

Juniper under threat from disease

The Scots juniper bush – one of three native evergreen trees to Scotland – is currently under threat from a deadly new fungal disease.

Environmental charity, Central Scotland Forest Trust (CSFT), is calling for West Lothian residents to help to determine the extent of the risk to juniper populations in Scotland, either in their local area or if they are on holiday elsewhere across the country this summer.

The *Phytophthora austrocedrae* disease is related to sudden oak death and is a new strain of fungus originating in South America. The disease presents a new health threat to the juniper bush, which has already disappeared from over one third of Britain where it was previously found.

As well as being an important flavouring ingredient to the gin industry, juniper also offers environmental and biodiversity value, is a significant part of Scotland's landscape and culture, and contains valuable medicinal properties.

A campaign has been launched by Plantlife Scotland, in conjunction with Forestry Commission Scotland and Scottish Natural Heritage, urging the public to complete a survey whenever they see a juniper in Scotland to help track its health and conserve it for generations to come.

West Lothian locals can easily identify the juniper by its distinctive blue-green needles. When in bloom, delicate yellow flowers can also be seen which are then followed by 'berries' (in reality fleshy cones) which turn from green to black. However, if the spiky needles are orange or brown in colour, they may be infected with *Phytophthora austrocedrae*.

✘ Simon Rennie, Chief Executive of CSFT, said:- “The juniper bush is famously used in the Scottish gin industry as a key ingredient, but it also has an important role to play in the Scottish landscape and ecosystem of woodland areas.

“We’re asking local communities in West Lothian to keep an eye out for the species in their local area and if out and about across Scotland during the summer holidays, and to complete the Plantlife Scotland survey if they do spot it.”

To complete the survey, please visit <http://www.plantlife.org.uk/>

For more information about CSFT, please visit <http://www.csft.org.uk>

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