Native Common Ash Trees Face Surprise Disease Threat

Native common ash (Fraxinus excelsior) now faces an unprecedented threat from the latest alien plant pathogen to arrive in the United Kingdom (UK). Chalara ash die-back caused by the fungus Chalara fraxinea sailed into the country in style on a consignment of 2000 ash trees exported by a Dutch nursery to nursery in southern England.

The south of England nursery based in Buckinghamshire subsequently sold the consignment by mail order to 90 customers throughout the UK. Forestry Commission (FC) and Fera (Food and Environment Research Agency), which subsequently intercepted Chalara fraxinea on the trees, identified the 90 customers and gave out instructions for them to dig up, chop up and double-bag the trees before taking them to a landfill for deep burial.

This is somewhat surprising since standard biosecurity practice in such potentially catastrophic pest and disease situations is for the destruction of trees on site by burning followed by a thorough clean up including tools, soil and compost by professionals drafted in specifically to do the job. Trans- porting tree material infected with a new alien pathogen into the wider environment flies in the face of standard biosecurity practice and common sense.

Be that as it may, FC and Fera have since found the disease in the wider environment on some 500 ash trees planted in a Leicestershire car park and sourced from a nursery in Lincolnshire. Fera is also investigating outbreaks of the disease at nurseries in Surrey and Yorkshire.

Chalara fraxinea was able to ‘walk into’ the UK because although it is rampant across continental Europe, including France, Belgium, Netherlands, Germany and Denmark, it is not an EU regulated pathogen. That means common ash trees can be imported into the UK from any other EU country with absolutely no restrictions, inspection or documentation (an EU Plant Passport) that would otherwise declare a clean bill of health.

The disease is particularly prevalent in Denmark where up to 90 per cent of trees in many locations are infected and all are expected to die. Chalara ash dieback has the capacity to inflict on common ash what Dutch elm disease did to English elm in the 1970s. That is to essentially wipe out the species as forest, woodland, amenity and landscape tree in the UK.

So what’s the damage? Chalara fraxinea infects ash trees of all ages but is more likely to be terminal in ash saplings. Symptoms are seen on the leaves, shoots and branches. Trees with advanced infections have defoliated crowns and profuse epicormic growth on trunk and branches.

Leaves display dark coloured lesions at the base and along the mid-rib, accompanied by obvious signs of wilting. Dieback of shoots and twigs is common.

Small lens shaped lesions form on the bark of stems and branches, subsequently enlarging to form perennial cankers which cause shoot and branch wilt and dieback especially in the upper crown.

The wood underneath bark lesions is brown/grey in colour which often extends longitudinally beyond the necrotic area of bark. Advanced infections of whole trees is characterised by withered tops and shoots in the crown, marked dieback of shoots, twigs and branches and prolific epicormic growth lower down.

The causal pathogen, which can be isolated from leaves, shoots, stems, branches and even roots of symptomatic trees, is spread by rain splashes and disseminated by insects.

Long distance spread is most likely through trade in living trees and the movement of saw logs from infected trees.

Ash dieback caused by Chalara fraxinea may be confused with similar symptoms caused by completely different fungal pathogens, insect pests and even physiological problems caused by environmental factors.

Canker caused by the fungus Nectria galligena and even bark necrosis caused by ash bark beetle (Saperda putris) could be mistaken for ash dieback.

Other factors which may be confused with ash dieback are larvae of Prays fraxinella (bud moth) that mine into shoot bases causing them to wilt and die. Even frost and drought damage could conceivably be confused with ash dieback.

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Dr Terry Mabbett reports on an unprecedented potential threat to your course
**GI NEWS FEATURE**

**Impact on golf courses**

Trees are an important and integral part of virtually all golf courses in the UK and their continued health is vital to the structure and appearance of the course as well as the health and safety of members, players and staff.

Common ash is spread throughout the UK. The ash tree population was recently estimated at 80 million but this is almost certainly a gross underestimate.

Common ash is a pioneer tree which freely germinates from naturally dispersed seed to establish in groves where opportunities arise in woodland, copses and rough open land.

Many if not most golf courses will have ash trees that have naturally established in this manner.

Common ash is also widely planted on golf courses, prized for its fast growth, open and light shade casting canopy which does not kill the turf grass beneath. And a light leaf load which rots away quickly in autumn and is relatively easy to clear away.

PC and Fera are now recommending that landowners who have planted ash trees in the last five years should inspect them for symptoms of Chalara ash dieback disease.

Greenkeepers who suspect they may have Chalara ash dieback disease on their courses should contact:
- Forest Research Tree Health Diagnostic and Advisory Service. Tel: 01639 654154, E-mail: dtcosteh.a@forestry.gsi.gov.uk
- Fera Plant Health and Seeds Inspectorate. Tel: 01964 666654, E-mail: planthealth.info@fera.gsi.gov.uk

**BIGGA AND GCMA DATE**

The BIGGA and GCMA seminars will be held in the South West Section on Thursday October 18.

Chipping Sodbury Golf Club is the venue for a host of speakers including former British Women’s Open champion Viven Saunders and Tony’s Andrew Brown who will be looking at water resource management. There will also be an afternoon presentation outdoors showcasing the benefits of the Blindlet Bluster Line so maps and tour operators will be required – the dress code for the day is outdoor casual. Lunch and refreshments will be supplied.

By attending this seminar, BIGGA and GCMA members will receive Continuing Professional Development points. This exciting seminar costs just £20 per person (or £25 for three delegates) – and the closing date for registration is Friday 12 October. There is a maximum of 30 delegates per club. So if you’re a golf club manager, owner or course manager, please send cheques made payable to GCMA 50 Southgate in early November to Karen Drake, Westonsuper Mare Golf Club, Uphams Heath, Westonsuper Mare BS23 4NQ.

For any queries, or further information about the day, please contact Karen on 01934 669981 or at kdrake@eurotelbroadband.com

**BIGGA Welcomes Communications Exec**

BIGGA are delighted to announce that Steve Castle has joined the Association as Communications Executive.

An appointment that strengthens the editorial team at Greenkeeper International, Steve has settled in comfortably, finding his feet in his new role, whilst mixing in very quickly and easily with everyone at BIGGA House.

Steve, who even managed a game of golf with his new colleagues, one night, brings with him experience of working as reporter for Roa Parry Agency Ltd, which syndicates news stories to national newspapers and magazines.

“I covered court cases, inquests as well as anything from press conferences with lottery winners to exclusive and sensitive interviews with members of the public,” Steve told us.

Looking forward to writing for GI, Steve also expressed an interest in finding out more about you, the member.

**Julie Joins BIGGA**

Julie Willington has joined BIGGA as Accountant. Julie has a wealth of experience in the financial area, starting off as an office junior. Her last position was at VMC in Warwickshire as Finance Assistant.

She said: “I’m really looking forward to the opportunity, and have been made to feel very welcome by everyone in the team. I’m particularly looking forward to helping our members with anything from press conferences with lottery winners to exclusive and sensitive interviews with members of the public, “Steve told us.

Looking forward to writing for GI, Steve also expressed an interest in finding out more about you, the member.

**Help is at hand...**

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**North East Competition Venue Change**

Please note the venue has changed for the North East Autumn competition. It will be played on October 10 at Tynedale GC. This replaces the original venue of Wooler GC.

**Jack and Rita award McMillan Tankard to Ernest Doe’s Steve**

Steve Alaibaster scooped the McMillan Tankard at the recent Surrey Section golf tournament.

Now in its 23rd year, the popular tournament again attracted many competitors and their guests to the New Course at Sunningdale Golf Club.

Scoring proved tough on a breezy day with many balls finding the hoister off the fairways. However, Steve defied the conditions, finishing level on 34 points with Mark Brooks from Sunningdale. Steve emerged victorious after enjoying a better score on the final six holes.

Mark did win the nearest the pin competition with Jack and Rita award McMillan Tankard to Steve.