

# BIHIP

## British and Irish Hardwoods Improvement Programme

### PROJECT TEAM

Irish members of the species groups:

Michael Carey, Forestry consultant - Chairman of Sycamore Group

Pat Doody, Coillte – Vice Chairman of Ash Group

Gerry Douglas, Teagasc – Member of Sycamore Group

John Fennessy, COFORD – Chairman of Oak Group\*

Derek Felton, Forestry consultant – Member of Oak Group

Ted Horgan, Coillte – Member of Spanish Chestnut Group

Elaine O'Connor, Teagasc – Member of Birch Group

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**COMPLETION DATE:** These long term broadleaf improvement programmes will continue for the foreseeable future.

### BACKGROUND

The British and Irish Hardwoods Improvement Programme was established as a result of the Royal Forestry Society's symposium on *Tree Breeding and Improvement*, at Edgbaston, UK, 1991. At this meeting a small group including John Davis (private nursery owner), Peter Savill and Peter Kanowski (both of Oxford Forestry Institute) decided to initiate work on improving ash. This led to the formation of the British Hardwoods Improvement Programme (BHIP). Ireland joined the group in 1998 and at the 1999 Annual General Meeting a new constitution was adopted establishing the British and Irish Hardwoods Improvement Programme (BIHIP).

### OBJECTIVE

The programme operates through individual species working groups with a central executive. There are seven individual species groups: oak, ash, birch, sycamore, cherry, Spanish chestnut and walnut. The objective of the programme is to improve the quality and productivity of these important broadleaved species in Britain and Ireland.

### PROGRESS

Progress is continuing with all aspects of the BIHIP programme. Plus tree selections are continuing in a number of species, particularly sycamore, ash and sweet chestnut.

Earlier progeny/breeding seedling seed orchards in oak, cherry and ash are being monitored and assessed at regular intervals. The first series of oak seedling seed orchards was measured during 2007/8 and results published. Limited seed production has commenced in the ash breeding seedling seed orchards and these are now due for rouging. The birch indoor clonal orchards are producing adequate seed to supply the demand in Scotland after a very short time. Similar indoor orchards are being developed at Kinsealy by Teagasc. A limited quantity of cherry seed will be available from the BIHIP programme in 2009. Collection of sweet chestnut selected clonal material for establishing seed orchards will be completed in 2009.

The BIHIP website was upgraded and made more user-friendly. New management plans are being developed for a number of the species groups. During 2008 a fundraising trust – the British and Irish Hardwoods Trust - was established in Ireland. A similar trust has been in existence in Britain for a number of years. The purpose of the trusts is to raise funds to finance the full development of the British and Irish Hardwoods Improvement Programme in the future. During 2008 a part-time genetics advisor attached to the Oxford Forestry Institute was appointed to the programme as research co-ordinator and to assist in the development of breeding strategies for each species.

### ACTIVITIES PLANNED

Broadleaved tree improvement is long term and the sourcing of funds to support the ongoing work is critical to the continuation of the programmes. The spring meeting will take place in April 2009 at Kinsealy Research Centre and the annual general meeting will be held in the UK in the autumn. The species groups have now produced performance plans and targets and the next stage is to implement these and to review and update breeding strategies during 2009.

### OUTPUTS

Plans are well advanced for a new database on all BIHIP plus trees and field trials. This unique database will give the details and numbers of all the plus trees identified in the species, their locations, quality, sex, dimensions, owners etc. It will be added to as new plus trees are identified across the species range as the programme progresses.