

## ELM TREES & WHITE LETTER HAIRSTREAKS IN DORSET BY NIGEL SPRING

**Elms** are a very complicated group of trees with many species and even more hybrids and the distinguishing features are not obvious. All species however have asymmetric leaves (look at the close-ups below).

The usually tall, upright and single stemmed English Elm with the rounded leaves is the species that has suffered most from Dutch Elm Disease (DED) but several of the other species and hybrids are resistant to DED to a varying degree.

Our butterfly reserve at **Ainers Gorse** has a long Elm hedge which supports possibly the most counted and most photographed White-letter Hairstreak (WLH) colony in the county! Here the elms appear to have a resistance to DED ("I am touching wood as I write this" said Nigel). The trees are multi-stemmed, untidy, not upright and have leaves that are longer than round. The margins of the leaves are evenly serrated and their leaf-stalks (petioles) are usually smooth not downy.



*White-letter Hairstreaks pairing*

This is a very elusive little butterfly that is on the wing in late June - mid July and is restricted to Elm trees where it can be seen on sunny days, flitting about amongst the foliage, often high up. The females lay their eggs on the bark of the twigs, sometimes low down, sometimes high up.



*Alners Gorse East Anglian Elm leaf*

smooth petiole (leaf stalk), longer than round leaf, evenly serrated along margins



*Alners Gorse East Anglian Elms*

multi stemmed and 'untidy', apparently resistant to DED, very good for WLH.

We have found elm trees in groups or lines and sometimes singly which look very like the Alners elms - and these are the ones we want to find more of!



*Down Lane Elms – multi-stemmed and untidy*





*Down Lane elm leaf*  
smooth petiole, even serrations on margins,  
leaf longer than round.



*English Elm*

rounded leaf uneven serrations on edges,  
hairy petiole.

All round us there are also upright English elms in varying stages of death from DED or recovery through suckers; many of the flailed hedges consist of English elms:

Can you identify the four leaves in this collage? None of them is Elm!



*Answers: clockwise from top L: Dogwood, Beech, Buckthorn and Hazel. Note they are almost symmetrical, unlike elm leaves.*



*English elm* upright form, single stemmed, vulnerable to DED



*Failed elm hedge* - no use for WLH

## **Wych Elm**

Has the largest leaves of the UK elms and is thought to be highly resistant to DED, but it is quite scarce in Dorset as it has a more northern and western distribution.