

New enemy for British oaks

Scientists are warning that Britain's native oaks could be under threat from a relatively new but potentially deadly disease.

Little is known about acute oak decline (AOD), first identified 13 years ago. It causes mature oaks (more than 50 years old) to bleed dark fluid from cracks in the bark.

Native species *Quercus robur* (pedunculate oak) and *Q. petraea* (sessile oak) are affected. Infected trees' canopies thin out and entire branches die back; the disease can kill a tree in less than five years.

Unlike sudden oak death, known to be caused by the fungus-like oomycete pathogen *Phytophthora ramorum*, the main cause of AOD is believed to be bacteria.

'We are looking at a disease that has the

potential to change our landscape even more than Dutch elm disease,' said Peter Goodwin of the charity Woodland Heritage. 'We can't afford a repetition of what happened then. Action is needed now.'

Forestry researchers are calling for urgent funding to find out more about AOD as the number of infected trees is increasing. It is estimated hundreds of trees may be infected, most of them currently in the Midlands.

The Forestry Commission has issued guidelines for woodland owners on managing AOD and suspected cases can be reported to Forest Research's Disease Diagnostic and Advisory Service.

• Email: ddas@forestry.gsi.gov.uk
or visit: www.forestry.gov.uk



'Bleeding' from cracks in the bark - a typical symptom of acute oak decline