

Sweet chestnut blight outbreak prompts swift action

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New Demarcated Area established in Devon following the first detection of airborne spores in Great Britain since 2011.

Sweet chestnut blight has been confirmed in Devon, the Forestry Commission has said today (Thursday 26 March).

In response to the outbreak, the Forestry Commission has introduced restrictions on the movement of susceptible material in parts of South Devon from Thursday 2 April. These measures are designed to contain the disease and reduce the risk of further spread.

Sweet chestnut blight is a destructive disease caused by the fungus *Cryphonectria parasitica* which attacks the bark of European sweet chestnut trees, entering through fissures or wounds and spreading to the underlying tissue and wood, killing these tissues as it advances. Symptoms of the disease include fissured or discoloured bark cankers with orange pinhead-sized fungal fruiting bodies and buff-coloured fungal fans under the bark.

While previous findings have been made at a small number of sites in England, all of which are subject to statutory control measures, this action is in response to the first finding in 15 years in Great Britain of the causal fungus reproducing sexually. This means airborne spores are being produced, increasing the risk of wider environmental spread.

The Demarcated Area being introduced will mean restrictions on the felling, killing and movement of sweet chestnut trees and other susceptible material capable of spreading the disease, helping to prevent further spread. This includes a prohibition of the movement of plants for planting of the genus *Castanea* to outside of the demarcated area and restrictions on the movement of sweet chestnut wood and bark within and outside of the demarcated area unless authorised by the Forestry Commission.

The Forestry Commission is working in partnership with the Royal Horticultural Society and Forest Research to encourage the public and stakeholders to look for signs of the disease and report any suspected findings as part of the Check a Sweet Chestnut campaign.

Professor Nicola Spence, Defra Chief Plant Health Officer, said:

“The confirmation of sweet chestnut blight in Devon and the presence of airborne spores represents an increase in risk of the disease.

“We have acted swiftly and decisively to introduce restrictions to protect sweet chestnut trees across the country, and we urge anyone who suspects they have seen signs of this disease to report it immediately via TreeAlert.”

Andrea Deol, Forestry Commission Head of Plant Health Forestry, said:

“We have moved quickly to introduce a Demarcated Area in Devon as sweet chestnut blight reproducing sexually has the potential to spread rapidly and over longer distances through the movement of airborne spores.

“We encourage woodland owners, land managers, tree nurseries and members of the public to engage with the Check a Sweet Chestnut campaign to maintain biosecurity and prevent spread.”

Further information, including updated guidance and information, is available via this link.

Additional information:

- Sweet Chestnut Blight is caused by the fungus *Cryphonectria parasitica*,
- The disease is regulated in the UK as a Quarantine Pest and we are obligated to act against the current findings to support maintaining this status. It is not endemic to the UK, although it is now widespread in Europe.
- Surveillance taking place will also direct future management decisions.
- A blog is available from Forest Research on how new research is investigating a potential biocontrol programme to manage sweet chestnut blight.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/sweet-chestnut-blight-outbreak-prompts-swift-action>