

Strategy to secure forestry's future

Andrew Heald revisits Confor's Plant Health action plan and considers the *Ips typographus* outbreak in Europe

Much has been written in recent years about the rapid increase in pests and diseases impacting UK forests and woodlands. We have seen how *Phytophthora ramorum* and *Xylella* have rapidly travelled across the UK and will change our productive forest, our hedgerows, and native woodlands forever.

A changing climate puts all our trees under stress, particularly after the very hot weather last year. Those unusual conditions saw an inevitable spread of Oak processionary moth (OPM) into the nurseries of Belgium and Germany in late 2018. Unsurprisingly, this summer we have witnessed over 80 confirmed cases of OPM in the UK.

The outbreak of *Ips typographus* in Kent appears to be under control but was a real wake up call for many of us who have always thought "it could never happen here".

The spread of *Xylella* from south-

ern Europe into Spain and though Italy and up to France, means that a ban on the import of Olive trees now looks inevitable.

The option of banning imports" is always appealing but it is often at odds with our relatively free trading history and, with relatively few plant health inspectors and with easy (ish) road connection with Europe, not always straightforward.

A key part of the UK Government's strategy in tackling biosecurity is the wider use of Plant Passports on all relevant material including harvested timber. It was plant passports that enabled the deliveries of oak trees to be followed and sites inspected.

How do we balance the real and urgent need for biosecurity with the desire for light-touch regulation and free trade?

Confor has worked hard to make the Plant Passporting requirements as workable and practical as possible, but the people who will be required to implement them need to see and understand that they are adding value. Is this a price we are willing to pay for greater biosecurity? *Read more on p14 and p16.*



Ips typographus - a Swiss perspective

The current European outbreak of *Ips* is having a devastating effect on forests across central Europe. The impact is also being felt in the UK with a decline in the price of sawn timber due to the large volumes of harvesting timber reaching the market. Harvested timber in Austria is currently cheaper than in Russia, and there are concerns regarding the availability of timber in five to ten years time due to the scale of the impact.



Here, **Dr Beat Wermelinger** describes the situation in Switzerland and reflects on lessons learned.

Ips typographus is currently the most challenging pest in Swiss forests. Following the storms Vivian (1990) and Lothar (1999), two million and eight million cubic metres, respectively, of Norway spruce timber was infested and killed. To put this in context: the usual annual harvest in Switzerland is five million cubic metres! Between 2008 and 2014, the infestations remained at a normal, low level, but since then they have

gradually increased, in particular after the hot and dry years of 2017 and 2018. The infestations in 2018 were higher than in the peak year after Vivian but clearly lower than after Lothar.

Due to climate change, few forest owners will now plant spruce, especially not at lower elevations. Instead, they rely on natural regeneration, leading to higher proportions of broadleaves. Occasionally, specific tree species such as oak, cherry or walnut are planted. As an alternative to spruce, silver fir is promoted.

To control *Ips* and other bark beetles, usually sanitation felling is used, ie removing infested trees from the forest

UK PLANT HEALTH STRATEGY

The UK's Plant Health Strategy launched in May 2018 included:

- Launching the 'Don't Risk It' campaign (summer 2019) to raise awareness of the risks of bringing back plant materials from holiday destinations
- Consulting with industry on contingency plans for key threats to our trees and plants to ensure a swift and effective response should new pests and diseases enter the UK
- Strengthening protection against *Xylella* – maintaining continuous scrutiny

of the risk situation and taking measures to maintain the strongest possible controls

- Building knowledge and awareness of threats to trees to ensure accurate and up to date information
- Working in partnership with the sector to drive up biosecurity standards through assurance and safe sourcing
- Exploring strengthening of public procurement strategies to specify safe sourcing

- Reviewing passenger baggage allowance for regulated plant material to assess whether it should be discontinued

Sir Harry Studholme, chair of the Forestry Commission said: "Publishing this strategy is a critical milestone in our ongoing work to safeguard England's trees. It provides clear direction on how we can work collaboratively across sectors, to combat tree pests and diseases, to protect our beloved forests and woodlands for not only our current generation but for the future."

Where do we want to be in five years?

2018 2019 2020 2021 2022 2023

Governments and regulators should...

IMMEDIATELY

Increase monitoring and reporting to include the majority of imported firewood and wood packaging material.
or
Ban imported firewood.

IN THE NEXT YEAR

Report area of woodland under management in annual Forest Statistics.

IN THE NEXT FEW YEARS

Promote UK-grown firewood.

Provide adequate grants and support for woodland management and streamline the process of approving felling permissions.

In five years, financial and regulatory incentives must make it easier and cheaper to supply firewood by managing UK woodlands, than to import it.

Landowners, management companies and nurseries should...

IN THE NEXT YEAR

Explore opportunities to bring unmanaged woodlands into management and help government create suitable support.

IN THE NEXT FEW YEARS

Take up and promote opportunities provided by government.

Earlier in 2018, Confor launched our own Biosecurity and Brexit paper

before the beetles have emerged. In remote areas, infested trees are often left standing. The same is true in the lowlands for forest reserves or for stands where the owners or authorities decided to refrain from measures for various reasons. The use of pheromone traps for monitoring has decreased.

Timber prices have declined in general, and the current situation with sanitation fellings has additional negative consequences on the timber market.

It has become obvious that *Ips* outbreaks in spruce-dominated forests after severe disturbance cannot be prevented. But a consistent, large-scale and timely sanitation felling of infested trees was shown to be effective. The most important lesson, however, is that

people have become aware that in lower elevations spruce will not be a promising tree species in the future and instead promote broadleaves. Spruce is drought-intolerant, susceptible to windthrow and bark beetles, which disturbances will probably increase with climate change.

What could have been done better? Given the composition and age of the affected stands outbreak were almost inevitable. A more intensive control was not feasible due to limited capacities. The control might have been organized more efficiently by better prioritization. And often sanitation cutting occurred too late when *Ips* had already left the stems.
Dr Beat Wermelinger is an entomologist and senior scientist at the Swiss Federal Institute WSL

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