

OAK PROCESSIONARY MOTH

Meeting of stakeholders and interested parties
held at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew
on 23 March 2010

This is a summary report of the key points from a meeting attended by representatives of the following sites where Oak Processionary Moth is known to be present:

- London Underground
- Old Deer Park
- Richmond Athletics Association
- Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew
- Royal Mid Surrey Golf Course
- Royal Parks
- Syon House

In addition, the meeting was also attended by:

- Charlton Clark, Forestry Commission
- Glen Harding, Richmond Borough Council
- Susan Kramer, MP
- Nittaya Lawrence, FC Plant Health Inspector
- Ron Melville, FC England
- Ralph Parks, FC Plant Health Inspector
- Mike Robinson, Fera PHSI
- Christine Tilbury, Forest Research

Presentations, which can be viewed at www.forestry.gov.uk/planthealth (link to pests and diseases, Oak Processionary Moth) were given by:

- Roddie Burgess, Forestry Commission
- Nigel Straw, Forest Research
- Barry Walsh, Health Protection Agency
- Olivier le Polain, Health Protection Agency

Presentations

1. Roddie Burgess, Head of the Forestry Commission's Plant Health Service, began by outlining the events and actions taken since Oak Processionary Moth (OPM) was first found in the west London area in 2006. Although the numbers of nests found and destroyed last year were considerably higher than the previous two years, there was no evidence of any significant spread of the species. In addition, the number of male adults caught in pheromone traps was comparable to the previous year, which suggested that the population had not changed significantly. He said that 2010 would be a critical year insofar as it could indicate whether it was still realistic to continue to aim to eradicate the species from Britain, or accept that we cannot eradicate it and have to learn to live with it and manage it.

2. Dr Nigel Straw, an entomologist with the FC's Forest Research division, outlined the species' lifecycle, behaviour, characteristics and some of the issues with its management. He discussed treatment options and the importance of surveillance and completion of nest removal prior to adult emergence, which would be followed by breeding and egg laying. He noted that while males are known to be able fly considerable distances, many tens of kilometres, current evidence suggested that females did not fly far, especially when laden with eggs which are laid in plaques and generally very difficult to spot.
3. Dr Barry Walsh and Dr Olivier le Polain from the Health Protection Agency – London outlined the health issues and their efforts to raise awareness among local health professionals, especially GPs and pharmacists. The HPA is keen to continue raising awareness, and was considering doing so in Surrey and other neighbouring local authority areas in case OPM spread into them. Drawing from experience on the Continent, the HPA supported continuing management because it was clear that a significant outbreak of OPM would cause considerable pressure on the health services. (In one town of 500,000 people in Germany, 20,000 people, or 4% of the population, had presented to GPs with OPM symptoms, with some individual GPs recording 100 consultations a day during a serious outbreak.)

Discussion

4. Discussion after the formal presentations centred around three main issues:
 - a) Eradication: whether aiming for eradication was worthwhile – some attendees felt it was futile, especially if not all affected property owners co-operate. Nigel Straw explained that it is possible to eradicate a pest species in the isolated, small, "spot population" circumstances such as the west London case, and it had been achieved with other species in other countries. Mr Burgess and others pointed out that if the authorities pulled back from full eradication, there would be permanent costs incurred at about the same level as the current programme costs just to manage the population and keep its impact on tree and human health down to tolerable levels within the currently defined outbreak area. This would, however, inevitably expand through natural and, probably, accidental spread, with consequential overall increases in both impact and cost.
 - b) cost – some attendees were concerned that the cost burden of eradication or continuing management is, or would become over time, too great for their organisations to bear without some third-party assistance. Mr Burgess explained that the Forestry Commission had no powers to pay compensation, which includes treatment costs, but that he was trying to identify potential avenues for financial assistance.
 - c) co-ordination of effort – there was a feeling among some attendees that the programme of action is currently too fragmented, with individual property owners having to engage removal contractors separately from their

neighbours. They asked whether the Forestry Commission could engage contractors on a single contract, with the property owners “buying in” to that contract and reimbursing the Commission. Mr Burgess explained that it was outwith the Commission’s powers to do this.

5. There was also concern expressed about properties, especially private residences, whose owners did not comply with notices to remove larvae and nests from their oak trees, risking re-infestation of neighbouring properties the following year, thus making eradication impossible to achieve. Mr Burgess explained that private residential owners were legally treated the same as others, but sometimes there had been particular difficulties, such as where an owner had died, and the Human Rights and Data Protection Acts imposed certain restrictions on activities such as ‘naming and shaming’ unco-operative individuals.
 - It was suggested that an email alert system be established to notify other affected property owners when the larvae started hatching, thus triggering decision on when to begin spraying. Tony Kirkham of RBGK explained they were monitoring some egg plaques for this purpose, and he undertook to provide such an alert.
 - It was also suggested that a spreadsheet collating information about all known affected properties and the steps being taken to deal with OPM be established centrally and shared among the parties to enable a more co-ordinated response. Mr Burgess agreed to investigate the feasibility of this.

Note: the Outbreak Management Team which oversees OPM control met the following day and agreed to the formation of an Action Group with a membership comprising the sites represented at the stakeholders’ and interested parties’ meeting. This group will be tasked with gathering and maintaining information on all affected properties and the action taken, and would keep the Outbreak Management Team informed. It will be assisted by FC Plant Health Inspectors, co-ordinated by Ralph Parks.