

Wellingtonia *Sequoiadendron giganteum*



illustrations by John White

Egg-shaped cones in bunches and tiny, awl-shaped leaves arranged in spiralling 'rats tails' will help you to tell the Wellingtonia apart from its relative, the coast redwood.

A vulnerable giant.

The Wellingtonia is sometimes known in America as the 'mammoth tree' – aptly, because these trees are record breakers. The biggest individual (the 'General Sherman' in America) is thought to be the biggest living thing on earth by volume. It weighs the equivalent of more than 10 blue whales.

Wellingtonias are threatened in the wild. They only grow in small groves in the Sierra Nevada and, sadly, our attempts to help these famous giants may be doing the opposite. Wellingtonias rely on fire for reproduction and their fibrous bark protects them. Our prevention of forest fires is causing fewer but fiercer fires which damage adult trees and stop the germination of new ones.

Staff from the National Pinetum at Bedgebury are part of the IUCN (the World Conservation Union) Conifer Specialist Group. The Group keeps an eye on the status and threats to conifers such as these and lobbies to make sure that all timber is managed in a sustainable manner.

Did you know?

When the tree was first named an argument arose as to whether it should be called Washingtonia (after the first American President) or Wellingtonia after the Duke of Wellington.

Bedgebury's Wellingtonias are still relatively young but they are already an impressive size.

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