

An Old Friend Returns



Art is designed by Brenda Peterson, Illustration, www.audubonpress.com



Cedar Waxwing

Elm trees offer nest sites and food for birds and other wildlife.



Eastern Gray Squirrel



Baltimore Oriole

American elm trees were once a very important part of our lowland forests. They also lined city streets and created a graceful canopy over roadways. These remarkable trees could live over 200 years and grew so large that several people joining hands could not reach around them. Today, it is hard to find an American elm that is larger than five inches in diameter.



Greenish Mark Butterfly Caterpillar



Mourning Cloak Butterfly



Dutch elm disease fungus on a leaf.

Dutch elm disease is caused by two closely related fungi. One was introduced to the United States around 1930 on diseased logs and the other, a more aggressive species of unknown origin, was discovered later. The more aggressive species is responsible for most of the devastating mortality of elms from the 1970's through present time.



Yellow-bellied Sapsucker

Elm bark beetles look for dead or dying elm trees in which to lay their eggs.

Larvae mature inside and emerge as adults from infected trees. These adults, which have fungus spores on their bodies, feed in the inner bark of elm branches and forks of twigs, introducing the fungus to otherwise healthy elms.

Illustration: J.R. Sauer & L.B. Buckner, North Carolina State University, Raleigh, NC



Detroit, 1974

Less than half of the original 77 million American elms remained by 1976.



Detroit, 1981

In recent decades, American elms have succumbed to Dutch elm disease, caused by a fungus that is spread by elm bark beetles. The beetles carry the spores of the fungus from infected and dead elms to the branches and twigs of healthy ones. The fungus infects the healthy trees, which usually die. The fungus also moves through interconnected roots to kill other nearby elms.

The elm tree planted here was bred to tolerate Dutch elm disease. While it is the same species, this tree has traits that allow it to tolerate the disease. When infected, this elm may lose a few branches, but will probably survive and grow new healthy limbs.

Disease tolerant American elms will naturally reproduce and hopefully result in increased disease tolerance in future generations. With time and continued research, this old friend may one day return to grace America's forests and cities.

White-tailed Deer