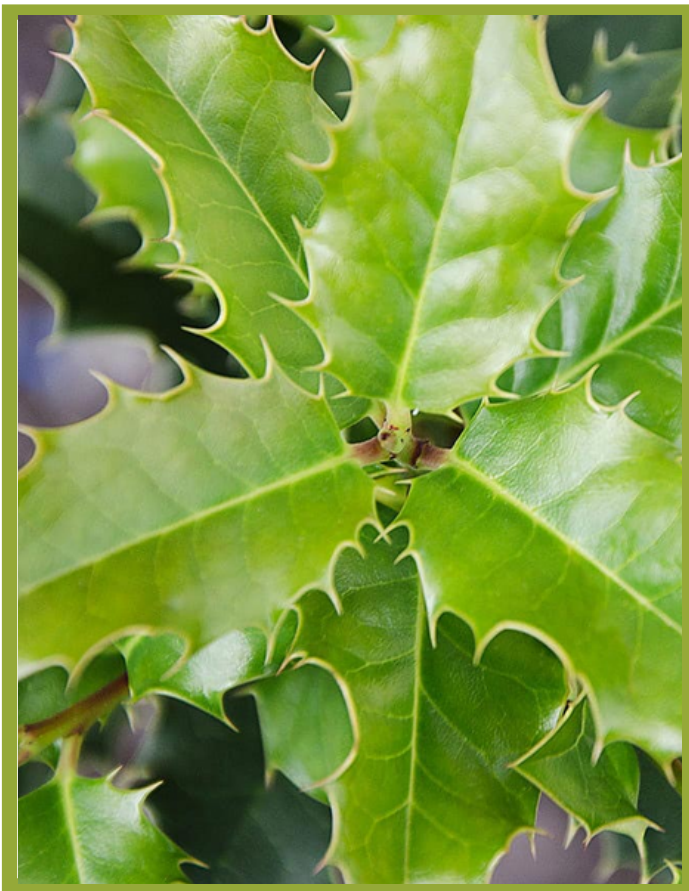


Ashes produce thousands of winged seeds known as ash keys. They are eaten by small birds such as finches.



**Before you start along the path look to the left where some small oaks were planted in 2019 by Riverside Naturally and Stirling Council Fisheries Team. If the old ash trees are lost to die back disease the oaks will grow up to screen the 'view' of Riverside Quay.**

This walk takes in many other examples of trees that are introduced on walks 1 and 2. There are a lot of self seeded birches immediately behind Riverside Quay. There is also a good example of hawthorn and sycamore opposite flats 9 and 10. You can see some holly growing near the river opposite flats 13 and 14, although it can be difficult to spot when the other trees are in leaf.



**Holly** is one of our best known trees, probably because it is used as decoration on Christmas paraphernalia. The familiar spikey leaves shown on Christmas cards cover the lower branches. Mature trees can grow up to 15 metres and live for 300 years. The leaves on older and higher branches are not usually spiked. Perhaps the spikey lower leaves were evolved to deter browsing animals such as deer.

Holly provides shelter for birds and its flowers provide nectar and pollen. The berries are good winter food for birds and small mammals. Holly wood is white, and is heavy, hard and fine-grained. It can take stains well and is used to make furniture and walking sticks. Holly wood also makes good firewood.



**Before you leave Riverside Quay, you can see that a a box hedge has been planted at the courtyard. We met box on the first walk. Continue along the path.**

You will see more examples of trees that you have been introduced to on walks 1 and 2, for example many willows and hawthorns. There are also a lot of alders all along this walk, for example beside the stepped drain to the right of the path. **Alder** can be confused with elm and hazel as all have similar leaves. Alder leaves are dark green and leathery, with serrated edges. The tip is never pointed.

**Alder** loves wet ground and so this is a perfect spot for the many alders that grow along this part of the riverbank. It is a native tree that can grow to 25 metres or so and lives for about 60years. Like clover, it has the ability to fix niitrogen through assoicated bacteria and so can flourish in poor soils.



Alder is a 'pioneer species' which will colonise cleared ground earlier than many other trees. It is often used in planting natural flood mitigation schemes. Alder trees support wildlife, including otters which can nest in the roots. The catkins appear early in the year and provide an early source of pollen and nectar. Some birds, including goldfinches, eat the seeds.

Alder is affected by a die back disease, but the many alders along this part of the river bank seem unaffected so far.



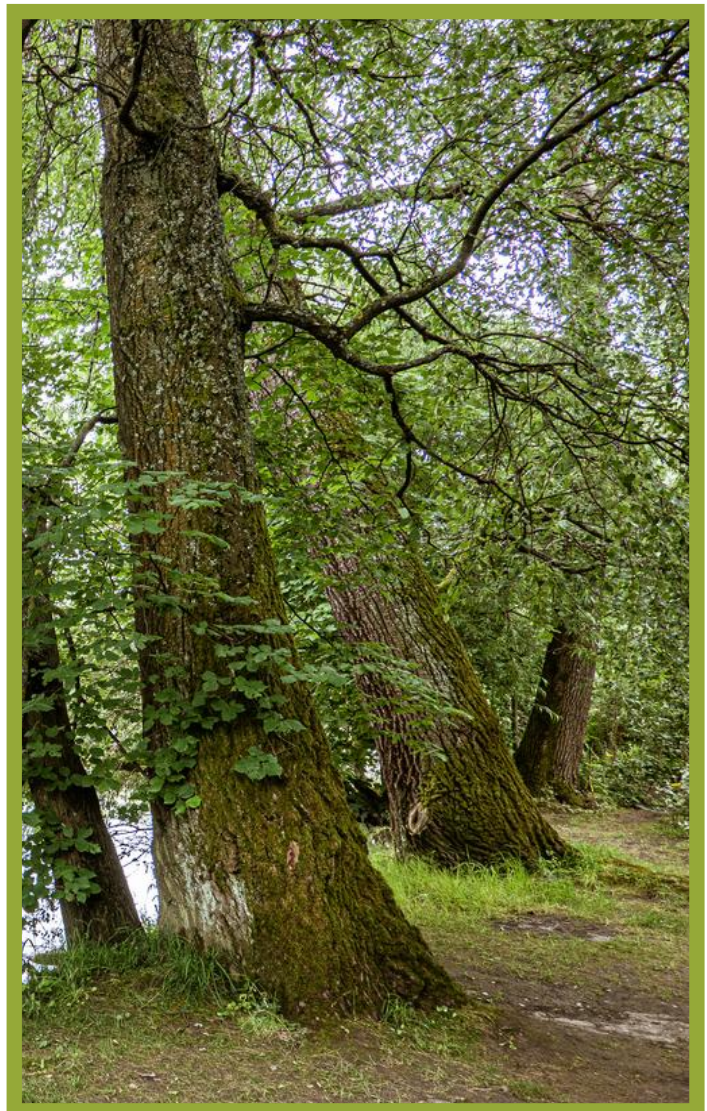
**Continue along the path until you notice some very light coloured leaves on small trees to your left.**



As well as these young trees there are several mature poplars between the path and the river. White poplar is native to southern Europe, but grows well in Britain, especially near water. It has grown in Britain for many centuries.

A variety of moth caterpillars feed on its leaves. The catkins are an early source of pollen and nectar for bees and other insects, and the seeds are eaten by birds.

The wood is not very durable and has not any particular uses in construction. The white poplar has historically been used in medicine, particularly its bark which has astringent, antiseptic and anti-inflammatory properties. It was used internally and to make a poultice.



**Continue along the path. There are many trees on both sides. Amongst them you will find small hazels, particularly on the left hand side.**

**Hazel** grows to a height of around 12m and can live for 80 years. They are easy to identify in early spring when they are covered in catkins. While many trees produce catkins, hazels are the probably most familiar as they form before the leaves come out and are like long 'lamb's tails'.



Hazel leaves are round to oval, toothed along the edges, hairy and pointed at the tip. Easily confused with elm, but are symmetrical, unlike the elm. Hazel leaves provide food for several moth species and other insects. Hazel nuts are food for many small mammals and birds (as well as people). Until the 20th century they were widely commercially grown in Britain but most cob nuts (cultivated varieties of hazel nuts) are now imported.

Hazel is often coppiced (regularly cut back) in commercial plantations. It produces good bean poles and pea sticks. The wood is particularly easy to bend and has been used for walking sticks, water divining rods and hurdles.





**You reach a branch in the path. Turn right up towards the cinema. This section has been planted with shrubs as well as hawthorn and other trees. Two of the shrubs are particularly interesting, Guelder Rose (or Dog Rose) and Blackthorn.**

**Guelder Rose** is rare in Scotland except when planted as an ornamental, sometimes as a cultivar especially for this purpose. It has very attractive berries, which are enjoyed by birds.



The flowers are also attractive and are a favourite of hover flies.

Blackthorn can grow to six or seven metres but is often found as a dense bush. It flowers very early, providing an early spring feed to pollinators. It produces very hard wood which is a traditional favourite for making walking sticks.



In autumn it produces berries which are known as sloes and can be used to flavour gin and to make wine. They were also used in medicines.



**At the top of the path turn back towards Riverside along Forthside Way. As you set off back towards Riverside you can see some birches and alders on the bank to your right. Continue until you reach four trees with a grass area behind them.**

Behind the hedge is the first of several horse chestnut trees.



Horse chestnuts have distinctive leaves and fruits - the familiar conkers.



Horse chestnuts were introduced to Britain from Turkey in the sixteenth century and have been widely planted since. They grow to a huge 40 metres and can live for 300 years. The soft wood is of little commercial use but good for carving.

The flowers are very attractive to bees and other insects. Deer eat the conkers, which have also been used in horse medicines.





The four trees in a row are whitebeams.



**Whitebeam** is native to Britain but rare in Scotland except where planted in parks and gardens.



Whitebeam has white flowers in late spring which develop into green berries that ripen red by autumn.

The leaves are eaten by some caterpillars and birds enjoy the berries.

There is also a fine beech hedge both here and on the other side of the road in front of the flats.



**If you continue towards Riverside you reach the area fenced off for development. Just inside there is a mature yew.**



Yew is a native tree which can live to a great age. It grows up to 20 metres and is associated with churchyards and death.

The leaves and fruits are very poisonous, with some reports of deadly poisoning.

Although it is a conifer, it does not actually have cones. The seeds are in attractive red berries. Although poisonous to humans, the berries are eaten by birds and small mammals. The dense foliage provides good shelter for wildlife and makes a good hedge.

Yew timber is very durable and was the traditional wood for making long bows.





**You have now completed the third part of the Riverside tree walk. You have met more than two dozen tree species which provide support to a huge array of birds, bugs, bees and other creatures. If you are heading back into Riverside it is worth going along Forth Crescent where there are mature elm, beech, oak, lime, rowan and sycamore on the bank above the Old Harbour.**

