

AERIAL BLITZ AGAINST OPM RETURNS

Aerial application of insecticide over West Berkshire in May 2013 against oak processionary moth (OPM), and reported first by Greenkeeper International in April 2013, will be repeated in May 2014 said the Forestry Commission (FC) in a surprise announcement.

Given the furore created by last year's aerial spraying of the biological insecticide *Bacillus thuringiensis* subsp. *kurstaki* over Herridge's copse and Broom's copse near Pangbourne, this year's blitz on nearby Sulham Woods, also a SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest), appears strange to say the least, and especially since no OPM nests were found in Berkshire in 2013. The action is apparently based on the capture of five male adult moths in late summer 2013 during a routine pest monitoring exercise using pheromone traps.

FC says this does not necessarily mean a viable breeding population of OPM is still present in the Pangbourne area but that their aim remains eradication of the pest. This begs the question as to why another round of aerial spraying, when last year's operation clearly failed to 'do the trick'. In 2013 FC admitted they were unsure as to whether there were actually any pest insects in the treated woodlands and 'Butterfly Conservation' branded the operation a 'sledgehammer to crack a nut'.

And what about the even stranger decision taken this year to spray just very small part of a single wood called

Sulham Woods, in the same general area as last year (to the south of Pangbourne) but this time nearer to Tilehurst on the western outskirts of Reading. Male oak processionary moths are strong fliers with flight distance capabilities of up to 25 km, which means they could have exited nests and mated with females over a potentially extensive area.

It is now over one year since the May 2013 aerial application 'trial' took place with no sign of the results being made public by FC. In January 2014 I asked someone who was operationally involved in the 'trial' if he was privy to how it went. He had asked to see the results but was told he would have to go through the 'Freedom of Information Act' to retrieve them.

I thought he was joking until I discovered that a Pangbourne resident had already used the Freedom of Information Act to find out why Natural England had sanctioned aerial spraying of an SSSI oak woodland in the first place, and especially since most conservation organisations thought the environmental and ecological risks were a 'no brainer'.

According to BBC Berkshire, the Freedom of Information request revealed how Natural England had sanctioned aerial application of insecticide despite believing that it would not eradicate the insect pest, and also believing it would have "a very significant impact" on other species of moths and butterflies in the area.

Natural England was right to think a single pair of BTK



sprays will not have eradicated OPM in 2013, even if present in the treated woodland, but for entirely the wrong reasons.

Spraying BTK as a stand-alone measure is essentially a pest management tool rather than a pest control tool and requires repeat applications over a number of years to achieve pest eradication if at all. If the capture of five male adult moths in 2014 shows one thing it is that aerial spraying with BTK in 2013 failed to eradicate OPM, so why should the same treatment prove any different this year. And especially since there is no hard evidence of pest presence in the woodland earmarked for spraying this year.

BTK is a biological insecticide lacking the potency and

persistence generally required to achieve eradication with a single application, but which is possible using more powerful chemical insecticides like diflubenzuron (an insect growth regulator) and deltamethrin (a pyrethroid insecticide acting through contact and ingestion). These insecticides are used in ground based spraying against OPM but are not licensed for aerial application.

UK plant health authorities are apparently keeping the results (if any) from these 'trials' very 'close to the chest'. It will probably take another 'brave soul' to make a Freedom of Information request to secure the findings for general viewing and scrutiny - any volunteers?

Dr Terry Mabbett

40 YEARS FOR DAVE AT CHILDWALL

BIGGA member Dave Macavoy has celebrated a 40-year stint as Head Greenkeeper at Childwall Golf Club.

Dave began his greenkeeping career at 15, and spent eight years at Royal Birkdale before joining Childwall – a

parkland course close in the Huyton area of Liverpool - which was established in 1912.

He heads a five-strong greenkeeping team with a seasonal member joining in the summer.

He said: "We don't have major events

here but we've held many county matches down the years and we're proud of our work here.

"We've reconstructed 16 of the 18 greens with work on the remaining two coming up, and all the work is always done in house."