

# Oak that sheltered Robin Hood dies: Experts



**The Major Oak tree.**  
(AP file picture)

**London:** A massive ancient oak tree linked to the legend of Robin Hood may have been loved to death.

The 1,200-year-old Major Oak in Sherwood Forest is believed to have died after it did not sprout leaves this spring, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) said on Thursday.

Visitors over the past two centuries who viewed the tree's gnarled limbs and sprawling canopy in Nottingham compressed the soil, making it difficult for rain to reach its roots, the conservation group said.

The forest has been under threat for years and the tree had been rumoured to have died in the past — only to have the group confirm it was still alive.

That is no longer the case.

"The tree's failure to produce leaves this year is heart-breaking for everyone," Hollie Drake of the RSPB said in a statement announcing the death.

The tree is said to have sheltered Robin Hood, the legendary 13th-century bandit who stole from the rich

and gave to the poor and took refuge in the forest when being pursued by the sheriff of Nottingham.

It got its name after being mentioned in a book on oaks by Major Hayman Rooke in 1790 that led to the first wave of fans who flocked to the forest.

It's impossible to say what killed the tree, but the footprints of millions contributed to its downfall, along with intervention to shore up its massive limbs using cables and poles. Climate change that has brought heat waves and drought was also blamed.

Tree experts found the root system strangled and starved.

The Major Oak was spared from the saw and has been protected by a fence since the 1970s.

"The Major Oak will continue to stand at the heart of Sherwood as a natural monument for visitors to come and see, living on in the legend of Robin Hood and continuing to provide as much support to the forest's ecosystem in death as in life," Drake said.