

## **UPDATE ON TREE DISEASE OUTBREAKS**

The Forestry Commission are actively involved with handling a number of outbreaks of pests and diseases in England. This paper provides a summary of the current status of these outbreaks. Further detail will be provided during a presentation at the meeting.

### **Phytophthora disease of Larch (*Phytophthora ramorum*)**

This fungal-like pathogen is now affecting 3,053ha of larch woodlands across Great Britain. The current containment strategy remains felling of all symptomatic trees and other host species within 100m of the infected trees.

The area placed under Statutory Plant Health Notice for felling in England reduced from 1,107ha in 2010 to 453ha in 2011. Although this appears encouraging, the area found in 2010 is likely to have been an accumulation of several years spread prior to symptoms being first observed in autumn 2009.

Aerial surveys for 2012 are now underway. Results from these observations are likely to provide a better guide to the rate of spread and the impacts of control action of the last 2 years.

It is clear that weather conditions will have a significant impact on spread. Weather patterns in England during 2010 have tended to be less favourable for the disease.

Although the costs of felling action have to be borne by the landowner, in general compliance with statutory action has been high, helped more recently by improved market prices for timber.

### **Asian Longhorn Beetle (*Anoplophora glabripennis*)**

The first UK confirmed outbreak of this beetle was discovered near Paddock Wood, Kent at the end of March 2012. This beetle lays its eggs on live broadleaved trees and its larvae feed deeply into the wood. Repeated attacks can lead to dieback and facilitate secondary infections/attacks that can lead to death.

FC and Fera are working jointly on site to assess the extent of the outbreak and undertake felling action (removal of infested trees and potential host trees within 100m). Intensive survey and inspections suggest that this is a very localised outbreak occurring within a farming landscape of hedgerows and a small number of private gardens.

Fera staff have led on survey of the immediate area, Forest Research lead on detailed inspections of suspect trees and FC are now leading on co-ordinating the felling and burning action. To facilitate rapid action FC and Fera are not seeking to recover the costs of eradication work from landowners and have actively sought their voluntary co-operation.

Operations are currently underway and aim to be completed by the end of May, prior to the earliest emergence of the adult beetles. FC and Fera have co-ordinated our communications and have encouraged local communities to report

possible sightings of tree attack symptoms and adult beetles over the coming months.

### **Oak Processionary Moth (*Thaumetopoea processionea*)**

The caterpillars of this moth defoliate oak trees, often weakening the trees and making them vulnerable to attack by secondary agents. The later stages of the caterpillar have toxin-containing hairs which can potentially create significant human health issues.

Currently there is a relatively localised outbreak in Pangbourne, Berkshire where it is hoped that co-ordinated insecticide spraying this spring will lead to eradication.

In London, where the first infections were found in 2006, the insect is still spreading outwards at about 0.9km/year from the core areas in Richmond and Kew. FC has deployed contractors to survey the extent of infection and issue statutory notices for action to landowners. Control action is either through manual removal of "nests" or insecticide spraying during a critical development stage window of a few weeks in spring.

During December 2010, on advice from Forest Research, Ministers moved from a strategy of eradication to one of containment, concentrating any requirement for action to the expanding edges of the core infested area. Survey effort is now directed to the outer buffer zone around an agreed core area.

The practicality of achieving appropriate containment operations and the high costs of this action to landowners has led to inconsistent levels of control to date. The number of "nests" observed doubled in 2011 from 2010.

Although individual human health incidents have been noted there have been insufficient to concern the Health Protection Agency. There is growing unease for the potential of a wider scale human health incident and particularly around the Olympic road cycling events to be held in Richmond Park.

FC England has added resources this year to extend survey effort and will seek to develop a clearer economic impact analysis of OPM.

### **Chestnut Blight (*Cryphonectria parasitica*)**

The first UK outbreak of Chestnut Blight was found in Warwickshire in 2010 on sweet chestnut trees planted as an orchard for nut production. The trees had been imported from a specialist nursery in France and exchanged through plant wholesaler based in Devon.

All other sites receiving the plants from the same source have been contacted and investigated by either FC or Fera inspectors. A further confirmed outbreak was found in East Sussex near Robertsbridge. Both sites have been served with Notice and the plants destroyed. Further surveillance in the surrounding areas revealed no new outbreaks, but ongoing monitoring is planned.