

Return of the Forestry Show: Birr 2011

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Approximately 5,000 visitors attended the Irish Forestry, Woodland and Bio-energy Show on the grounds of Birr Castle Estate on May 6 and 7. It had been 14 years since the previous Forestry Show was held in Kinnitty Castle, Co. Offaly, then organised by the Society of Irish Foresters. Even during a time of economic uncertainty, the forestry sector demonstrated that it remains resilient and positive, and highlights the emerging economic importance of the forestry and timber industry.

The Society of Irish Foresters produced a special souvenir edition of its newsletter *The Irish Forester* for the show. It included a site map and background information on the Association of Irish Forestry Consultants (AIFC), which represented the Society and the forest consultancy profession at the show. AIFC welcomed visitors at their stand and distributed the newsletter as well as promoting their website (www.aifc.ie) which Sean Lenihan, Chairman of AIFC said “is the first port of call for foresters, growers, the press and other stakeholders who need the latest information on developments in the Irish forestry and forest products industry”. The Society, through AIFC, is represented on many strategic and policy-making forestry forums including the Forest Service Liaison Group, the Forest Policy Review Group and regular meetings between the Forest Service and the Irish Forestry and Forest Products Association, the forestry group within IBEC.

Speaking at the launch of the show, Shane McEntee, Minister of State with responsibility for forestry, said that the event was important in promoting the forestry and bio energy sectors. “Not only does the show allow those in forestry and bio energy to showcase their industries but it provides the general public with a valuable opportunity to get an insight into the sector and gain information on our national woodland resource,” he said.

The Irish Timber Growers Association were involved in promoting the Show and also hosted the conference centre, which featured stands from universities and research groups showcasing the economic, environmental and social benefits of forestry. Walk-in displays were hosted by the groups which included the CARBiFOR Project Team from UCD, the COFORD FORECAST Project Team from UCD, the PLANFORBIO Project Team from UCC and TCD, the Irish squirrel and pine marten project from UCG, the Coillte Recreation Team, the Irish Forestry and Forest Products Association, PEFC Ireland and presentations by Forest Service staff on the EU Regulation which lays down the ‘due diligence’ obligations of operators who place timber and timber products on the market. Sean McGinnis, of *Ecoplan Forestry*, also gave an introduction to Birr Castle Estate woodlands and their management.

Outside the centre, all the major forestry companies were present as well as harvesting and other forestry machinery distributors. The farming community was also well represented through the Irish Farmers Association. *The Irish Farmers Journal* featured a seven-page supplement on the show.

Demonstrations were carried out by harvesting contractors and distributors while the first Irish National Tree Climbing Championships were organised by the Irish Tree Care Association. Sponsored by Husqvarna, the surprise winner of the Masters' Challenge was Philip Annett – a young novice – who held off Bill Blyth who was second, followed by the Stevie Donaghy. The Bwyellwyr Gwynedd Axemen from Wales performed their breath-taking demonstrations of lumberjack skill with axe and crosscut saws.

The Show organiser, David Wilkinson, deserves credit for his input in making the event a success. He was encouraged by the positive feedback from the event and has already committed to organising the next Show in May 2013 and hopes to continue alternating the event every second year with the UK show.



The axemen from Bwyellwyr Gynedd put on a thumping display.



Tom Nixon demonstrated horse logging techniques using his Ardennes heavy draught horses.



Joe Gowran demonstrates charcoal making. He is also involved in coppicing projects such as the ecologically important native woodland St. John's Wood in Co. Roscommon.



John McLoughlin, President of the Society of Irish Foresters (right) with the Green Belt team: Seimié Hagan, Seamus Gavigan Maurice Ryan.