

FORESTRY COMMISSION PRESS RELEASE

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Bedgebury staff lead expedition to America's giants of the forest

A team from the Forestry Commission's National Pinetum at Bedgebury in Kent are about to embark on an epic seed-collecting expedition along the Pacific Northwest coast of America in the cause of tree conservation.

Their purpose is to gather wild seed from some of the tallest, largest and rarest trees on the planet.

Pinetum dendrologist Dan Luscombe will be joined by colleagues John Allen and Luke Wallace, as well as partners from the Forestry Commission's National Arboretum at Westonbirt in Gloucestershire, and University of Oxford Botanic Gardens and Harcourt Arboretum. Local expertise and support will be provided by the US Forest Service and Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden, Los Angeles.

The group will travel thousands of miles through lush rainforests, mountains and coastal regions for three weeks from 3 September. Using their combined skills and expertise in field work, climbing and horticulture, they hope to collect seed from endangered and enigmatic species such as Santa Lucia fir (*Abies bracteata*), bristle-cone pine (*Pinus longeava*), some of which are the oldest living trees in the world, and coast redwood (*Sequoia sempervirens*), which are the tallest trees in the world.

Dan Luscombe, dendrologist at Bedgebury, said:

"It has been a life-long dream of mine to visit the Pacific Northwest to see some of these amazing trees in their stunning natural environment. Also now having the opportunity to not only see them, but to collect seeds from them and bring them back to grow

and plant out at Bedgebury as part of our tree conservation work, is icing on the cake.

“Knowing that these seeds will one day become towering giants at Bedgebury to be enjoyed by future generations is what makes my job so rewarding.”

The pinetum is home to a grand silver fir tree called the “Old Man of Kent”, which is Kent’s tallest tree. The team hope to bring back and propagate wild seed of the species which can one day replace the “Old Man” when it comes to the end of its natural life.

Luke Wallace, who is employed by the Friends of Bedgebury, will keep a daily written and photographic account. The information will be used to produce on-site interpretation, publications and material for the popular seasonal walking trails at Bedgebury. He will post photos ‘live’ from the expedition on the Friends’ Facebook page,

www.facebook.com/pages/Friends-of-Bedgebury-Pinetum/160305917488348?fref=pb&hc_location=profile_browser

Patrick West, Bedgebury manager, said:

“Bedgebury’s purpose is to help conserve the world’s rarest conifer trees, and this trip will provide a fantastic opportunity to continue this work with other botanical collections.

“As well as bringing back seed collected in the wild to grow in our nursery and eventually plant out at Bedgebury, it will also enable us to forge contacts and support efforts in other countries.”

Information about Bedgebury National Pinetum & Forest is available from www.forestry.gov.uk/bedgebury, www.facebook.com/bedgeburypinetum and www.twitter.com/BedgeburyP.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

1. Bedgebury National Pinetum & Forest is home to the National Conifer Collection. The 128-hectare (320-acre) site is recognised as one of the most complete collections of conifer trees and plants on one site anywhere in the world, containing more than 12,000 trees, including rare, endangered and historically important specimens. Staff travel the world to collect seeds from rare and endangered species for propagation, and are supported in this work by The Friends of Bedgebury, a registered charity. It is a key partner in Fauna & Flora International's Global Trees Campaign, and makes a major contribution to the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation co-ordinated by Botanic Gardens Conservation International. It does this by collecting endangered seeds from all over the world to bring back to Bedgebury for propagation.
2. More than 2000 tree and shrub seedlings are grown at Bedgebury every year, some of which are planted on site. Surplus seedlings and plants are distributed to other botanic gardens and safe sites across the UK and Europe, and it provides seed to the Millennium Seed Bank. Bedgebury works to conserve species identified in the UK Red Data Book as in need of particular conservation effort.
3. The pinetum and forest is also a popular destination for activities such as walking, running, cycling, mountain-biking, horse riding, and adventure play, and it has a GoApe high-ropes adventure trail. Visitor information is available on line at <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/bedgebury>, by email to bedgebury@forestry.gsi.gov.uk or by phone to 01580 879820.
4. For more information about the Friends of Bedgebury visit www.bedgeburypinetum.org.uk and

www.facebook.com/pages/Friends-of-Bedgebury-Pinetum/160305917488348?fref=pb&hc_location=profile_browser, or contact Kathy Jary, 01580 879842, friends@bedgeburypinetum.org.uk.

5. The Forestry Commission is the government department responsible in England for protecting, expanding and promoting the sustainable management of woods and forests and increasing their value to society and the environment. Further information can be found at www.forestry.gov.uk/england.

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(Image shows, left to right, Dan Luscombe, John Allen, Luke Wallace)