

BIHIP

British and Irish hardwood improvement programme

PROJECT TEAM

BIHIP comprises seven species groups: ash, birch, cherry, oak, Spanish chestnut, sycamore and walnut. It is run by a Management Committee drawn from the chairs and secretaries of the species groups. A Finance Committee allocates funds, to which COFORD contributes, on an annual basis to the groups depending on current needs.

Irish representation on BIHIP species groups in 2007 comprised:

Ash group: Pat Doody (vice-chair);

Birch group: Dr Ellen O'Connor (member);

Oak group: John Fennessy (chair)*, Derek Felton (member);

Spanish chestnut group: Ted Horgan (member);

Sycamore group: Dr Michael Carey (chair), Dr Gerry Douglas (member).

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COMPLETION DATE

Long term tree improvement programme.

OBJECTIVES

To improve the quality and productivity of the main broadleaved tree species in Ireland and the United Kingdom.

PROGRESS

Plus tree selections took place in a number of species: ash, Spanish chestnut and sycamore. Over 350 ash plus trees have been selected. Most are in clonal genebanks at Kilmacurra in Ireland and at Bradbourne, Kent, in the UK.

Almost 200 sycamore plus trees were identified between 2006 and 2007 in Britain and Ireland. Scion collection is in progress for the establishment of conservation collections and the development of clonal and seedling seed orchards. This approach will lead to a greater improvement in planting stock quality than from

using material from registered seed stands alone. Members of the Spanish chestnut group visited Ireland to compare English and Irish stands and to select new plus trees. Plus trees were selected in Spanish chestnut stands in Coillte forests at Ballyhooley and Kilsheelan; both stands were rated as very high quality and have been registered as seed stands.

Ash and oak seedling seed orchards are being maintained, with individual progeny performance being assessed. Poorly performing individuals will be removed. Consideration is being given to establishing new seedling orchards, depending on mast years and availability of resources. All oak seed orchards were measured during the year (after five growing seasons). Results of the assessments are due for publication in 2008.

Fifteen delegates from Ireland and Britain attended the BIHIP study tour to Denmark in September to see broadleaved breeding programmes, compare progress and to create linkages with Danish work.

OUTPUTS

Work is well advanced on the new BIHIP website which is due to go live in early 2008. Plans are also well advanced for a new plus tree BIHIP database. This resource will contain the unique tree numbers of all plus trees identified in the seven species groups, as well as location, quality, sex, dimensions, ownership, etc. It will be updated as new plus trees are identified across the species range.

ACTIVITIES PLANNED

Work in 2008 will focus on continuation of the improvement work programme in the species groups. Most groups have put in place performance plans and targets. During 2008 work will commence on preparing breeding strategies for each group.