

# Alder Cone Gall **A rare species on the increase**

by Robert Maidstone

By the pond in the centre of New Buckenham Common in Norfolk stands a lone planted Alder, *Alnus glutinosa*, encased in wire-netting to protect its bark from the grazing cattle. One day in April 1998, idle curiosity, I suppose it was, made me reach up and pull off a stem of small woody cones that were wide open and bereft of seeds.

I noticed that on a few of the cones stiff, curled, leaf-like appendages could be seen. These I recognised as being something I had seen in one of my books while looking up other things. So I transferred a few into a collecting bag for checking later.

Sure enough I soon found the illustrations of *Exoascus alni-incanae* (Kuln.), a fungus that attacks the flowers and seeds in young catkins of Alders and produces green fleshy tongue-like outgrowths as the cone is growing which then turn black and hard as the cones ripen.

I mentioned this find to the Chairman of the British Plant Gall Society a few days later; he had not heard of this gall before and promised to check it for me.

When he contacted me again he had been unable to find any record of the gall in any of his British books but found it mentioned in both Dutch and French books as *Taphrina alni*. Subsequently he has discovered it should now be called *Taphrina amentorum*. Names aside, it appears this was the first record for many years of this gall in the British Isles.

While these machinations were going on through the Gall Society I was carrying on life as usual, chatting with one of my neighbours

in Wacton when I saw several of these galls on a small lone Alder planted by his gate!

Since my first sighting these galls have been seen in several places in Norfolk on the Common Alder cones, in some numbers on Teeside, and at one site in Suffolk. They have been found at the green cone stage when the gall is also green, sometimes flushed with red, and when the cone ripens when the galls are black.

As this rare gall seems to be on the increase it would be interesting for Tree Wardens to monitor its spread and distribution. The gall does not harm the tree, other than by infecting a few seeds in the cone. It seems the galls may not form on the same tree each year and they have only been found on the Common Alder, *Alnus glutinosa*, so far.

I am a member of the British Plant Gall Society and would be prepared to collate any sightings of these galls from Tree Wardens. The basic scientific data required would be the date and place (address) where the gall was seen and the type of Alder (if known - "alder" will do if you cannot differentiate between the different alders), and the Ordnance Survey Grid reference.



South Norfolk  
Tree Wardens Digest

# Tree Issue No.5 October 2000 line



# Regional Tree Warden Forum

23 September 2000  
Snape Maltings & Henham Park

## Making the Effort

Over 100 delegates attended this year's forum on a glorious day in Suffolk. Paul Heiney started the day with a talk on references to trees in literature and how they have been used as a symbol of character, permanence, stability, threat and shelter over the years. He read from his wife's (Libby Purves) children's book "The Hurricane Tree" which told the true story of their Beech which fell in October 1987.

Jon Stokes then reminded everybody of the origins of the Tree Warden Scheme, and outlined its achievements in the last 10 years.

Derek Patch of the Tree Advisory Trust spoke on pests and diseases, and outlined the need for vigilance. Tree wardens can play a vital role in spotting infestations of species such as the Asian Longhorn Beetle, and outbreaks of disease. Derek explained however, that the only thing that can kill a tree in hours is man!

John White outlined his method for calculating the age of veteran trees. John has worked for many years perfecting his method, and a copy of his paper was recently issued with "Tree Warden News".

Two Suffolk Tree Wardens then took the floor to describe activities that they had been involved with in their Parishes.

In Wangford the Parishioners have felled a line of *leylandii* on the playing field and replaced them with native hedging and trees. In Wickham Market, extensive tree planting has been undertaken across the Parish.

After a very enjoyable lunch, eaten overlooking sun-drenched marshes, coaches took us all to Henham Park. Once there we were asked to rank trees in order of preference. The idea was that if some HAD to be felled, which would they be. It was the "Big Brother" of the arboreal world! The devisors of the idea had been very sneaky though - some of the trees at Henham, including two *Sorbus domestica*, are very rare indeed!

Next year's event is planned to be in Norfolk.

South Norfolk delegates: Eric Wilkinson (Chedgrave), Donald & Maureen Bennett (Long Stratton & Shelton), Robert Maidstone (Wacton), John Webster (Fornsett), Paul Chapman (Caistor St Edmund), Roger Turpin (Wortwell), Andrew Daniels (Roydon) and Robin Taylor & Tina Gray (SNC).



## SOUTH NORFOLK FORUM

26 July 2000

The second South Norfolk Tree Wardens Forum was a success in as much that it turned out to be a FORUM! Lots of issues were discussed and actions agreed despite a limited turn out of only 14 wardens. If there had been a lot more however, it would have proved difficult for everybody to have their say!

Robin Taylor started the proceedings by reporting on the year's activities. The Regional Forum was held in October at Epping Forest, and the mini bus load of South Norfolk representatives had an enjoyable day. This year's event is in Suffolk (see separate report).

The Newsletter, mooted at the last Forum, has been a great success. Thanks were expressed to Ian Dobson and Ken Grayling for being the catalysts for this. Ian was enjoying a well deserved holiday, so Ken gave some more information about the newsletter and in particular made a plea for more contributions from all the other Wardens.

Robin then reported on the findings from the training survey and explained that he would try to organise events in accordance with the preferences suggested by them. Hedgerow Regulations had emerged as the priority, and these would be the subject of a talk later in the meeting.

Walks had been enjoyed in the Parishes of Morningthorpe (lead by Mr & Mrs Sargent), Wacton (Robert Maidstone) and Longs

Wood, Wreningham (Ian Dobson & Dennis Long). It is hoped that more of these will happen on a regular and informal basis.

After the round up of the year, the group discussed whether or not to subscribe to "Tree News". After a long debate it was agreed that South Norfolk Council will pay for all its Wardens to receive Tree News for one year, and that this would be reviewed annually.

Robin also outlined the new Community Environmental Grant opportunities, highlighting the provision for Tree Wardens. Hopefully this will make it much easier for Wardens to get the trees, shrubs, sundries and training that they need. In particular, centrally organised ordering will be used from now on for tree week planting.

After a break, the Hedgerow Regulations were the subject of a short talk. Robin outlined the scope of the Regulations and the procedures involved. Since the Hedgerow Regulations came into force on 1 June 1997, 26 notifications have been received by South Norfolk Council. These have resulted in a total of 2657 metres of hedgerow being protected. It was requested that wardens could be more directly involved with the Regulations. Whilst there is no formal provision for their involvement, Robin agreed to try to find ways to involve them with the process. During the evening there was also a lively discussion about the merits of *Leylandii*!

The issue of insurance was raised by the Wardens as it appears that there is disparity in how they are protected from Parish to Parish. Robin agreed to write to the Clerks in an attempt to resolve this.

## Interview with a Tree Warden

*Ken Grayling talks to Robert Maidstone, Tree Warden for Wacton*

For a Tree Warden, Robert is inordinately interested in much smaller things. He is a keen natural historian and has been so all his life, making observations from the mid-60's and recording them for the old Biological Record Centre (now the National Biological Centre), at Monks Wood which was run by the Nature Conservancy

Interviewing him in his study, I was reminded of the Victorian naturalists - he is an true amateur in that this is not his career but is the subject he loves - yet he provides the essential background information that allows academics to put flesh on their theories. So, alongside the inevitable modern computer there are boxes labelled 'skulls', and 'galls', filing cabinets stuffed with records of observations and articles he has written, innumerable slides, microscopes and the odd stuffed bird alongside peacock feathers and wasps nests.

He became a Tree Warden by volunteering for the job, having heard about it by attending his local Parish Council meetings. As there is little scope for tree planting in Wacton he fell back on recording what is there and has comprehensive files recording not just hedge and tree species (all properly plotted on 6" to the mile maps), but also weeds, insects, pond and ditch life associated with the hedges. One grid map he showed me plotted Field Maple occurrence that coincides with the medieval field pattern of the area.

As an example of his work this issue carries an article he has written on Alder Cone Galls. His observations require great patience and discrimination - to differentiate between one particular gall insect and its brother requires inspection of a single segment of its antennae and

magnifications of up to x600 are needed.

His interest in galls means he can be called a cecidologist - my edition of Chambers gives *Cecidomyia* from the Greek for a gall and a fly and describes it as a genus of flies destructive to vegetation. Robert says that galls usually do not adversely affect the plant at all and often a tree carrying galls one year will have none the next.

Robert writes for a periodical called Flora Facts & Fables, which contains articles much like the Alder Cone Gall one and also gives talks on natural history to organisations such as the WI. With his breadth of knowledge and his willingness to share it I believe there is a need to give him a platform and we hope to include articles by him regularly in future issues of TreeLine.



### *On The Trail Of The Lonesome Pine*

That time of year again ! In the absence of any contributions from you, dear readers, here is my 'swap list':

To good homes:

4 Goat Willow (pot grown outdoors)  
2 Honey Locust (not native... but someone might have a large garden....) 5+ Walnut  
Some Ash

In return, I need:

Alder, Holly, Hawthorn and Blackthorn

Ken Grayling  
01508-531754

## High Hedges

You may have read or heard in the news that the Government has agreed to work up new laws to tackle nuisance hedges such as *Leylandii*. Do not hold your breath for these however, as there has yet to be time found for this in the Parliamentary timetable!

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## Welcome!

Tina Gray has joined South Norfolk Council as Landscape Assistant. Tina has been a resident of the District for many years and therefore has a lot of useful local knowledge. Her first project with the Tree Wardens is to co-ordinate the requests for free trees and sundries for National Tree Week – see the right hand column.

## News From South Norfolk Planning Department

Two new Tree Preservation Orders have been served in Pulham Market and Hethersett. The first resulted from a Conservation Area Notification and the second from a planning application for a new agricultural access.

An appeal against South Norfolk's refusal of consent to fell a pine tree in Hethersett has been dismissed. South Norfolk successfully argued that the tree's contribution to the amenity of the area outweighed the residents concerns and desire for a larger vegetable garden.

## Forthcoming events

22 November to 3 December National Tree Week, including World Record tree planting attempt. Winter/Spring 2001 – Tree Survey Training.

## During National Tree Week

In November some of our Tree Wardens are going to be extremely busy planting trees and hedges. The take-up of the offer sent to Tree Wardens in early September has been very good, thank you to all who responded. At the moment we are putting together our huge order and if we don't contact you, then you can take it your requests have all been met.

The Community Environmental Grant Scheme enables SNC to offer these plants and in due course we shall be asking for details of the schemes. We hope that you will record them yourselves, with photographs please! It is intended that we will feature these in Treeline from time to time.

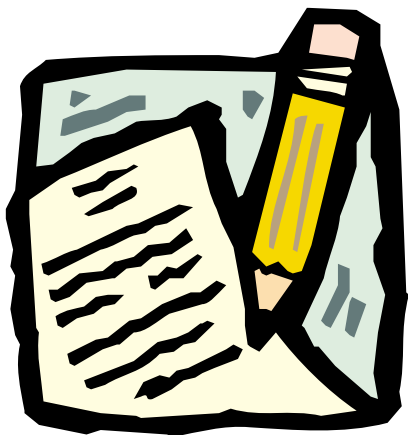
We offered a pre-selected range of native species to give Tree Wardens as much choice as possible for sites within their parishes.

In early November Tree Wardens will be notified when and where their trees will be ready for collection . If you have any questions please contact Tina Gray on 01508 533936.

## Access to South Norfolk Tree Wardens

Tree Wardens and the Internet/  
World-Wide Web

E-mail addresses are given for those Tree Wardens and organizers already on the web. If in doubt visit Ian's woodland web site: <http://www.ibdigital.co.uk/woodland>  
... and let us know when you get online!



## Write to us

Contact address and Telephone:

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It's all about sharing information and best practise so please contribute any item of interest, local or national activity. Your news and views will be most welcome.

...see all issues in colour @

<http://www.ibdigital.co.uk/woodland>

Any ideas –put them in the (e)mail.

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## New Wardens

Four new Tree Wardens have been appointed since the last issue. In Wheatacre & Burgh St Peter, Mrs Margaret Gaylard has replaced Vera Fulcher. Steve Beckett is the new Warden in Tasburgh, whilst in Thurton, Mr N Whiting has agreed to take on the role. Mr Chris Johnson has replaced the late Peter Leigh as Warden for Bergh Apton. Mr Leigh died in July and we offer our sincerest condolences to his wife.