

Beetle mania

Last month the Forestry Commission (FC) sent out a press release begging the public to help find populations of the Asian Longhorn beetle/ALB (*Anoplophora glabripennis*) and its close cousin the Citrus Longhorn beetle/CLB (*Anoplophora chinensis*).

Several outbreaks of CLB having arrived on infested Acers (maples), probably imported from plant nurseries in the Netherlands and originally sourced from China, have thankfully been eradicated over the last few years. ALB was found in spring 2012 at Paddock Wood in Kent (Greenkeeper International July 2012), having arrived in wooden crates from China, and was responsible for the precautionary felling of virtually all trees across eight hectares.

Hopefully this single ALB outbreak has also been eradicated since FC and FERA have said virtually nothing on the subject since autumn 2012. However, they are clearly concerned that more beetles could arrive in the country.

Martin Ward, the UK Government's Chief Plant Health Officer, said "Government plant health services cannot do this work alone, and we need the public to act as our eyes and ears in gardens, parks, woodlands and workplaces to help us spot threats quickly before they become a serious problem."

Fat chance, according to a recent Woodland Trust survey 80 per cent of the UK population can't even distinguish a huge ash tree from a huge oak tree and 50 per cent can't even identify an English oak tree – in England!

FC and FERA have finally



woken up to the traitorous activities of the native oak jewel beetle, a buprestid bark boring beetle called *Agrilus biguttatus*. In cahoots with a couple of plant pathogenic bacteria, this beetle is currently killing mature English oaks in their thousands across East Anglia and the Midlands by causing acute oak decline (Greenkeeper International March 2013).

Plant health authorities in North America are keeping a watchful eye on *Agrilus biguttatus* and have already marked it down as a 'quarantine pest'.

And with good reason since a close cousin called the emerald ash borer (*Agrilus plannipennis*) arrived from Asia and is currently destroying all species of native and exotic ash across a swathe of 18 contiguous mid-west, Appalachian and North East states and into adjoining areas of Canada (Ontario and Quebec).

If emerald ash borer ever gets into the UK it will destroy our native common ash (*Fraxinea excelsior*)

before even *Chalara fraxinea* (chalara ash dieback) has a chance to.

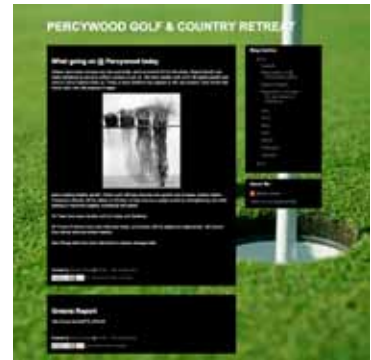
The United States has another *Agrilus* beetle this time a native species called the bronze birch borer (*Agrilus anxius*) which as the common name suggests attacks birch trees.

Native European species of birch have absolutely no resistance to this insect pest which will wipe out our native silver birch (*Betula pendula*) and downy birch (*Betula pubescens*) if it ever becomes established in the British Isles.

And now there is a British, native ambrosia beetle called oak pin-hole borer. Having been given a new lease of life in oak trees flattened by the 1987 Hurricane, the beetle has graduated over the years from a relatively rare insect of British oak woodland into a huge pest problem for the oak timber trade.

This beetle will make a mess of your club's new designer oak wood kitchen before it has even been made.

Dr Terry Mabbett



BLOGGING AT PERCY WOOD

This month's featured blog comes from Simon Olver, Course Manager at Percy Wood Golf & Country Retreat in Northumberland. We've had a great response to this so far with greenkeepers really embracing blogging as a superb tool for communicating with members and visitors alike and helping to remove some of the myths surrounding the greenkeeping profession.

Keep your blogs coming to steve.castle@bigga.co.uk.

Simon explained: "Our blog gives members a detailed up to date diary of what's going on around the course, allowing the team to carry out efficient maintenance work seamlessly and alert our membership to important information. Feedback has been fantastic showing that clear and concise communication is a must for any successful business.

"There has been unanimous appreciation for all the time put aside to keep everyone informed, resulting in greater respect for myself and the team. Since our blog began committee meetings have halved in time as most questions have already been answered.

"Our advice to any greenkeeper thinking about creating a blog is to build up your social network connections first, this will allow you to spread your blog further than you could ever imagine. Also to remember your Blog can enhance your CV, so make sure it showcases your ability."

See for yourself at <http://percywoodgolf.blogspot.co.uk>