



Forestry England

# Bedgebury Apprentice Blog

February 2021

By Sarah

The weekend at the beginning of February was a challenge...



Work had to stop for a couple of days and the site was closed for safety reasons. The heaviness of the snow could have caused trees to become weak or damaged, and the ground conditions were treacherous for both public and staff. We were able to get back to work on the Wednesday, checking the Pinetum for damage, continuing some work in the car park and making sure Bedgebury was safe before we re-opened. I felt extremely lucky to see the place looking like a winter wonderland, truly magical!

We have been busy in the plots this month clearing the fence lines to stop them from being damaged, and so allowing access to larger animals that could harm some of the younger trees. We thinned out trees that are used as windbreaks and that have grown too thick to let in more light. This will naturally encourage the young specimens to put down heavier roots and to grow stronger and more self-supporting.

As you may have noticed, or heard, the tree team have been very busy felling over the last couple of months.... I have been asked several times by visitors why we do this. A good example to explain this can be seen along the cherry tree and coast redwood avenues in the Pinetum. There, we have taken back some of the birch and chestnut that ran along both sides to allow the light to be evenly distributed to the trees.



Originally the birch and chestnut trees would have provided cover to protect the young saplings. However, the saplings are now establishing well and require their space and more sunlight to grow strong and even. The felled trees will not go to waste though, their trunks get cut into 3m lengths and will be used for various purposes.

You may also have noticed that in most places we chip the branches directly onto the ground, these chippings will naturally break down providing nutrients to the soil. We fell at this time of the year to avoid any disturbance to wildlife and spring bird nesting.





I was tasked this month to help Emma clean and re-apply a special whitewash paint to the green house in the Pinetum nursery. This is because the untreated panes of glass allow the greenhouse to become too hot at the height of summer. Adding the whitewash gives the seedlings protection from direct sunlight.



The last couple of weeks in the month saw the weather change and the first signs of spring appeared: buds on the deciduous trees and drifts of snowdrops and daffodils starting to show.

With the help of some of the Friends of Bedgebury Pinetum team and members from other departments on site, we set to work on the beds around the Visitor Centre and the main entrance. Willows and dogwoods were pruned, early weeds were pulled and mulch was put down to enrich the ground and discourage weeds from returning. There is still more to do in the next few weeks, and we thank all the team members who have joined us along the way. We are very grateful for their help and it is lovely see everyone. Of course, all the work was carried out with stringent social distancing measures in place.





One of the elements of the apprenticeship training is tree identification. We have several broadleaf and conifer trees to learn each month. Ella and I are very fortunate to work with such a supportive team; they have been helping us by setting goals to learn, and by joining us and learning themselves. Cat set the challenge this month. With spring arriving and the buds appearing on the branches, she set us a broadleaf twig ID assignment.

Cat put together learning sheets with images of broadleaf branches, pointing out the individual characteristics to identify. She emailed the team at the beginning of each week setting us five trees to study. We had to identify them, learn their Latin name (spelled correctly) and look up a fact about each tree, to add a little fun and so that Cat could also to learn a little something new.

After learning the sheets, we were given real twigs from the trees and had to correctly identify them. I would like to thank Cat on behalf of Ella and myself for putting in the extra time and effort to help us - it is greatly appreciated. We look forward to the next challenge from the team!

On March 2<sup>nd</sup> I celebrated my one-year anniversary in the Bedgebury team, and what a year! I have already learnt and achieved so much. From learning to drive a tractor, to being able to identify trees and, importantly, remember their Latin name - learning to pronounce that Latin name has been even more fun (an extra special thanks to the team for their patience on that one!). I have met so many fabulous people. Who would have thought my start as an agency worker was all going to lead to me taking the apprentice batten (or rake) from Harry? Happy days indeed!

