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Army of volunteers needed to fight tree disease

NATURE lovers across the Lake District are being urged to get involved in the fight against a deadly disease.

An army of volunteers are being recruited to identify ash trees threatened by a killer fungus - the deadliest threat to the British 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, identified at ten sites in the county.

"A people's army of volunteers 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 the Penrith-based Silviculture Research

Ted Wilson:
'A people's army of volunteers could be the best wall of defence against deadly dieback disease'

International.

"We're looking for up to 80 volunteers, people with a love of trees and the countryside," Mr Wilson explained.



"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 over 550 confirmed cases.

"The picture is of ash dieback spreading from the south east and east towards the west and north and, of course, Cumbria," said Mr Wilson.

"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."

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.