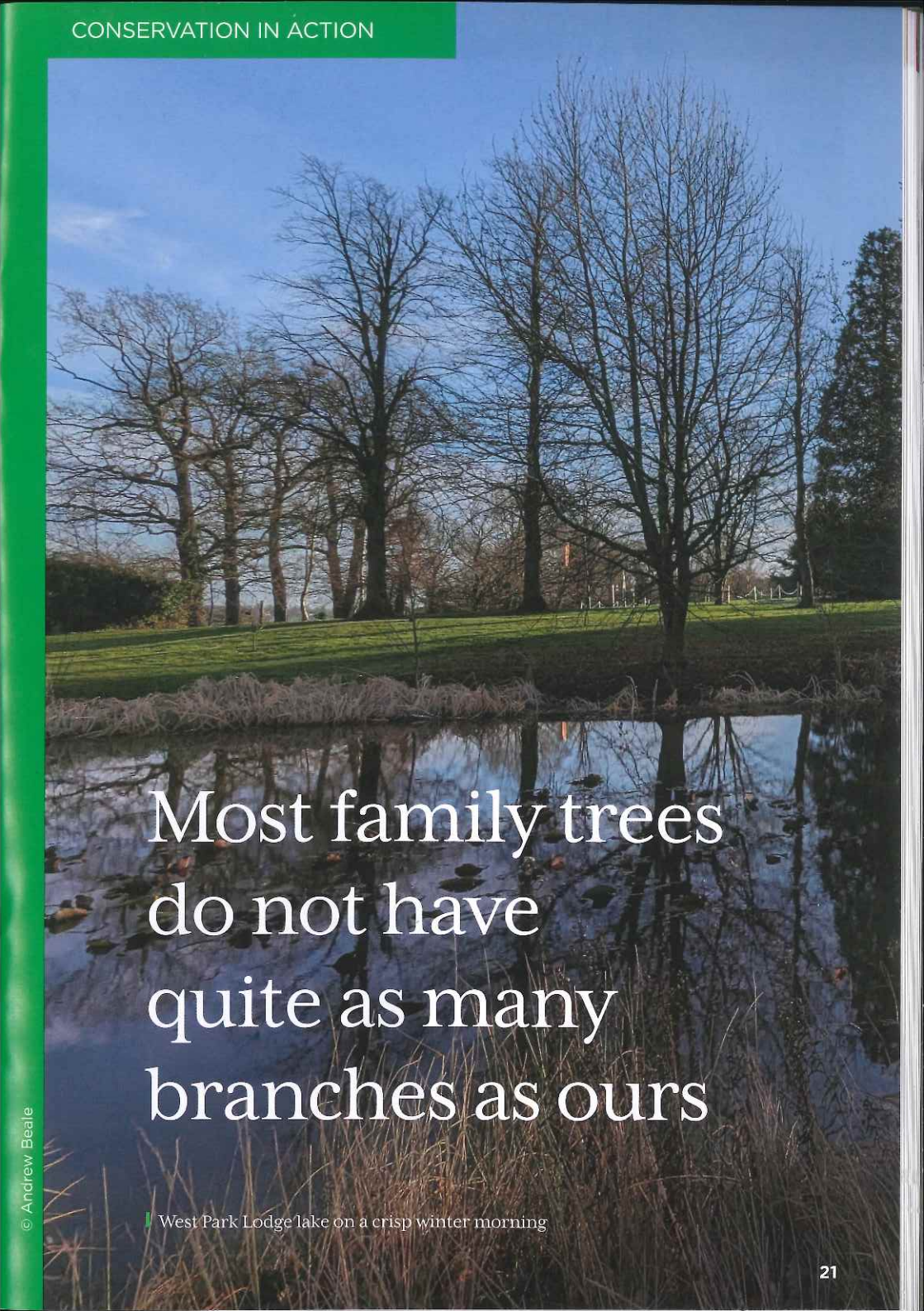




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Most family trees  
do not have  
quite as many  
branches as ours

West Park Lodge lake on a crisp winter morning

## ANDREW BEALE explains why his hotel's arboretum in North London remains such an uplifting place to visit, whatever time of the year

The Beale Arboretum was founded by my grandfather Edward Beale in the 35 acres surrounding our four-star hotel. It sits at the heart of the Enfield Chase, the 1,800 acres just to the north of London that was once a royal hunting ground. While the game has gone, mature oak, hornbeam, ash and beech trees are still a feature of the area. Thanks to the work of four generations of the Beale family since 1963, we have three National Plant Collections\*: *Carpinus betulus* cultivars; *Taxodium* species and cultivars; and *Catalpa*. We have another collection planned of our 70 *Sequoiadendron giganteum*.

**'I planted my first tree aged ten. Trees were a feature of my childhood through walks with my grandfather'**

I planted my first tree in the arboretum at the tender age of ten – an *Araucaria araucana* (monkey puzzle) that fruited for the first time 40 years later in 2014. Trees were a feature of my childhood through frequent walks with my grandfather. His enthusiasm and passion certainly rubbed off on me. I have the privilege of seeing the arboretum in a more mature state than my grandfather ever did.

### EARLY START

I have been working in the family firm – as the eighth generation of the Beale family – for 32 years. My degree was in geography, so I bring a knowledge of place, distribution of species, temperate zones, climate, etc to my work in the arboretum. We have held National Garden Scheme spring and autumn open days for well over 40 years, and my father still takes tours. My children now work

alongside me, making us the oldest family business in London continuously run by the family, and the arboretum has been core to this work.

### CHAMPION TREES

We have about 800 species of trees and 15 Tree Register champions, three of which are also international champions: *Fraxinus excelsior* 'Westhof's Glorie', *Paulownia fortunei* FAST BLUE ('Minfast') (AGM) and × *Cuprocyparis leylandii* 'Castlewellan'.

In 60 years we have had just four arboretum consultants: Frank Knight, director of RHS Wisley; Derek Honour, head of trees for the Greater London Council; Paul Akers, head of trees at Westminster City Council; and Mark Lane LVO, the recently retired gardens manager for the London Palaces, based at Buckingham Palace.

The arboretum may really come into its own in spring and autumn, but it's worth putting on your walking shoes for the trees and shrubs that are of interest in late winter.



**|** *Catalpa* × *erubescens* 'Purpurea'



■ *Acer rubrum* 'Scanlon'

Our 40 species of *Malus* hold their fruit long into winter and the yellow crab apples of *M. x zumi* 'Golden Hornet' look great in the snowy and frosty conditions. Of the National Collection trees, *Taxodium distichum* var. *imbricarium* 'Nutans' has a fine skeletal silhouette in the winter as does *Carpinus betulus* 'Fastigiata'.

*Crataegus tanacetifolia*, the tansy-leaved variety, is one of several hawthorns that tell us what kind of spring we're having. None of the may trees came out before May 25 last year because of the cold spring, but sometimes they are out in early or mid-April. The flowering is hugely more variable than in our grandparents' time – another indicator of the very real threat of environmental change.

### VIBRANT SPRING

Growing the arboretum continuously for 60 years means we have a lot of history and, apart from the *Crataegus* collection, other totemic trees that give good indicators of the variability of the

seasons are *Quercus palustris* (pin oak), the harbinger of autumn each year; and the National Collection of *Catalpa*, which depend on a certain amount of warmth in the air to really get going with their beautiful summer flowers.

The site is mainly sheltered so we don't suffer huge losses, but we regularly plant up to 100 specimen trees each winter to boost the collection, sourced from fellow arboreta such as RBG, Kew and Bedgebury National Pinetum and Forest, and from specialist nurseries.

Spring is a vibrant time for the Collections – the *Taxodium* and *Catalpa* are a little hesitant to get going, betraying their roots in the southern United States, but once warmth arrives they burst out with huge *Catalpa* leaves and feathery leaflets of the *Taxodium*. This year *T. distichum* 'Little Twister' grew cones for the first time since planting in 2007, while *T. distichum* 'Pévé Yellow' is particularly beautiful, and *T. distichum* var. *imbricarium* 'Nutans' grows its leaflets plumb vertically.

The *Carpinus betulus* are at their best in their April light green foliage before the caterpillars start munching! 'Globus' is glorious in its symmetry and its compact size makes it suitable for a garden, while the 'Pendula' is a rarer variety with a very shapely habit. *C. betulus* 'Horizontalis' is as the name suggests, while an oddity is 'Quercifolia', which manages to hold hornbeam and oak leaves on the same branches.

All this is against a backdrop of vibrant spring *Magnolia*, *Viburnum* and *Cornus*, while attractive fruiting trees such as *Sorbus bakonyensis*, *S. hupehensis* and *Malus* 'Evereste' all have delightful flowers at this time of year.

I recently turned 60, and fully intend to play a key role in the Beale Arboretum like my grandfather Edward, and father Trevor for another 30 years or so. I hope to be able to hand over the collection to the next generation of tree lovers, who will find that the trees become like old friends, while their principal challenge will be a lack of space as the 35 acres become increasingly full as the trees mature.

- The author is the managing director of the Beale Arboretum at West Lodge Park Hotel in Hertfordshire, EN4 0PY ([www.westparklodge.co.uk/arboretum](http://www.westparklodge.co.uk/arboretum))



■ *Nysa sylvatica*

© Andrew Beale



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■ Autumn and winter scene: *Carpinus betulus* cultivars including 'Fastigiata', 'Quercifolia' and 'Pendula'

- The Beale Arboretum is always open. It is free for guests of West Lodge Park Hotel (even a coffee in the bar or on the terrace will do) or you can pay a £3.50 entry at reception
- I do private and public tours in spring, summer and autumn. Book private tours via **Jane Gray on 020 8216 3904 or [janegray@bealeshotels.co.uk](mailto:janegray@bealeshotels.co.uk)**
- Our NGS open days this year are: Sunday, May 19 (2-5pm) and Sunday, October 20 (1-4pm)



■ Trees of distinction: *Taxodium distichum* var. *imbricarium* 'Nutans' (front), with *Taxodium distichum* and *Metasequoia glyptostroboides* behind