



## British and Irish Hardwoods Improvement Programme

### PROJECT TEAM (Irish representatives)

Michael Carey (Forestry consultant), Sycamore group chairman

Pat Doody (Coillte), Ash group vice chairman

Gerry Douglas (Teagasc), Sycamore group member

John Fennessy (COFORD), Oak group chairman\*

Derek Felton (Forestry consultant), Oak group member

Ted Horgan (Forestry consultant), Spanish chestnut group member

Elaine O'Connor (Teagasc), Birch group member

\* Email: [john.fennessy@coford.ie](mailto:john.fennessy@coford.ie)

**COMPLETION DATE:** Long term improvement programmes, that will continue for the foreseeable future.

### BACKGROUND

The British and Irish Hardwoods Trust (BIHT) was created in 2009 but has its origins in the British Hardwoods Improvement Programme (BHIP), which was formed in 1991. It is an informal association of landowners, nurserymen, forestry consultants, timber merchants and researchers in Ireland and the UK. Work is carried out through species groups for ash, birch, cherry, oak, Spanish chestnut, sycamore and walnut. The aim is to improve the form and quality of the species selected through reduced rotation length, increased volume, enhancing resistance to pests and diseases, and to ensure a broad genetic base in order to maintain resilience to future climate change. The method used is traditional selection and breeding. It gained charitable trust status about five years ago in the UK, and in Ireland in early 2009.

### OBJECTIVE

The programme operates through individual species groups with a central executive co-ordinating the programme. The objective is to improve the quality and productivity of the most important broadleaved species in Britain and Ireland by continuous improvement through conventional breeding programmes.

### PROGRESS

Plus tree selections are almost complete in most species, while earlier progeny/breeding seedling seed orchards in oak, cherry and ash are being assessed at regular intervals.

The first series of oak seedling seed orchards, of which there are eight, including one in Ireland, were measured during 2007/8. Results were published during 2008.

Limited seed production has commenced in the ash seedling seed orchards, and they are now due for roguing.

The birch indoor clonal orchards are producing adequate seed to supply demand in Scotland. Similar indoor orchards are being developed at Kinsealy by Teagasc. Commercial quantities of seed will be produced over the next couple of years.

A limited quantity of cherry seed became available from the BIHIP programme in 2009.

The collection of sycamore and Spanish chestnut selected clonal material for establishing seed orchards was also completed in 2009.

During 2008/09 the Irish element of the British and Irish Hardwoods Trust was established in Ireland. The purpose of the trust is to raise funds to finance the full development of the programme. During 2009, genetics advisor Dr David Boshier, Research Coordinator at BIHIP, worked on the development of breeding strategies for a number of the species, including ash and cherry. The development of the oak programme strategy is expected to be completed in early 2010.

### ACTIVITIES PLANNED

A full review of BIHIP will take place in early 2010. The outcome of the review is expected to be published during 2010 and consideration of its implementation will be an important component of the annual general meeting to be held in the autumn.

The Management Committee will meet in Northern Ireland in May 2010, hosted by the Agri-Food and Bioscience Institute at Loughgall, Co Armagh.

### OUTPUTS

Plans are well advanced for a new database on all BIHT plus trees and field trials identified in the programme across Ireland and the UK. It will provide a permanent record of this valuable breeding material for the first time. Plus trees will be listed by species, location, quality, sex, dimensions, and ownership. It will be continually updated as new plus trees are identified.