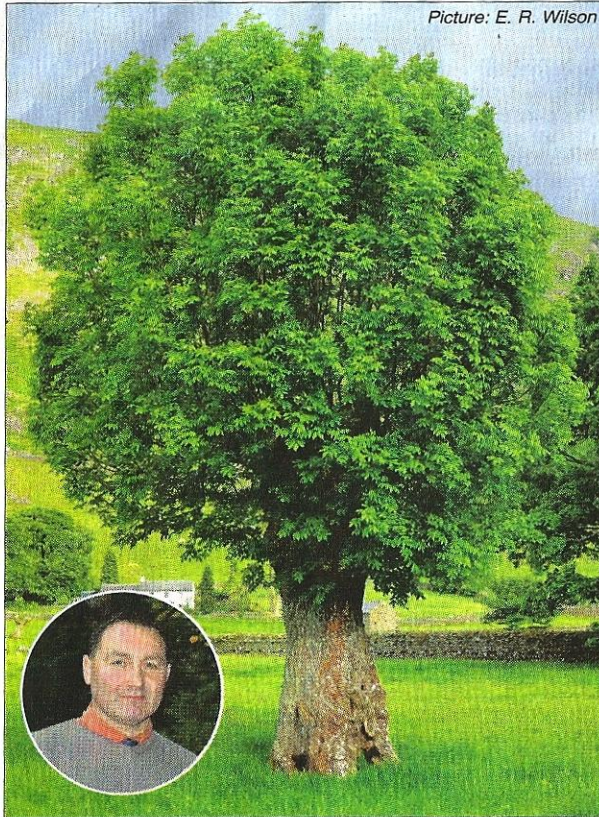


Ted's army on warpath over killer fungus



UNDER THREAT: An ash pollard in St. John's-in-the-Vale, near Keswick, and (inset) forestry expert Ted Wilson.

A CUMBRIAN forestry expert is seeking an army of volunteers in Eden to identify ash trees threatened by a killer fungus which he says is the deadliest threat to our countryside since Dutch Elm disease in the 1980s.

If successful, similar action groups could be rolled out across the UK to monitor outbreaks of ash dieback disease which has now been identified at 10 sites in the county.

"A people's army of volunteers — right here in the heart of Eden — could be the best wall of defence against deadly dieback disease wiping out Cumbria's globally significant population of ash trees," said Ted Wilson, director of Penrith-based Silviculture Research International (SRI).

A special training workshop — the first of its kind in the UK — is being held at Lowther Castle next Saturday. The project is being delivered by SRI on behalf of the Heart of Eden Development Trust following a successful bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund.

"We're looking for up to 80 volunteers, people with a love of trees and the countryside," explained Ted. "No expert knowledge is needed although it is important that volunteers have access to the Internet to upload their findings."

Ash dieback disease, which causes the leaves of the tree to curl, wither and die, arrived in Britain from the continent last year and there are now more than 550 confirmed cases. "We are going to see more incidences of ash dieback here but we are not sure where and when — hence the importance of our volunteers," he added.

"These people will be our very own early

warning system, their trained eyes picking up early signs of ash dieback. Their findings will create a constantly updating map of the disease's spread in Cumbria. Foresters will then be able to take rapid action to hopefully slow the spread to other areas."

Mr. Wilson, who lectures on forest conservation all over the world, is particularly concerned about the threat to the Lake District's collection of ancient ash trees.

"They are truly ancient, some reaching 700 years and are a crucial part of the landscape. They are home to dozens of species of lichens, insects, birds and mammals," he said.

Mr. Wilson was the first British forestry expert to call for public participation to help fight against ash dieback disease (*Chalara fraxinea*).

The workshop at Lowther Castle is the first of five such events — the next four will be held in 2014. Mr. Wilson said Eden was the perfect area to launch the first ash action group as it has numerous ash trees and Eden residents were very engaged with nature and conservation.

"The disease is still spreading even if it has temporarily dipped from news headlines," he said. "The problem is that nature moves much more slowly than instant news and the 24/7 media but ash dieback disease is not going to go away."

The workshops will be run by Mr. Wilson and Dr. Dani Leslie, an expert in rural development issues and conservation.

Volunteers can book a place on the Lowther Castle workshop by going to www.silviculture.org.uk/ashineden/