

1. Why is the Białowieża Forest valuable?

Large parts of it have never known a lumberjack's axe, there are many old trees and many rare species, its ecosystem is still shaped by natural factors, almost like it was thousands of years ago. As the only such place in Europe, it is well known to naturalists in the West, who envy us a lot. The Białowieża National Park covers 17% of the Polish part of the Forest.

5. Why is there a bark beetle outbreak in the Forest?

It is a natural phenomenon, to which foresters have contributed by cutting down deciduous trees and planting spruces for years. To make matters worse, the Forest was dehydrated for many decades (in Belarus as well) to facilitate forest management, which weakened the shallow-rooted spruces. This led to many spruces being in poor health – a bark beetle paradise. Thus the outbreak.

6. Is the bark beetle a pest?

In production forests the bark beetle is treated as a pest threatening lumber production, which leads to interventions. This requires at least 80% of invaded trees to be logged and removed from the forest before the beetle can leave them and invade more.

7. What is the role of the bark beetle in the Białowieża Forest?

Just the opposite: it is not a pest but rather a natural facilitator of changes in the forest caused by climate changes. There are more spruces in the forest than there should be, so some of them have to die, sooner or later. The bark beetle removes the surplus, leaving the fittest ones, and so corrects the foresters' mistakes. Therefore, bark beetle control is not only unnecessary, it is harmful to the Forest.

8. Will logging the infested trees limit the bark beetle outbreak?

It is completely unrealistic. The bark beetle is 5mm long and can fly, the forest is huge, with spruces scattered throughout it. As a result, it will not be possible to find all infested trees in time, and logging only some of them is pointless. Besides, some spruces grow in Belarus and in the National Park (which covers 2/3 of the Forest), where they cannot be cut. So, the spruce logging method is doomed to fail, and even the foresters admit to it off the record. What is more, this method is extremely harmful.

10. Why do foresters want to fell infested spruces?

First, they fell spruces infested by the bark beetle in order to limit the outbreak, just as they do in commercial forests, even if it should harm rare species and lead to the loss of the Forest's biodiversity. Second, they fell dry spruces in order to sell the lumber they yield.

13. Dry trees are dangerous for people

But definitely less dangerous than steep slopes of the mountains. Dry spruce can stand for years, but will fall someday, and that is the reason why you can't enter the forest during heavy winds. In the National Park where there are lots of dead trees and thousands of tourists, no one was ever hurt. Also, dry spruces can be cut down if the stand close to houses and roads – no one will protest it. The scientists are not crazy. But there is absolutely no reason to cut thousands of spruces in the middle of the forest and put them in lumber mills, because it has nothing to do with the safety but it is only about making money and destroying the biological variety of the forest!

14. The ecologists were blocking the cutting of first infected spruces couple of years ago and that is the reason of invasion of the bark beetle.

The foresters increased the number of spruces almost twice in the agricultural part of the Białowieża Forest and it had to leave to the gradation of the bark beetle. Cutting or not cutting of the trees would not change anything. – There is no way to stop the gradation. It is a natural and wanted occurrence."

excerpts from: Kowalczyk R., Tryjanowski P., Żmihorski M. 30 questions about the bark beetle, foresters, and ecologists in the Białowieża Forest – scientists answer frequently asked questions and set the record straight (June 2017) <http://save-bialowieza.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/SCIENTISTS-ABOUT-THE-FOREST.pdf>