Tree Wardens Report July 2020

I think more people than usual have been tramping the roads, byways and public footpaths of the area as part of their daily Pandemic exercise regime.   I have no doubt that everyone has noticed the abundance of wild flowers and butterflies. The birds too seem to be in better voice, although that might just be the lessening of the background decibels through lack of the normal hum human activity. Insects appear more numerous which must be helping the birds.

Whatever the reason humans have noticed the same and appear to like it.  The council have not regularly cut verges, hedges and footpaths and so we should expect a bumper show next year too as the plants are allowed to seed.

The trees in our landscape have added a welcome backdrop to our walks. They have benefited, as have we, from the cleaner air during this time. However, they have also suffered from the see sawing weather from very wet to very dry and wet again. I expect we may lose a goodly number of both the young, mature and veteran trees this autumn and winter.

Whilst we find ourselves under this spectacular oak, I thought I’d say a few things about the pathogens affecting our oak trees today. Luckily in Suffolk we have not suffered with the Oak Processionary Moth (OPM). However, it’s in London and most of the Home Counties so we should be vigilant to look for light candy floss like nests with hairy caterpillars on our Oaks and report any sightings.

Oaks are being affected by Acute Oak Decline (AOD) and Chronic Oak Dieback (COD) and these are a major concern.  Scientists are looking at the causes of both and the interrelationship between them as some trees are affected and weakened by both. The current thinking is AOD is caused by a number of factors including soil conditions, water logging and pollution. COD targets the oaks central system and roots and this its ability to take up water and nutrients.   This causes leaf and branch die back.  There is also a bacteria that is attracted to the oak’s leaves and as the bacteria spreads down the down then trunk it attracts a beetle. The beetle lays eggs and when the young hatch, the bacteria and the young act in unison to weaken the tree. The young eating the pulpy softwood and the bacteria make the wood pulpy and soft. Usually, the Oak tree would have defences and would fightback by releasing toxic chemicals and tannins However, it is thought another bacteria joins in and together it’s all too much for the tree and it cannot cope. To compound a bad situation, once weakened Honey fungus and water mould join the battle. Thus, the mighty oak is weakened.

Oak Trees have been on this earth for 65 million years and can live for 1000 years. The oak traditionally symbolises moral strength, nobility, honour and wisdom: qualities that both the oak and humanity need in abundance at the present time.

On another note the Tree Council, DEFRA and the Forestry Commission have published a guide for Ash tree owners and what they can do to identify and manage Ash dieback. In particular, to save those trees be they veteran mature or young that show resistance to the pathogen. Additionally, it may be of interest to know that the Law has changed as regards trade in wood and wood production and that you may need to be registered to move wood both within the UK and abroad especially, if your business involves large conifers or any sweet chestnut wood. More information can be found on the UK Government’s website.