



Forestry England

# Bedgebury Apprentice Blog

August 2021

By Sarah

I was going to begin by saying it's the start of the silly season here at Bedgebury, but the tree team are always very busy looking after our beautiful pinetum!



We do get a lot of help from our volunteers though, who we greatly value. One of their ongoing projects is the maintenance of the national collection of yews. In this section you can really appreciate the work the volunteers do. It is very hard for us to keep on top of all the maintenance work needed around the pinetum and especially the brambles! In these photos (taken by one of the volunteers and our resident photographer Cedric) you can see how the brambles had really taken over some of the original specimens in our yew collection. During this session they also came across one of the earlier tree labels.



This label is a beautiful teal colour and is made in ceramic, I'm not sure how the writing has been added, but you can see the species is *Taxus cuspidata* var. *Nigra* and was planted in 1935. I have included the newest version of the label to compare. I love things like this, little treasures, and glimpses into the past of Bedgebury.

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As we're on the subject of yew trees, and just to prove once more how important conifer conservation is, I recently learnt that the yew is now used within the medical sector. It contains poisonous taxane alkaloids that have been developed as an anti-cancer drug. To think it was considered a symbol of doom and death in the past!



This month I have had a chance to consolidate some of my new skills. We have been felling some of the nurse trees in the Pinetum. A nurse or matrix tree at Bedgebury is used to protect a younger more endangered specimen. They help to protect the tree from wind and other various elements whilst it's establishing. Although it's always sad to remove a tree, it is balanced out by the fact it's a good sign and means that some of our rarer trees are doing well and this could help to save threatened species in the future.



Ella and I helped by felling a couple of the smaller trees,



this was a very testing time for us both. The responsibility to make sure the tree fell in the direction we wanted it to go and not on a nearby specimen was quite stressful. You'll be pleased to hear no endangered trees were harmed in the process! In the picture to the left you can see how a young Redwood has been given space to really bulk up and spread its branches. Our chainsaw ticket only allows us to fell trees up to 380mm in diameter. You need to go on a further course for trees over this, which meant that other members of the team did the taking down and Ella and I "processed" the trees. This includes removing all the branches and then cutting the trunk into lengths to be milled. Using our track chipper, we chipped the removed branches directly into our trailer to be stored up at the yard. This will be used around the site.



I also got to be in one of my favourite places, driving the tractor! Consolidating using the front loader with the grab attached, I was tasked with moving some of our cut log lengths into easily accessible piles to



be collected by Cat with our timber crane. There's something about driving the tractors that really makes me smile, I'm not sure if it's because it was a childhood dream of mine, but I am fascinated by the engineering, especially the hydraulics. You also get a great view from the high cab!



← Our tractor and timber crane. I am yet to be trained to use the crane, but hope the opportunity arises. Until then I'll leave it in the expert hands of Julian and Cat.

[forestryengland.uk/about-bedgebury-the-national-pinetum](https://forestryengland.uk/about-bedgebury-the-national-pinetum)

August also sees the start of Autumn and the dramatic changes to the colours in the pinetum.



We have a planting ratio of around 70% conifers and 30% broadleaves, giving us interest in all four seasons. This time of year gives the broadleaves their chance to shine. The katsura tree (*Cercidiphyllum japonicum*) with its beautiful almost paper like heart shaped leaf turning a delicate pink colour, it produces a smell much like candy floss.

Berries and fruits will start to appear including the strawberry like fruit of the Japanese strawberry tree (*Cornus kousa*), I spoke about its beautiful delicate flowers in a previous blog. The strawberry tree is now covered in the distinctive fruit after which its named.



I love the light at this time of year, crisp mornings with early sunrises makes my journey to work a real joy and makes me feel incredibly lucky to work in such a magical place. Passing by Marshals Lake and watching the swamp cypress (*Taxodium distictum*) trees turn from green to light green and finally a rustic red colour, which when reflected in the water gives an illusion of flames.



Ella and I have a busy few month's head so we will let you know what's been going on in our blogs to come. Thank you for taking the time to read this month's blog and make sure you go and enjoy our beautiful Bedgebury in all its autumn beauty.....