



Definition of a veteran tree Within the scope of VETcert

For VETcert the following definition is used, which includes the common features of veteran trees in all partner countries:

- Great chronological age for their species
- In an advanced life stage where they may show retrenchment and have been through phases where they have demonstrated resilience
- Often large for their species
- Showing a complex structure or architecture with hollowing, decay, roots inside the trunk, a colony-tree structure/multiple functional units being common features
- Have high biological/ecological values
- Have a high cultural or heritage value – but this alone does not make a tree a veteran (for example a recently planted tree by a famous person is not a veteran)

Be aware that national and/or legal definitions might be more specific or vary from this definition. It is important to assess each veteran tree individually and to adapt any management to the important features of that specific tree.

As a VETcert specialist you will need to:

- Know that there are different definitions in different countries.
- Understand the definition in the country in which you are operating/taking the assessment.
- Know the definition (if there is one) that is enshrined in law in your country. Note that you should fully understand the definition.

You will not be asked to give a specific definition for a country other than that in which you take the assessment.

Additional points to be aware of:

- Dead trees are considered as veteran trees in some countries and not others. Regardless of this they should be recognised by all as being of good habitat value and managed appropriately although many of the management techniques specific for veteran trees will not be appropriate for dead trees.
- Some countries distinguish between ancient and veteran trees. This distinction does not generally affect management recommendations.



Overview of key elements included in the definitions of veteran trees for the countries in the VETcert project &/or links to documents that give more information.

Czech Republic

The definition is set within the country standard (SPPK A02 009) and operates on a point system. A minimum of 7 points needs to be reached from the following factors (trees cannot qualify on size alone):

Size (DBH) (4)

Condition (significantly poorer condition in one of the key aspects defined by standard (SPPK A01 001) (5)

Tree with extensive central cavities or with massive damage (1)

Growth shape (uniqueness (1).

Evidence of protected species (1)

Heritage tree in law (1)

The standard also includes definition of each criterion.

The trees gaining higher scores are these of great size with signs of extensive defects or poorer growth conditions; all of which can be seen as an expression of their higher biological value.

Belgium

There is no national definition, generally the old UK definition is used (tree of importance biologically, culturally or aesthetically because of its age, size or condition). The Heritage Agency have taken the definition and highlighted cultural history. There is no clear agreement on defining the elements of it.

France/Spain

Have worked with Christophe Drenou to produce a recent definition. Need to take into account the three types of ages: Chronological, ontogenic (developmental) and physiological. A French definition of a veteran tree has three approaches, ontogenic, architectural and heritage. Note that trees can progress in cycles of good and bad health. Two strategies were identified. The strategy of the unitary tree always leads to death. Senescence is the ultimate stage before death. However when a tree becomes a colony potential immortality is evoked.

A flow chart is under production:

Colony trees are automatically veteran trees, the other key determinants are: Crown architecture (has the tree formed a second crown), trees that are in the 'senescent' phase of development and then those showing past resilience' i.e. the tree has already been through a cycle of cutting or natural 'damage' (note that a first cut pollard is not a veteran tree, but a second cut pollard might be).

A written definition has also been produced but is still a working document because the historical and cultural issues have not been fully addressed.

Sweden

'Trees worthy of special protection' (largely for biodiversity but also usually includes cultural trees and also includes dead trees) are partially enshrined in law.

- Trees with dbh more than 1m or
- 40cm dbh or more with major hollowing in the trunk or
- Very old (200 years for spruce, pine, oak and beech, 140 for other tree species)

There is no mention of cultural in the definition but it is generally accepted that they may also have cultural interest.

UK

Ancient trees are distinguished from veteran trees.

There is a continuum from young veteran trees to very old trees.

Veteran trees have significant decay or hollowing in the trunk or major limbs, or have large dead branches. The value of the veteran characteristics increases with the quality or quantity of decaying wood.

Veteran trees that are in the life stage beyond maturity can be categorised as ancient trees.

In terms of managing (and where VETcert will apply) it is anticipated that ancient and veterans in a mature life stage are those that require special management. See Ancient and other Veteran trees: further guidance on management (download for free from <http://www.ancienttreeforum.co.uk/resources/ancient-trees-books-shop/>)

EAC

Have produced a collective definition as a result of discussions:

A veteran tree is a tree which is especially old for its species and displays features relating to advanced age such as cavities, cracks, splits and significant dead wood. Usually a veteran tree will have features of ecological importance whilst showing an element of vigour which indicates that the tree will survive for a considerable further period

No other countries where EAC operates are known to have a clear definition.