**Skillshare, Sandy Main**

Jenny: Are you happy for me to record you?

Sandy: Aye that's no problem.

Jenny: Just checkin'. So we're going down over the River Don.

Sandy: Aye the Valley of the Don. It used to be grazed by cattle, but now it's been converted to trees what, 12 years ago or something like that?

Jenny: Why did you do that?

Sandy: Low income - they were getting from renting rough grazing for cattle was much better income.

Jenny: Ok, from forestry? Yeah, and is that when you started working?

Sandy: No, I've been here for 36 years I think it is [laughs].

Jenny: That's a long time. So you'll have seen it all, like, grow up I guess?

Sandy: I've seen - like I'll say later on - I've seen areas been felled, replanted and almost ready for felling again!

Jenny: Yeah, yeah. So how long is the cycle? Is it about like 25 years, or is it less than that?

Sandy: Depends what sort of trees you're looking at. The main commercial tree here is Sitka spruce, which hopefully you can clear in 30 years, the new varieties.

Jenny: OK.

Sandy: But native Scots pine for instance - which are some of these ones here - and this, this is pine plantation here and I don't think this really done much since like [laughs] I started here six years ago!

Jenny: So that's been there the whole time?

Sandy: It's a really slow grower, I suppose it has grown some but you're talking aboot 60, 70 years - maybe longer - for pine. But spruce is bread and butter species for forestry.

Jenny: And is that what's over on this hill here?

Sandy: Up here is a mixture of pine and larch, which is about the same age as me, it's over 60 years old.

Jenny: OK.

Sandy: And it will be another possibly 10, 15 years we might think about clear felling that.

Jenny: OK. And is that what'll happen? It'll just be clear cut and then replanted.

Sandy: That's usually what happens wae spruce. It's clear cut and replanted. Some of the spruce we're looking at the day has been planted and it's like you've ancient woodland.

Jenny: OK.

Sandy: So when it's clear felled in maybe 5 or 10 years time, we'd have to go back into native woodland.

Jenny: Ok. And so which ones - which species - are native?

Sandy: Scots pine's the only conifer native, commercial conifer native. And you're talking about all the broadleaves, like birch and hazel, rowan, oak.

Jenny: And so is that like legislation that says that 'that has to be replanted with native species.' Does that like come from Government, or is that a decision of the Estate?

Sandy: It does, we're working under FSC certification? And as part of that you've committed to reinstating at least a part of your, sort of, your plantations which are ancient woodland sites. So we are audited every year in regards to that sort of thing to see how we're getting on.

Jenny: And is that like a load of paperwork? Or is it like -

Sandy: It's load of paperwork yeah. A lot, a lot of paperwork.

Jenny: And is that important for... I guess that's important for selling it, because if it's got that -

Sandy: You need the paperwork to sell timber here. Another thing is, we work under a 10 year forest plowing wae the Forestry Commission, which is a big part of your certification paperwork. I'm just working on my second 10 year plan now, putting it through the pipeline.

Jenny: OK.

Sandy: The trees you can see in the left you - this isn't start of the fields - these are all native broadleaves.   
   
Mainly birch and rowan, oak, aspen. And the bigger ones either side, this is like the ancient woodland area here.

Jenny: And so like how... what are the indicators of it being an ancient woodland? Like how does that differ from -

Sandy: I don't know. The criteria is based on military maps from the 1700s [chuckles].

Jenny: Oh really?

Sandy: Pretty much.

Jenny: Like on an ordinance survey map?

Sandy: General Roy made some military maps so could plan routes and his maps are used as a basis for the fact that's an ancient woodland site. If there's woodland on that map -

Jenny: OK.

Sandy: That's considered ancient woodland site. Very roughly you know, that's a general indicator.

Jenny: Ok, and did General Roy make maps all over Scotland or was it just this area?

Sandy: Presumably all over Scotland yeah. But there's more accurate indicators on the ground with ground vegetation and that sort of thing.

Jenny: OK. So this is still all of the Forbes Estate.

Sandy: Yep.

Jenny: Yeah.   
   
Do most of the estates have forestry? Is that kind of like one of their main like income sources, apart from shooting up here?

Sandy: Most of the estates up here in the North East anyway are forestry farming, bit a shooting, fishing.   
   
You go further west and there's less and less trees, more open hill and grouse and deerstalking.

Jenny: And is that to do with the landscape? Is that just that it's like more suitable to be growing trees round here - like the climate?

Sandy: It is but I mean, the North West, is suitable for spruce as well, so there's a lot of areas of spruce in the West as well.

Jenny: So this is different to back there?

Sandy: No, this isn't change here. This is the same plantation, but this is a commercial bit, with the spruce. We should probably stop here and just... walk.

Jenny: Yeah, yeah, that would be great.

Sandy: Am Sandy Main, I'm head forester in Forbes Estate, which is 6,000 acres of woodlands on Deeside near Beenachie. I've been here for 36 years and this is my second office basically in front of us here.   
   
What we've got here is, we're surrounded by spruce here, on the left, we've got a 10, 12 year old plantation. Planted in an old field and on the right, we've got the same spruce, 10, 15 years further on -

Jenny: Oh yeah.

Sandy: Ready for thinning.

Jenny: So when will that happen?

Sandy: It's happening like soon - the next few weeks.

Jenny: Yeah.

Sandy: You can see where it's been landscaped with broadleaves round the edge.

Jenny: Is that to kind of conceal it?

Sandy: Just to conceal it yeah. To soften the edge of landscaping.

Jenny: And so is that something that you consider when you're planting them is like, just how it looks like in terms of landscaping.

Sandy: Especially in an area round Beenachie like this so landscape all important. So we spend a lot of time landscaping.

Jenny: Kind of making it look like what people think it should look like?

Sandy: Basically [laughs with Jenny].

Jenny: Nice.

Sandy: If you see all the plantations looking at the Beenachie, they've all been landscape to a greater or lesser extent [laughs].

Jenny: And so would that, always be somebody in your sort of role that would do that. Like the forester that would do that.

Sandy: It is. In conjunction wae Forestry Commission, Scottish Forestry nowadays.

Jenny: That was a question I had actually, was like, what's the difference between managing a forest on an estate - a private estate - compared to like a public like Forestry Commission or something like that?

Sandy: Forestry Commission just are on a bigger scale -

Jenny: Ok, so it's a similar -

Sandy: But... similar concept sort of thing. You still have to take care of the landscape. And we're all working under the same rules.

Jenny: Yeah. So how much, em like how much... So like this area that's about to be clear cut, that's about to be thinned, how much like, how much money would that make [laughs]? Depends how much like what the, em, like the going rate is?

Sandy: Historically the thinnings are fairly low value, but at the moment, timber prices for all sorts of them are really high. OK.

Jenny: And is that because there's not so much getting imported?

Sandy: There's a lot of demand for small, for biomass -

Jenny: Right.

Sandy: For small round wood. In the past, we've got had to export it to Finland.

Jenny: Really?

Sandy: For papermaking. Now, it's all goin' for biomass.

Jenny: Oh, really?

Sandy: And chip-wood, so there's a bit of competition between the different mills [chuckles].   
   
But the high value product is the sawlogs, which comes in second and third of clear fells.

Jenny: And is that like... And so I guess like as well, depending on the species, the type of timber that you have, the value will be different too won't it? Cause like a fast growing one like spruce maybe would be less expensive than like a slow growing one like Scots pine or something? Is that right?

Sandy: Spruce is a bread and butter species for the... for the sawmills in this country, but also pine as well. But you can get good prices for pine and larch as well, but it just takes longer to grow.

Jenny: Yeah [laughs].

Sandy: We'll have a look into the spruce wood and we'll see -

Jenny: Which way are we goin'? Just along here?

Sandy: We'll just follow the dark track.

Jenny: Sorry this microphone's a bit intrusive [chuckles].

Sandy: We're just going through the area where the timber will be taken to and the lorries will pick it up.

Jenny: Ok, so that's what that kind of muddy turning bit was?

Sandy: We've got some work to do on it.

Jenny: See right over to Beenachie can't you from here?

Sandy: It's an amazing view here.

Jenny: Do you get out and about quite a lot? Like out to look at the trees? I mean whenever I've come by you've always been in the office looking at your maps [laughs].

Sandy: Generally sort of in office in the morning - or most of the morning - and then get out in the afternoon. But wae Google Maps and that sort of thing these days you can sort of do a lot of fieldwork on the computer!

Jenny: Does that change things then?

Sandy: That's changed things.   
   
You've got fairly up to date aerial photographs, which really helps when you're managing. You can see where you've got holes in the woodland or... given that they're usually a couple years behind.

Jenny: Right, so you have to kind of project forward.

Sandy: Yeah, if you want up to date ones you've got to use a drone or something like that.

Jenny: OK.

Sandy: But Google and Bing are updating their maps fairly regularly these days.

Jenny: When did you em... Did you always want to work in forestry Sandy? Is that something that you always wanted to do, or did you kind of fall into it?

Sandy: Since I left school, I just wanted to work outside wae nature so... eh I left school and forestry was the first job I bumped into.

Jenny: Yeah.

Sandy: So I stuck to it.

Jenny: My granddad was a forester.

Sandy: Where was he?

Jenny: Up Glen Devon. With Forestry Commission.

Sandy: All right. Well, I spent the first six or seven years with Forestry Commission up in Murray. And then for university and then I've been here since university.

Jenny: Uh huh - what did you study at university? Forestry or was it -

Sandy: Forestry yeah, a forestry course. Aberdeen. I think nowadays you need to Inverness -

Jenny: Oh really?

Sandy: For commercial forestry sort of course... mainly.

Jenny: And so do you think it's like the practice of forestry has changed a lot since you started? Or is it pretty much the same principles?

Sandy: We're very much more environmentally aware these days -

Jenny: Oh, yeah.

Sandy: Than we were 40 years ago.

Jenny: That's something that you're interested in as well though right?

Sandy: Exactly, exactly.

Jenny: So I remember you showing me the footage of the Wildcats eh -

Sandy: All right on the tree cam - that was on Bennachie.

Jenny: That's amazing.   
   
I guess there must be a lot more working with folk who have those sort of special interests.

Sandy: There's a lot more of that these days.

Jenny: Yeah.

Sandy: All your plans go to be scrutinised by all the different organisations and they'll all come back and comment on them.

Jenny: Really?

Sandy: All right, this is the... woodland that was planted roughly 1999/2000.   
   
You can see where the broadleaves have been planted along the edge in tubes. And then there's the spruce that are on the edge or just natural regeneration.   
   
So we'll come in here and do a first and then we'll take lines out allowing machines access. And in total take out approximately about a third of the crop concentrating on the small trees, suppressed trees. Leaving all the nice trees like this, but a final crop of sawlogs which is what we're after.   
   
Take a walk through here?

Jenny: Yes.

Sandy: As you can see once you get in to the crop it's pretty dark.

Jenny: Yes, it's much more sheltered.

Sandy: We need to get some light in. That one's totally dead, it's been just suppressed and died. That's what happens when you don't go in and thin. We need to plant them close together so that they go straight and light branched. We need the branches to be as light as possible. Less knots.

Jenny: Yeah.

Sandy: But I think this one will be thinned once and possibly be felled. Once you let the light in here, the trees that are left will just take off and be big enough for logs in five or six years time.

Jenny: So I guess we already saw some deer, but did deer live up here and then in this wood?

Sandy: They do.

Jenny: Yeah.

Sandy: Roe deer all over. And there's also signs of Red deer in the open areas.

Jenny: And is that something that the Estate encourage? Or is it em, just that they just are here [laughs]?

Sandy: The deer are here and they've got to be controlled, so deer stalking's part of the activities of the Estate.

Jenny: Yeah.

Sandy: And you can bring in paid stalkers for buck stalking.

Jenny: OK.

Sandy: Brings an income in.

Jenny: Mm hmm, yeah.   
   
So is there much like that lives in these woods, other than the the trees, I guess [laughs with Sandy]?

Sandy: Aye well, there's all sorts live in these woods! And you've got to be careful, less so in a wood like this.   
   
Normally I wouldn't, I wouldn't thin this time of year -

Jenny: Yeah.

Sandy: But with the guying conditions, I'm gonna have to try and do it when it's dryer.

Jenny: OK.

Sandy: So, I'm going have to go through all this and check for any signs of wildlife.

Jenny: OK.

Sandy: Squirrels' dreys and that sort of thing.

Jenny: So you do that before you thin.

Sandy: Yep, but there's unlikely to be squirrels in this area.

Jenny: Yeah.

Sandy: When you've got oak that's surrounded by pines and better areas.

Jenny: So do you work a lot with em, I guess like, the rest of the team on the Estate, or is it kind of quite solo, quite solo work that you do? Because I guess you're just, you're the only one, that's doing the forestry right?

Sandy: It's kind of solo yeah, as far as the rest of your Estate's concerned.

Jenny: Do you like it?

Sandy: Yeah. I work more in collaboration wae eh, Scottish Forestry and we are actually certified through a group scheme run by Tilhill. So I'm never working alone entirely [laughs].

Jenny: What are Tilhill?

Sandy: Tilhill is a big forestry company.

Jenny: OK.

Sandy: And they're a certification scheme taking on a lot smaller estates -

Jenny: Ok.

Sandy: Becomes more viable to do it on their big scheme, cause it shares the cost.

Jenny: How big is the Estate?

Sandy: 6,000 acres, 2,500 acres of forestry? It's just under a 1,000 hectares of trees.

Jenny: It's a lot isn't it? I mean that seems like a lot to me, but I imagine that other places, it's just loads more than that [laughs].

Sandy: Some of the hill estates are huge compared to that, with 10 times the size but there's nothing on them but heather [laughs]. This is about half... half and half forestry and farming, so a lot of good farmland on the Estate as well.

Jenny: And the farmers rent from the Estate?

Sandy: No, the Estate is farmed on contract by two local farmers - on contract to the Estate, so... and there is small areas let to other farmers, but in the whole the main area's worked for the Estate on a farming contract.

Jenny: Mm hmm, yeah, mmm. Shall we walk round a bit more?

Sandy: Even at first down stage some of the spruce here are sawmill size, that's about as big a tree as they want at the sawmill these days.

Jenny: Wow, it's about... do you go on the height or the girth?

Sandy: Both. But girth-wise that's pretty much the maximum size.

Jenny: So maybe like, what like, 40 centimeters or something.

Sandy: Aye, I mean, you can get them a lot bigger than that, but they're looking for that sort of size.   
   
Now-a-days any oversized trees have to go to specialist mills rather than just the local mills.

Jenny: There's a lot of lichen isn't there? On the ones at the edges.

Sandy: Yep, that's a sign they're slow growing. This area for it was first clear fell I think it was 37 years old and it was Sitka spruce, the same as this.   
   
These trees have been improved - or eh genetically improved - and eh, through tree breeding, so I'm hoping to clear fell this in say about 30 years -

Jenny: OK.

Sandy: Maybe even less, because it's a lot faster growing and lighter branched. But this is a good site for spruce: moist, but not waterlogged. Plenty water in the ground.

Jenny: Yeah.   
   
So I guess like that's a big part of your job as well is like, deciding what varieties to go with based on the conditions.

Sandy: Exactly yeah.   
   
I mean normally we would restock this with spruce again but because it's on that ancient woodland site, we will be looking at from we clear fell it, favouring all these native broadleaves and any Scots pine that are scattered around, to use as a basis for regenerating the rest of the site as a native woodland.

Jenny: And if it's native woodland, do you get subsidies or... what's the kind of em... what's the stimulus to do that? Is it just you have to or is there like something that like -

Sandy: Well, we need to do a certain amount under the certification. But we could... what will probably happen it'll mainly go into Scots pine so it'll still be commercial.

Jenny: OK.

Sandy: Still be a commercial element in it, just slower growing.   
   
What's going to happen here is I'm saying we're putting back into native woodland. I think the spruce will have other ideas. When we clear fell this it's going to regenerate quite a lot in spruce. [laughs] So we'll plant as much pine as we can, but the first rotation after this will be a mixture of pine and spruce I would imagine. We'll probably go in the first and then remove the spruce and try and feel out the pine, so it's a long term change back to native woodland for these site. I can show you an example of that across the hill.

Jenny: Everything must be quite a slow process -

Sandy: Forestry is a slow process compared farming. If you mistake in forestry it takes years to come to light [chuckles]. You make a mistake in farming and you know that year.   
   
If you look across the hill here, you see the light green -

Jenny: Oh, yeah.

Sandy: The whole of this face of the hill was a plantation on ancient site, and this is the first one we want to reinstate under certification. So it was all a continuation of the spruce, you see a dark green spruce was here, across here. It was basically a continue right across the hill, except the left hand side there was larch - which is also known native - uh... so clear felled it and replanted it in mainly native broadleaves: oak, aspen, hazel, rowan and a few areas of Scots pine. That's... that was about 10/12 years ago. What's happened is the oaks and other broadleaves are growing fine, but it's regenerated in larch and you can see all the light over there, that's larch coming up through the broadleaves like this in tubes.

Jenny: Just because they're like super vigorous.

Sandy: It just likes the site so what we're going have to do is in the first thinning just go in there and just thin it, removing all the larch and leaving the oak and other broadleaves.

Jenny: What about these like really tall ones on the horizon over there? Because I've been up there and they're, they're something else right?

Sandy: These are these are all old policy trees eh, that's Noble Fir there. All starting to blow over, we're just leaving them for habitat and that. It's just -

Jenny: What do you mean, "policy trees"? What does that mean?

Sandy: The trees are planted round the castle. I mean there used to be drives up to the castle from, from the Glenton Road here right up through these trees.

Jenny: Yeah I've walked along there.

Sandy: There were two or three rows running parallel and they all use to lead to the castle area. And you got the firs across here as well for the Ospreys' nest -

Jenny: Oh really?

Sandy: So Osprey nests across in that big trees there. It's been there since 1970-something?

Jenny: Really?

Sandy: I dunno if you can see the nest or no but [grunts] -

Jenny: Which one am a looking at? Which tree am I looking at?

Sandy: A'll move till we get in front of something... behind something obvious.

Jenny: I also just noticed the trees right up the top. Is that Mither Tap that one? No that's... what's that hill called again?

Sandy: That's part of the Black Hill o Bennachie.

Jenny: Is that part of your domain?

Sandy: It is. I huvnae even got these trees mapped they're just a wild clump [laughs with Jenny]. There's a lot of stories about how they're planted, but I'm not gonna get in to that. Not sure how many of them are true.

Jenny: Really? Like... so just like who did it?

Sandy: Yep. Think it was... rumour has it, it was one of the Lord Forbes coming of age and they were planning to have a bonfire at that time - when he became came of age or something with that - but what Lord Forbes that was I've no idea [laughs].

Jenny: And how long will those em, like the ones around the castle, the 'policy trees', have been there for?

Sandy: Most of these old trees along the roadside and that are all about 200, over 200 years old.

Jenny: Because you see them a lot, don't you, at like stately homes, that type of tree?

Sandy: That's right. A lot of them were designed by Capability Brown who did a lot of the landscaping round the big big houses.

Jenny: There's a wee ladybird.

Sandy: You can see the damage that the deer do [chuckles] here.

Jenny: Oh yeah, that one's totally over it, isn't it? There's some evidence.

Sandy: Breaking mistakes, I'll need to come in and repair some of these.

Jenny: So are they kind of like the main, ehhh, they'd be the thing that would kind of cause the most damage?

Sandy: They are.

Jenny: The main risk.

Sandy: Ehh, I mean forestry would be easy if it wasn't for deer. I go to a lot of extra expense with the tubes and trees, eh, stakes to protect the broadleaves otherwise they'll just disappear overnight.

Jenny: What's this one?

Sandy: It's a Cherry birch cherry.

Jenny: It's quite like far, far on compared to -

Sandy: Aye it's a fast, fast grower.

Jenny: Also though in terms of the weather, like it's snowing this morning and it's got -

Sandy: It's an early flusher as well, that's probably why it grows faster, because it's resistant to frost. Most of the trees are ehhh... holdin' their leaves for a wee bit longer to avoid frost you see. Especially ash, it's really susceptible to frost, and it's about May before it flushes. And even then, if you get a frost in June it will kill the shoots, kill the young shoots.   
   
You can see the damage the deer are doing here. That's the bucks marking the territory: freeing the bark-off the young trees. They don't so much eat the trees, they just free the bark and then the tree dies. You see this one's blown over, but it's just been left and it's come up sort of bushy and it'll be fine. That will be nae use as a timber tree but because it's just native woodland tree, just leave it.

Jenny: Aye, so when they're planted, it's just kind like 'just leave them to it?' There's not much like ongoing care other than like checkin' -

Sandy: No, no there is a lot of ongoing care. Spray the base 'bout to here, for the first few years to keep it clear of grass, because grass really slows the growth. These ones are getting to the stage where it's... they don't need it so much. But certainly -.

Jenny: How long have these ones been here?

Sandy: 2012 we planted. Some of them are a bit smaller because they've been, eh, replacements for ones that've died.

Jenny: That's a really old one there, isn't it? On the corner.

Sandy: Big old, big old Granny Pine yep.

Jenny: Why d'you call it a 'Granny Pine'?

Sandy: Just cause the... the old, rugged form of it. That's the traditional name for it, a Granny Pine.

Jenny: Or a Granddad Pine?

Sandy: No it's always a Granny Pine. Also called wolves.

Jenny: And do they have a purpose, like is there a reason why that one would have been left?

Sandy: It's great for environment, great for the wildlife, and apart from anything else, a nightmare to cut it down, it's nae use for timber. It's better to be left. Full of cones, cross balls and squirrels.

Jenny: Yeah.   
   
What do you think about em, like quite a lot of the estates are re-wilding, you know, like re-planting a lot of this native woodland and talking about introducing other species and...?

Sandy: I suppose there is an extreme version of what we're doing here, we reinstated the native woodland.

Jenny: Yeah.

Sandy: You've just got to be careful of which pieces you reintroduce.

Jenny: Yeah. I guess with the, with all the landscaping that you're doing, there's like, there's also something round potentially like tourism isn't there cause people want to come and see it?

Sandy: Aye, it's definitely a draw this part of the country for tourists. And Bennachie's a particularly important part of Aberdeenshire for tourists, so we need to keep the landscaping nice for that.

Jenny: Do you think you'd get a tellin' off from Aberdeenshire Council or somebody if you weren't.

Sandy: We work, we work in conjunction with the Council planners all the time. I mean, my forest plan goes to them and say SNH and all the maybe archaeologists for comments before I proceed.

Jenny: Of course archaeologists, because there's a lot of things happening isn't there?

Sandy: There's a lot of digs, there's a site here look, just right in front of us.

Jenny: Oh really [laughs with Sandy]?! What's this one?

Sandy: Just old ancient crofts. Sheepfolds. All sort. It's all marked in the GIS system and on the computer. I've got all the known archeology sites. I can just bring it up so when I'm planning I know they're there. So we can avoid this when we're extracting the timber. Here's the timber extraction route here, which is well clear. That's, that's the marks left from the original clear felling here about 20 years ago. So we just use the same route.

Jenny: What are these ones, right down? I guess they're just like old trees that were there on the edge? Or is that more of your kind of, like em, screenin'?

Sandy: No, we'll have a look at these ones when we get closer to them.   
   
They grazed and this was an enclosure that was fenced off within the old field. I removed the fence a couple of years ago cause no big animal was in here apart from deer. So these arew ancient trees here, mainly alder.

Jenny: They look really old.

Sandy: When this was grazed, we got paid to fence this off to protect these trees.

Jenny: Really? When was that?

Sandy: That was a long time ago, 20 years ago maybe. And just recently took the fence down because... to allow free access through it. And incorporate it as part of this new plantation.

Jenny: OK.

Sandy: This is the edge of the commercial bit here, with more broadleaves by the river.

Jenny: It's so nice to hear more about it cause we've been up here before but obviously without knowing [laughs] what's going on.

Sandy: It makes it more interesting if you know what's going on right enough. We've cut these tracks through the plantations both for access for management and for for walking as well like. It helps a lot.

Jenny: Yeah.

Sandy: You need to get into these plantations to take off stakes and tubes.

Jenny: So you do that maybe like when they're more established?

Sandy: When they're big enough to sort of fend off the deer. Here's a couple here with tubes been removed.

Jenny: Yeah.

Sandy: These are the size where they're safe from deer. Deer like something flexible - like this - to fray on, you can see they've been fraying there. They clean the velvet off their antlers against the trees that size.

Jenny: Aw really.

Sandy: When they get to this thickness they're a wee bit safer. It's better to get the tube off when they can't.

Jenny: What's your favorite time of year, when you're in the forestry calendar?

Sandy: Probably spring. It's a busy time, it's a nice time.

Jenny: It's been a hard winter this year hasn't it?

Sandy: Ah it's been long.

Jenny: A remember you were saying when I saw you - maybe it must have been December or something - and eh, sayin that it hadn't been this cold since you moved here [chuckles].

Sandy: Well, that's right. It was... I think we hit -19 and lower in some of the areas this year. I've seen it -28 in the past as well. But that was certainly the coldest it's been for a while.

Jenny: Is that a risk for your, for the younger trees that, that those kind of temperatures or is it, is it all good because they're native species or...?

Sandy: Most of them are native and they're fine. Haven't lost any trees or such but a lot of the Gorse nut has been hit by the cold, you see the brown patches on the Gorse across the river there? It's native as well but I mean... quite often gets hit by the cold.

Jenny: That one there, looks like it's been hit by lightning or something that tree.

Sandy: It was eh... about 15, 20 years ago. The top come off, it was a big Norway spruce. [inaudible] that's a Scots pine but it was a similar size and... I can't remember if it was lightning or wind - probably just wind.

Jenny: Aw look who's back.

Sandy: It's the Martins, Sand Martins mainly, some House Martins there as well.   
   
We've got a problem on the ash wae ash dieback. It's not too bad in this corner but we'll have a look see if we can see any.   
   
These are ash - ashes here.

Jenny: Yeah, they look really different don't they to the ones up there.

Sandy: The buds are tightly closed - they'll keep them closed until all risk of frost's gone. Eh, we're not seeing any signs of disease here, but there will be.   
   
Here's the start. See how the shoot here's all blistered and brown? It's called 'ash dieback'. It just dies back, it'll continue down and spread to other shoots and eventually this whole tree will die. So there is a chance you might lose most of the ash [sighs].

Jenny: Is that a new thing?

Sandy: It's rel- fairly new, it's in the last few years it's come in this far North. But because - as you can see - there'll all planted in mixture, losing the ash here wouldnae be complete disaster, the rest of trees would cover for it. Where if you planted pure ash in a plantation it would be a different story - you'd lose everything.

Jenny: Is that happening elsewhere?

Sandy: I'm sure it'll be happening further South where they do use ash as a crop. It's less commercial up here. Mainly just for [inaudible].

Jenny: How's it em, how's it transmitted?

Sandy: Ehhh. Spores and fungus into... trees... The spores - they're in the leaves - fall to the ground and it's just spread bit like that. The spores are spread in the air and through... People can pick them up on their boots and all sorts [chuckles]. But it certainly spreads around the country.

Jenny: Nothing you can do about it?

Sandy: Not practically, no. I think it came in from the continent wae eh young trees coming across from Holland and just slowly spreading across the country. I mean we've lost all the elms in the last 30 years. Pretty much every single elm's gone because of Dutch elm disease. Eh, you'll still see dead ones along the riverside here.

Jenny: Oh these are elms here?

Sandy: The dead one in the front there - across the river - that's an elm. I think there's one or two live ones left in the whole Estate. Eh I, I've got a few planted in these plantations, just in case, some of them might survive.

Jenny: Yeah cause that's what I was going to ask, I guess like kind of as a safeguard you maybe would just choose not to plant in any more. But do you feel it's important to keep keep trying?

Sandy: Keep trying! As long as you can obtain the plants it's worth trying because as long as they're in a mixture you've nothin' to lose. So far, they're doing OK. A lot of the elms are recovering these days and growing up from the base of the dead tree, but then you get a warm year and then get it again because the beetle likes warm temperatures. It transmits the spores and the fungus. You can see these tubes are designed at 1.2 meters tall. They're designed to stop Roe deer fraying the trees, but when the Red deer move in look: [laughs with Jenny]. You need bigger tubes, but basically it becomes impractical.

Jenny: Aye cause the Red deer are big!

Sandy: They're big and they fray it higher - look at this - below here. Fray it right up there.

Jenny: That's like taller than me.

Sandy: Mh hmm.   
   
Aye a big stag's head will be up here, it'll be just rubbing its antlers on there. I mean the tree survives it a little bit but if it continues the same tree - which quite often do - scent marking that's when [inaudible] see some fresh damage there.

Jenny: Are the wee platforms for fishing?

Sandy: There's one to the left here and one to the right of these for shooting the Red deer. Still some grass across here where the Red are drawn onto in the spring when the grass grows. The idea is you get up up the platform and just wait.

Jenny: Mmm.

Sandy: You use them for shooting Roe deer as well but these ones are particularly for the Red deer along this crossfield.

Jenny: And if you weren't keeping like the population in check, you just wouldn't be able to grow any -

Sandy: You just wouldn't be able to grow trees basically. There's no natural predators, especially in Red deer, or Roe deer really. Apart from eh road traffic [chuckles with Jenny] and that sort of thing. So they've got to be kept in check. They shoot about approximate 50 or 60 Roe deer every year here and the population still grows. But the Red Deer are so secretive, very rarely see them, but they are here. And there's herds as big as 20 have been seen. I think probably 30 in one place. But they're very nocturnal. I mean you see the deer on the hill estates up on the hill, but they prefer the trees.

Jenny: Bit of shelter.

Sandy: Bit of shelter and it's better feeding as well. So I mean they're mainly in these trees across here but on this side as well, and they'll just walk across the river, especially if it's as low as it is at the moment.

Jenny: So do you think that eh with like climate change and warming temperatures and increased storms and extreme weather, is that going to start impacting on your work more or is it already kinda something that you're considering?

Sandy: There's always been storms. Every few years you get some sort of big, big wind blow. You just bear it in mind, you just be careful what you plant and especially on wet sites. And we can do a wind through hazard classification for the, for the sites before we plant them sort of thing.

Jenny: What's that?

Sandy: It's just a... Estimate the risk of trees getting blown over based on the sort of guying conditions and the winds zone and the elevation and the aspect. Just gives you a rough idea. But you get a big, big wind blow and it just blows through everything sometimes [chuckles]. See it just blowing this big corridor. The last one we had just blew a big corridor from the West to East, right across the North end of the Estate. You just... you've gotta... you're plans have got to be flexible to allow for that sort of thing. So when my plan becomes operational this year or next year I intend to sort of clear up the remains of the last big wind blow we had, before I start doing anything else.

Jenny: Nice spot, huh?

Sandy: This is a nice spot. Nice area for fishing as well.   
   
There's the other high seat for the deer control here.

Jenny: Mh hmm.   
   
This looks different again.

Sandy: This is a part of the ancient woodland here as well, this corner here. Trees in here are actually planted in this corner, and they look quite natural. I think that these ones that have blown over and kept on growing add to the natural effect.

Jenny: Yeah, I heard that deadwood is kind of equally important -

Sandy: As live wood - that's right.

Jenny: Why is that? Is it just for like bugs and -

Sandy: Just for bugs and fungus and to keep the healthy forest. Alright, you're starting to get into the more natural corner, this wee bit here. Just go to the left and you can almost see they've been planted. You can almost see lines where they've been planted.

Jenny: Cause you've kinda, you've talked about the difference between like the commercial and the natural woodlands, like, what do you find more enjoyment in planting, planning? Is it about the same?

Sandy: For more enjoyment in planning the native areas.

Jenny: Bit more variety.

Sandy: More variety. But I like to see both types, I like to see the commercial crops and the native ones. This is an open ground area within the plantation that we've left. Open grounds is just as important as the woodlands and the, and the more edge you have the better it is for wildlife. Tend to plan in something like 10 percent open ground over the plantation, sometimes more. If we head straight up the hill there, it'll take us back to...

Jenny: How does it feel like working on something that you know is gonna like, keep going after you retire and into the future? Like do you think you'll have an apprentice or somebody to pass it on to?

Sandy: Who knows [laughs] we'll have to wait and see like eh. As long as it's all down on paper it'll help whoever takes over. In theory, if there's a 10 year plan there that's all you need. And it'll just take somebody time to find their way round the woods. And it's all in the computers.

Jenny: Yeah.

Sandy: It should be a fairly easy transition, easier than it has been in the past. Before computers there were all different scraps of paper here and there and I'd just have to find my way around. And eh, there was a few contracts that started and needed be finished but basically it just took a few years to find my way round and then... Now with the new 10 year plans and everything on the computers it's a lot easier. Things are much different from what they used to be.

Jenny: That's great, thank you so much.

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