

# Some counties are so slow in replacing fallen elms that they won't be finished for 70 years. Not in Wheatley

TWO Oxford researchers believe county councils in southern Britain are taking too long to replace dead elm trees.

Over 15m elms have been wiped out in the last decade by Dutch elm disease.

But many county councils are dragging their feet over replacing the trees — with disastrous effect on the countryside.

Farmland has been transformed into vast and featureless areas unsuitable as a habitat for wildlife, say researchers. John Krebs and Louise Osborne of the Edward Grey Institute of Field Ornithology, Oxford, in a report in New Scientist.

But while some counties — taking over 70 years to replace their dead trees at present rates of planting — were condemned, South Oxfordshire was one of the few to earn praise.

## Five-year plan

That was for replanting trees in small groups or spinneys favouring wildlife — a method to be encouraged elsewhere, say the team.

One person who wasn't surprised at the praise is Mrs Caroline Dalton, a parish councillor in the village of Wheatley.

She has been organising her own campaign of tree planting and conservation for over five years.

In that time the face of Wheatley has been transformed by over 250 trees of various shapes, sizes, types and colours — not just elms.

"I'm not surprised at the criticism either. Many people in this country think Britain has a great number of trees compared with other countries. But if you travel abroad, you'll see that in fact we have far fewer. And many of those are in danger."

It was after extensive travel in Europe, Africa, Russia and America that Caroline Dalton's interest took root.

After a lot of talking she persuaded Wheatley Parish Council in 1976 to give the village an annual grant to buy sapling trees.

"They argued at first it was pointless planting young trees because vandals would just rip them up again. But I argued back, what a defeatist attitude."

"And do you know in the five years we have planted over 250 trees only three have been uprooted by vandals."

## List of helpers

Her enthusiasm caught on in the village and was boosted in 1978 when Wheatley came second in a tree competition organised by the Council for the Protection of Rural England.

"I've never had much trouble in finding volunteers. Once people realise the danger to the countryside by not replacing trees they are only too prepared to help."

"Now I get villagers donating saplings to be planted and suggesting places where more trees are needed. I've got a list of people prepared to turn out and help with

# Village where trees are a growing hobby

By OLWEN RICE

planting in the busy period between October and March."

"In fact one lady got carried away after seeing my advert in the parish magazine for saplings. She left a fully grown apple tree on my lawn for planting. Unfortunately it was much too big to be used and we had to chop it up for firewood."

The work of choosing, buying and planting saplings, not to mention the task of building protective fencing and arranging for them to be watered and cared for as they grow, is too great for Caroline Dalton to consider expanding the project to other parts of the county.

"I do give advice to people from other villages though who are interested in starting similar schemes. I would say to anyone who is concerned after reading the elm report or just wants to improve their village — try to get a grant

from your district or parish council.

"Contact the council forestry department and find out what types of trees are most suitable for your area. Buy something not too big but not so small it takes years and years to grow."

Meanwhile the planting will go on in Wheatley. The original five-year planting plan has just ended — but she has no intention of stopping.



Mrs Caroline Dalton plants another small sapling tree to add to the 250 she has already helped plant in her home village of Wheatley. Picture by PETER FARR