

Press Release

22nd April 2014

Public asked to help survey health of ash trees

New ash tree survey launched

The **Living Ash Project** is asking members of the public to report information about the health of ash trees. They are especially interested in those that may have some tolerance to the disease that is threatening Britain's second-most common broadleaved tree – Chalara ash dieback. The Living Ash Project aims to identify trees that are tolerant to ash dieback.

There are an estimated 120 million ash trees in Britain's woodlands and hedgerows. Evidence from Denmark, where Chalara ash dieback is more prevalent, indicates that approximately 1% of trees show good tolerance to the disease. While tolerant trees may regenerate naturally in some woodlands, identifying tolerant trees is urgently needed so as to ensure a genetically diverse and resilient population for future woodland planting. Identifying tolerant trees and including their progeny in breeding programmes run by the Living Ash Project will enable the large-scale production of resilient trees.

The project is employing citizen science - asking members of the public to help in gathering information - to aid in the identification of tolerant trees. Working with the University of East Anglia's Adapt Group, a new function has been added to the AshTag app. By logging into the site at <https://www.ashtag.org/sightings/submit>, anyone can report on the health of an ash tree, not just this year, but over the next few years.

Gabriel Hemery, Chief Executive at the Sylva Foundation says: "The launch of this survey is a milestone in the development of the project. We will be working closely with AshTag to oversee the online survey and look forward to receiving submissions from members of the public". He added, "Enabling people to follow the progress of an ash tree is very important, as it will allow us to understand the tolerance of a tree to this devastating disease".

Chris Blincoe, Programme Manager at the Adapt Group, University of East Anglia says: "The AshTag app was created at a time when the nation's ash trees were first under threat from ash dieback and the outlook for the species was pretty bleak. Time really was of the essence if we wanted to safeguard our forests and so Adapt had the app up and running just four days after it was confirmed that ash dieback had spread to the UK. Eighteen months on, we are incredibly proud to be in a position to start looking ahead to find a solution to the disease."

"By asking members of the public across the UK to track the health of their local ash trees, we can tap into a wealth of data which could hold the key to locating tolerant trees and safeguard the future of the UK's ash trees."

The Living Ash Project team are most interested in larger trees but any tree can be surveyed. They are particularly keen to survey ash trees in every corner of Britain, because the genetics of ash trees vary across the country. Ideally, the trees selected need to be surveyed every year for at least three years, so that a detailed picture of their health is built up.

People who want to find out more can visit www.livingashproject.org.uk to take the survey and to get free tags to track the health of their tree.

Notes for Editors

Further Information

The **Living Ash Project** was launched in 2013. It incorporates four work programmes to:-

- i) identify individual trees that show good tolerance of Chalara ash dieback
- ii) screen these individuals using genetic markers developed by other Defra funded research
- iii) secure material from these trees in archives for further breeding purposes
- iv) develop techniques for rapid production of tolerant trees for deployment to the forestry sector

The **Living Ash Project** aims to secure ash trees for the future that show tolerance to Chalara ash dieback. It is important that a good proportion of trees that make it through a screening programme will be suitable for timber production to ensure a continued supply of this valuable product for the future.

In total, including in-kind contributions from the many partners, the Living Ash Project will cost approximately £1.2M and will take six years to complete.

Project website www.livingashproject.org.uk

Media enquiries

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Pictures are available

Interview and guided tour opportunities available: with Dr. Jo Clark, Forestry Research Manager, (population genetics and tree breeding specialist), at Earth Trust's national research woodland, Paradise Wood.

AshTag

AshTag was developed by the Adapt Low Carbon Group at the University of East Anglia.

The University of East Anglia (UEA) was founded in 1963. It has played a significant role in advancing human understanding and in 2012 the Times Higher Education ranked UEA as one of the 10 best universities in the world under 50 years of age. The university has graduated more than 100,000 students, attracted to Norwich Research Park some of Britain's key research institutes and a major University Hospital, and made a powerful cultural, social and economic impact on the region.
www.uea.ac.uk/50years

The Adapt Low Carbon Group brings together a broad range of expertise and builds on the widely acknowledged successes of UEA's business activities in the low carbon sector. Based at the Norwich Research Park (NRP), the Adapt group offers a range of programmes and consultancy services to support business in their low carbon growth and draws additional expertise from across the University. www.adaptlowcarbongroup.co.uk

AshTag, developed by Adapt, was launched in October 2012. When the news that ash dieback had been found wild in the UK first hit the headlines, the team were keen to do something to help. We worked around the clock to rapidly develop a smartphone app that enabled thousands of people to identify diseased trees and submit photos to be assessed by experts, to track how the disease was spreading across the UK. This was a good start, but thanks to the support of the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation, AshTag has now gone a step further. By physically tagging ash trees, we can build up a clear picture of how ash dieback affects trees in the long term, and hopefully track down resistant trees that can be used to fight back against this devastating disease. Together, we can ensure that ash trees continue to thrive in the UK for generations to come.

Sylva Foundation

The Sylva Foundation is a charitable trust which supports forestry science, promotes trees and their management to the public, and supports the production and availability of home-grown timber. The Foundation's charitable objects are to promote the conservation of the environment for the public benefit consistent with sustainable development principles.

It is a charity registered in England & Wales ([Reg. Charity No. 1128516](#)) and in Scotland ([Reg. Charity No. SC041892](#)). www.sylva.org.uk

Earth Trust

The Earth Trust is an environmental learning charity ([Reg. Charity No. 1095057](#)). We believe the best way to look after the places we love is to change the way we live. We provide great opportunities for people of all ages to discover nature and the countryside. Our programmes of events, courses, children's learning and volunteering can inspire everyone to make a small difference and look after our local environment.

www.earthtrust.org.uk

Future Trees Trust

Future Trees Trust is a registered charity ([Reg. Charity No. 1103202](#)) dedicated to the improvement of broadleaved trees through selective breeding, and to improve their resilience to disease and climate change. By making broadleaved trees more attractive to grow for timber, we hope many more trees will be planted with all the associated benefits for our environment, our economy, and for public enjoyment.

www.futuretrees.org

Forest Research

Forest Research is the research agency of the Forestry Commission and is one of the world's leading centres of research into woodlands and forestry.

www.forestry.gov.uk/forestresearch

Ends