



Ash dieback in the UK – February update

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Joint Nature Conservation Committee

Ash dieback in the UK – February update

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1. Current disease situation

- 1.1 As of 5 February 2013, there are 369 confirmed cases of ash dieback in the UK – 19 in nurseries, 176 in recently planted sites, and 174 in the wider environment. Of the wider environment sites, eight are in Scotland and 166 in England¹.
- 1.2 Modelling suggests that there is good evidence for spore incursion from the continent to the UK during 2008-11, and that Chalara is likely to continue to spread in the UK. However, controls that suppress sporulation, such as removal of young infected trees or leaf litter, may have a significant effect in slowing the rate of spread.

2. Government response

- 2.1 *Chalara* spreads through the movement of infected stock and the aerial dispersal of spores from fruiting bodies arising from the previous season's leaf litter. Spore production is between June and October.
- 2.2 An interim *Chalara* Control Plan was published by Defra on 6 December², and it is planned to be updated in March 2013. The current interim Control Plan maintains the ban on the import and movement of ash trees and is using the period of no disease spread from spores to improve understanding of the likely impacts and the costs and benefits of a targeted approach to the management of infected trees. Epidemiological modelling by Cambridge University in collaboration with Rothamsted Research is providing key evidence to inform the next iteration of the control plan.
- 2.3 The revised plan will also consider how to minimise the impacts of Chalara on UK biodiversity and ecosystem services, and how we can build resilience for UK woodlands.
- 2.4 The Scottish Government have also published an interim Control Plan linked to the Defra publication, but additionally requiring a Tree Health Advisory Group to be set up for Scotland, to be convened by Forestry Commission Scotland.
- 2.5 The Tree Health and Plant Biosecurity Expert Taskforce has also published an interim report³ and action has already been taken to implement some of its recommendations. These include the transfer of the Plant Health Policy team to

¹ [http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/UK_outbreak_map-21-01-14_Map2b.pdf/\\$FILE/UK_outbreak_map-21-01-14_Map2b.pdf](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/UK_outbreak_map-21-01-14_Map2b.pdf/$FILE/UK_outbreak_map-21-01-14_Map2b.pdf)

² <http://www.defra.gov.uk/publications/files/pb13843-chalara-control-plan-121206.pdf>

³ <http://www.defra.gov.uk/publications/files/pb13842-tree-taskforce-interim-121206.pdf>

Defra from FERA and new import regulations to improve the tracking and understanding of risks arising from within-EU movements of four major genera of trees (including those for oak and ash).

- 2.6 There is a recognition that ensuring plant health and preventing major new incursions of pests and diseases is important for the delivery of biodiversity outcomes. This may eventually lead to new responsibilities for the biodiversity sector to assist in delivery of plant health strategy, for instance eradication measures and surveillance when biodiversity is at risk.
- 2.7 Defra are developing a Plant Health Evidence Plan to 2018 for publication in early spring, alongside all other Defra Evidence Plans. This will include within it research needs for tree health, for which Defra are committing £8 million up until 2016/17, approximately half of which will be delivered via the LWEC initiative.

3. JNCC activities

3.1 JNCC has:

- i. delivered evidence on the distribution and scale of important ash⁴ to inform the December interim Chalara Control Plan. JNCC is now providing advice to the epidemiological modelling team on the incorporation of important ash data into the models so that these can (i) improve their estimation of impact, and (ii) inform their assessment of benefit for the targeted management of infection.
- ii. established an inter-agency mechanism to co-ordinate advice and evidence for input into the control plan revision and to synthesise and identify the main implications from the current research programme. The mechanism will also identify where country requirements for advice and operational work will benefit from shared evidence.
- iii. developed with CEH online facilities to help the biological recording community report ash dieback and monitor epiphytic species.

3.2 JNCC has established a research funding collaboration between the country conservation bodies, Defra, FC and itself, and is commissioning and managing research into the likely impacts of ash dieback on i) the species which depend on ash, and ii) the ecological role of ash. Research also covers how pressures on ash will interact with disease to inform mitigation, and will also look at monitoring needs.

3.3 JNCC is providing technical advice to the Chalara Control Plan revision groups but additionally we are maintaining our focus on evidence and advice to help ensure the effective and integrated management of all non-native pest and disease risks to biodiversity and ecosystem services. On this wider goal, JNCC is:

⁴ http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/pdf/important_ash.pdf

- i. providing technical advice to the Tree Health and Plant Biosecurity Taskforce and inputting to the evidence plan;
- ii. a member of the UK Plant Health Strategy Board and providing technical advice on EC proposals for a revised Plant Health Regime;
- iii. Providing technical advice into the review of the *Phytophthora* programme, which is due to report in February, to enable decisions on the approach to managing the impacts in future.