

Rare pine less lonesome in new arboretum home

By Tom Hutchison

A HOTEL is showing off the newest edition to its arboretum – a rare 200 million-year-old tree.

Staff at West Lodge Park, in Cockfosters Road, Hadley Wood, are among the first people in the UK to get their hands on the ancient Wollemi Pine species for its renowned gardens.

Thought to be extinct, it was discovered alive and well in 1994 by a bush-walker in Australia and is now being cultivated to safeguard its survival. Belonging to the 200 million-year-old Araucariaceae family, the Wollemi Pine is a fast-growing conifer and can reach heights of 40 metres.

Hotel manager Andrew Beale said: "It is an honour to add such a rare tree to our

collection and help conserve the Wollemi Pine for future generations. We hope that it will flourish here and be seen by guests and visitors on our garden open days."

The arboretum at West Lodge Park was created by Andrew's grandfather, Edward Beale, in 1963. More than 800 varieties of trees and shrubs, including national collections of hornbeam and elaeagnus, are planted in 35 acres surrounding the hotel.

Members of the public can tour the grounds of West Lodge Park and see the Wollemi Pine during an open day on Sunday October 22 between 1pm and 4pm. Entrance is £2.50, children go free, and money raised will benefit various charities, including the Macmillan Nurses.

The Wollemi Pine is one of the world's oldest and rarest plants, dating back to the time of the dinosaurs.

With only a handful of adult trees known to exist in the wild, the Wollemi Pine is now the focus of extensive research to safeguard its survival.

Money raised from the sales of the Wollemi Pine will support its conservation and that of other rare and endangered plant species.

- ↳ Scientific name: *Wollemia nobilis*
- ↳ Family: Araucariaceae
- ↳ Oldest known fossil: 90 million years
- ↳ Wild population: Less than 100 mature trees
- ↳ Characteristics: Conifer with attractive, unusual dark green foliage, bubbly bark, and sprouts multiple trunks
- ↳ Growth habit: Fast-growing in light, favours acid soils and temperatures from -5°C to 45°C (or 23°F to 113°F). Trials in the USA and Japan have indicated that it can survive temperatures as low as -12°C (or 5°F).
- ↳ Size: The largest wild Wollemi Pine in the rainforest gorge is 40m tall with a main trunk 1.2m wide.



Collector: Andrew Beale with the 200 million-year-old species of pine