

'Natural Rotter'

On reading Tree Damage Alert no 97 Nasty Rotter my first reactions were surprise and disbelief. Looking at the published date of July 2004 too I thought it must be a mistake and should perhaps read July 1904! Unfortunately 'Nasty Rotter' endorses some fears and apprehensions I have felt that the Arb world seems to be sliding back into old, long held entrenched views despite Alan Rayner and Lynne Boddy's long published revelations on the relationships between trees and fungi.

Fortunately there is in fact a very strong counter movement amongst modern arbs. Once Rayner and Boddy had spoken they listened, took note, formed and developed their own opinions. This has meant that most modern workers at the rock face have progressed and there are many exciting new tree management techniques. The outdated 'nasty rotter' beliefs have mostly gone and a great many trees with 'nasty rotter', hollowing fungi are now being managed by modern thinking arbs. In this respect these arbs almost certainly lead the rest of the world in tree management.

The co-evolutionary relationships between tree, fungi and other micro-organisms are not only fundamental and natural but now beyond dispute. When the modern arb became aware of these multifunctional, dynamic natural systems throughout the tree their reactions were positive and our management and understanding of trees and fungi has obviously continued to grow. Crucially the very act of managing trees with 'nasty rotters' rather than felling them has lead modern arbs to gain a far greater understanding of how trees grow, work and age. We forget so easily that from 'day one' trees without the aid of the modern arb survived the colonisation (attack is the outdated term) of 'nasty rotters'!

So how could this happen? Could it be that many species of 'nasty rotters' are really only capable of living on living and decaying dead wood - heartwood or ripe wood, and incapable of crossing into living wood?

You may go on to ask why do you often see trees that appear to have survived an extensive colonisation by a 'nasty rotter' and the fungi appear to have stopped or died? Could it be that the fungal mycelium has been eaten by nematodes to a point where the fungus dies or ceases to have any further impact. It is believed that at least 80% of all the species of nematodes in the UK live by feeding on fungal mycelium. Or could it be that the effects of fungus gnat or beetle larvae that feed on fungal mycelium or fungal fruit bodies?

Could it be another fungus eating the mycelium or merely competing for the same food source. Perhaps this is one of the most common scenarios of fungi in wood. Could it be bacteria, yeast or other microorganisms that could be termed diseases of the mycelium affecting its growth or its actual existence. All organisms have other organisms affecting them in some way or another. And modern arbs have become increasingly aware of these complex co-evolutionary relationships.

Equally many modern arbs today see that there can be positive benefits from decay. However nowhere in the nasty rotter article are these possibilities considered to give a more balanced view which could lead the reader away from the totally negative viewpoint expressed.

To see a tree with a 'nasty rotter' and declare its death sentence without due consideration of the facts as they stand at the beginning of the 21st century is not acceptable ever again. Perhaps the article should have said 'NATURAL rotter' instead of 'NASTY rotter'

Ted Green

Fungi First!