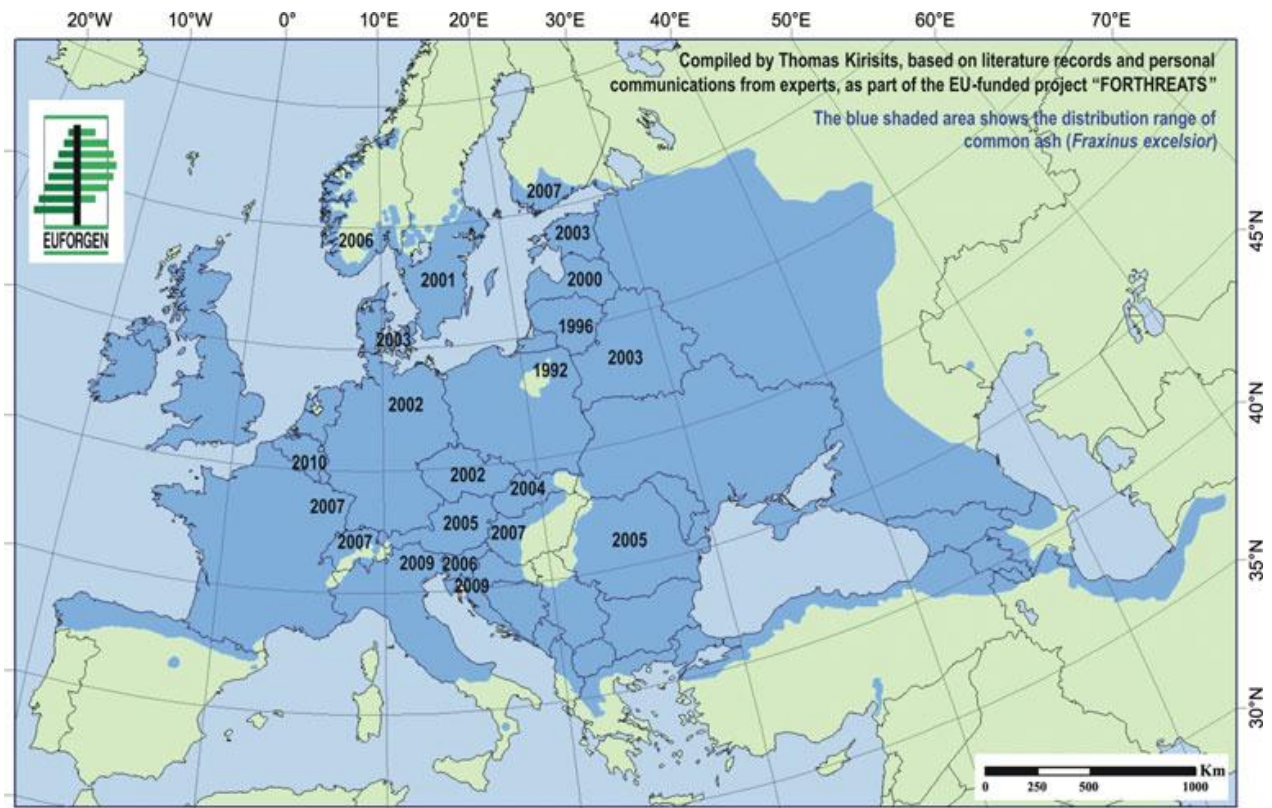


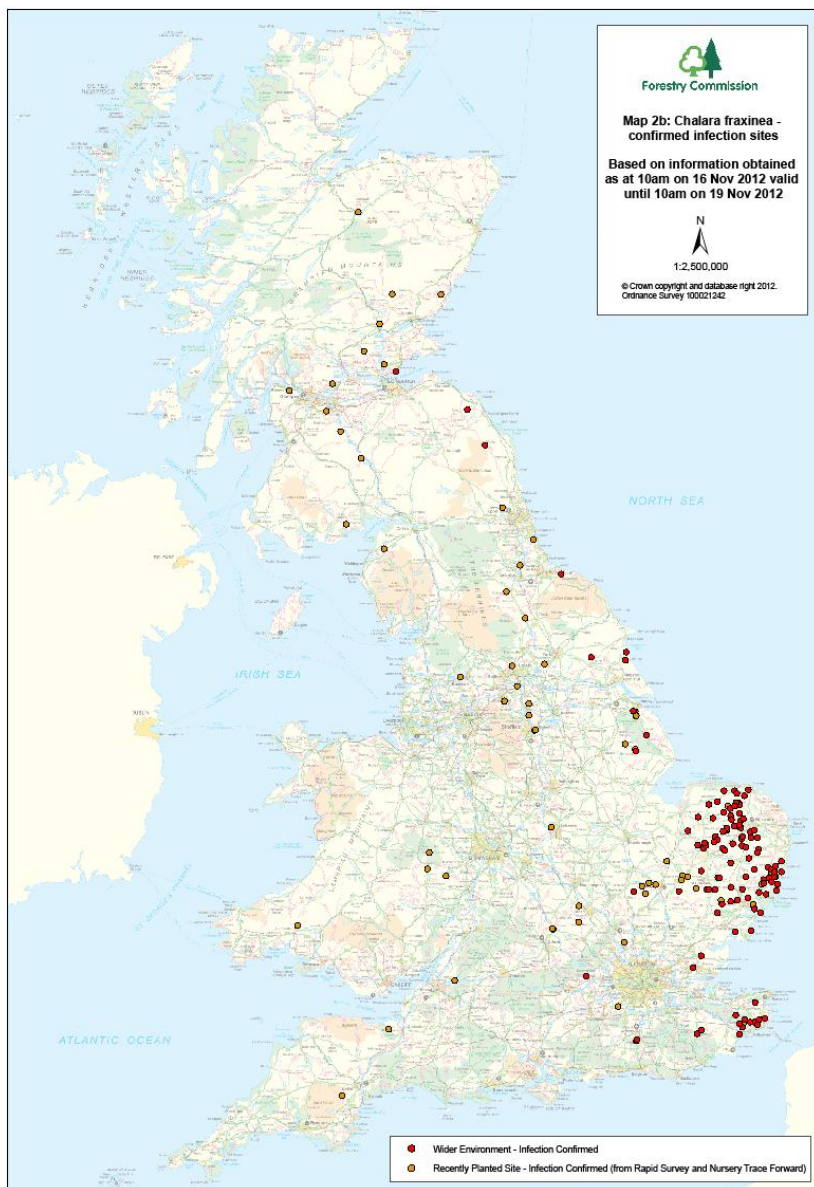
Briefing – Ash die Back

There has been great interest in recent weeks in the plant disease known as Ash Die Back which is caused by infection with the fungus *Chalara fraxinea*. This has been present in Europe for more than 10 years and has progressed to all countries with Ash trees. The reports have been very alarming in the light of the experience in Denmark when 90% of Ash trees died as a result of this disease.



European Distribution of Ash die back prior to 2012.

Until this autumn the UK had appeared to escape infection but recent surveys have shown the disease present in natural woodland, where as earlier it was confined to young plants in nurseries. Plants when found were destroyed, but it now appears to be more widespread.



UK records of Ash Die Back as of mid November 2012

Control Measures

Prior to 22nd October 2012, infection had only been recorded in ash trees in UK nurseries and considerable numbers of young plants had been destroyed. The Commerce and Employment Department has close links with the UK plant health authorities and reacted by halting the import of ash trees once alerted to the risk by UK Plant Health. In the light of growing concerns, contact was made by Department staff with local plant importers in mid October and a voluntary agreement was reached not to import ash trees.

The UK import ban was put in place on Monday 29th October. In an effort to protect the island from Ash Dieback the Commerce & Employment Department imposed the statutory ban on the import of ash trees (including the importation of seed and logs) when it met on the 30th October.

In Guernsey we had seen no sign of the infection but responding to the experience in the UK, Plant Health staff started to check on areas planted in the last few years and in one plantation of about 80 small trees one was found with symptoms. The tree had come from an English plant nursery in February 2012 (thought at the time to be free of the disease)

Samples were taken which were sent to the UK Central Science Laboratory. As a precaution, the owners removed all of the young trees on 8th November along with the top branches of the standard trees. Confirmation that the tree was infected with was received on 13th November and the remainder of the standard trees were removed in the morning of 14th November and destroyed.

All trees in the consignment have been destroyed and recent surveys have shown that there are no ash trees near to the site. It is hoped that the prompt action taken will result in the eradication of infection from the site. The site will be inspected next year from early summer.

More information on Ash Dieback, including symptoms to look out for, can be found at the UK Forestry Commission website at <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/chalara>

Current and Future Measures

Control may be possible by a rigorous process of destroying young trees if infection is found and for this reason surveys of ash trees in Guernsey are being undertaken. Islanders who have imported ash trees in the past 3 years are asked to contact the Plant Health Section at the Commerce & Employment Department so that their trees can be inspected. Anyone with ash trees on their land is also asked to check their trees for symptoms.

Mr Nigel Clark, Plant Health Inspector for Guernsey said “It is particularly important that recently imported ash trees are inspected. Finding infection before it becomes established will give us the best chance of protecting the island’s ash trees from this potentially devastating disease.”

The time to plant forestry trees such as ash is from the autumn through to early spring when the plants are still dormant. The bans, voluntary and statutory, on the importation of ash trees were put in place before the 2012 – 2013 planting season.

The Department’s plant health staff will be following closely the current considerations of the UK plant health experts on future tree disease control strategies. In the mean time staff will monitor sites over the coming months and into the 2013 growing season and remain keen to receive information from the public regarding areas planted in the last 3 years. Plant Health staff have visited 11 sites monitoring for Ash die back and other disease threats since September. This work will continue.

There is yet to be evidence of the spore producing stage of the fungus being present in the Island. Whether an infection could establish from spores blown many miles over the Channel is, at this stage, conjecture as the current understanding is that trees need a high dose of spores to become infected.

Reflections on Lessons from the Dutch Elm Disease Experience.

The first legislation to control the movement of diseased elm wood was enacted in 1978. The main initial campaign responding to Dutch Elm Disease was to fell trees to slow the progress of the disease. The cost in manpower and money was considerable and reflected the highly dominant position of elm in the local treescape at the time. As late as the early 1990s it was reported that more than 80% of the mature trees were "Guernsey" Elms.

When it became apparent in 1992 that control could no longer be maintained by the felling and burning scheme, and that the annual cost of control measures at that time would exceed £600,000, the States switched resources to a replanting programme to replace trees and specifically to diversify the tree population of the Island. This was done to ensure that it would be better able to weather a species specific problem (such as we are now threatened by with Ash Dieback) without losing a high percentage of tree cover, as was the case when DED struck the Island. This campaign was transferred to Environment in 2004 and subsequently was brought to a close as an early budgetary saving measure.

It is likely that the policy may prove to have been very valuable in creating greater resilience in the tree population of the Island by increasing the genetic diversity of trees on the Island. The loss of a tree is in fact an opportunity for others to survive and thrive in its stead.

Interestingly the Islands elms have regenerated to a degree over recent years as that plant is able to send up substantial sapling from its extensive root system which survived the dieback of top growth.

The lesson perhaps is the resilience of nature, given the right opportunities and the evolving nature of the Island's natural plant population and that extensive and expensive felling campaign may have little chance of ultimate success against a vigorous easily spread pathogen. .

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