

## December 2019

In December we continued our work in Churchill's Wood (next to the walled garden) thinning birch and chipping the brash to waste. Retaining some birch ensures a woodland environment is maintained to allow for future specimens to be planted there, while the chip will break down and provide nutrients for them. Aesthetically, the different height structures will benefit the Pinetum's long term appearance.

Figure 1: Felling a willow



Figure 2: Thinned birch with timber read for extraction



Figure 3: Guatemalan fir (*Abies guatemalensis*)

Trees of interest in this section of the Pinetum are Chinese Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga sinensis* var. *sinensis*), Guatemalan fir (*Abies guatemalensis*) and Swiss stone pine (*Pinus cembra*). The latter, although of little timber value as it is slow-growing, provides essential protection from avalanches and erosion in its native alpine and sub-alpine ranges in the Alps and the Carpathians. It is also the most westerly of the edible pine varieties. The other



Figure 4: Chinese Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga sinensis* var. *sinensis*)

two species are threatened by the familiar attacks of agriculture and logging, and the Guatemalan fir also suffers from exploitation of its foliage for Christmas decorations.

We have also been out with the volunteers in the 'Conifer Conservation Project' plots behind the Area Office removing birch, broom and brambles and relieving strangled specimens. This is in preparation for mulching the ground in between the remaining trees which will give more space for planting.



Figures 5 and 6: Cutting and dragging birch (*Betula pendula*)

The mild, wet weather throughout the month meant that many areas on site were either difficult or impossible to access. Farmers and foresters nationwide were also suffering, being unable to harvest, sow or plough. The irony is that the intensification of such practices is one of the key drivers of climate change. Another concern for those cultivating trees or food is the lack of frosts to kill off pests and diseases. There was some good news recently on this front with the discovery of resistant genes in ash trees (*Fraxinus* sp.) to ash dieback (*Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*). This was discovered through a screening trial of 150,000 trees across the south east of England. Hopefully this will lead to the identification of trees that can be used to restore affected woodland and lessen the projected devastating impact of the pathogen. This demonstrates how vital plant and tree research projects conducted at sites such as Bedgebury are to the nation and the ecosystem overall.



Figure 7: Phil McGovern 2016-19

As we approached the end of the year it appeared the world was on fire with Australia hit by record forest fires. While human, wildlife and landscape loss was extensive, the famous Wollemi pine (*Wollemia nobilis*) was saved because of a huge effort by [firefighters](#). Through a combination of dumping fire retardant around their valley and soaking the trees with water, the fires swept over, only killing 2 of the 200 remaining trees in existence.

At Bedgebury we said a fond farewell to Phil McGovern who has gone on to teach forestry and land skills at Plumpton College. He will be sorely missed; he was a pleasure to work with and learn from.

<https://www.agriculture.gov.au/abares/forestsaustralia/australias-forests>

<https://fires.globalforestwatch.org/home/>

<https://www.newscientist.com/article/2214267-record-amazon-rainforest-fires-spark-row-between-brazil-and-france/>

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<https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/pub/data/weather/uk/climate/datasets/Tmean/date/UK.txt>

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