

Nature Diary 2

There's good news and bad news.

'Ash dieback will kill up to 90% of ash trees across the UK. At a cost of billions the effect will be staggering and will change the landscape forever....' (The Woodland Trust). Some estimates exceed 90% so it is a very serious problem.

The disease is called Chalara and is caused by a fungus (*Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*). It was accidentally introduced to a nursery in Buckinghamshire from Polish stock in 2012. It is now endemic throughout Britain. It helps if I explain its life cycle. Infected leaves and twigs fall to the ground in autumn and small white fruiting bodies appear. These produce thousands of spores which can travel up to ten miles on the wind. If



they land on an ash leaf fungal roots penetrate the water carrying tubes in the stem blocking them up. The leaves die of thirst causing the characteristic leaf droop. Saplings suffer first but eventually mature trees succumb. Public access to some woods is barred



Wilwell July 20

because of falling boughs. Nobody wants ash dieback on their death certificate!

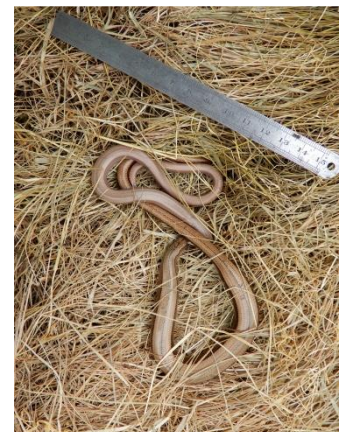
There are considerable infections at Wilwell, Bunny Woods, Sharphill and The Wilfrd Claypits. It will only get worse. A small percentage of trees ,however, exhibit some genetic resistance. These are propagated to establish fresh stock for the long-term future.

Now the good news

Some of you will remember me introducing you to the slow worms at Wilwell. I was worried that following this very wet winter they would be affected as they hibernate underground. I can report that they are thriving. Once again we put out some reptile refuges ie squares of roofing felt and in addition we built a hibernaculum.



That sounds grand but it is simply a pile of bricks and rubble topped off with the twigs and small branches and covered in a thick layer of dead grass and vegetation. Nice and cosy for any small creature to hide in.



I have always found individuals of various sizes including a pregnant female and some spaghetti sized youngsters. Frequently they are accompanied by an ant colony. Lovely, breakfast in bed every morning.