
EDITORIAL

Mol an óige agus tiocfaidh sí.

Bual sa tóin í agus titfidh sí.

The next generation of foresters needs a more diverse range of skills than ever before. The entire sector (as well as the pension funds of current staff) is increasingly reliant on its ability to respond to many changes in circumstances and conditions in the forest estate, as well as society's interactions with it. Mirroring the skewed nature of the forest estate, a similarly skewed age profile of the professional staff in the sector means that in recent years there has been increased numbers of forestry job postings. With a selfish and often wistful eye on those pensions, it behoves all of us to make sure we are attracting the very best calibre of students and new professionals into forestry and related areas. Indeed, this may be a good time to consider the difficulties arising from the forestry sector's poor public image. Despite being a successful sector, economically and environmentally, there is still a widespread misunderstanding of what forestry is about. While this continues, it will be very difficult to attract the calibre of entrants required to serve the industry and profession.

Students and new professionals are needed not only to cope with buying/selling timber and planting new sites, but will also have to respond and adapt to changes caused by alterations in climate, markets, a wider diversity of tree species and increased threats from pests and diseases. Greater silvicultural and ecological knowledge will be needed to manage a wider portfolio of species and to adapt to such changes. Therefore, it is critical that new entrants to the sector play to strengths from the practical and field-related to the more academic and theoretical. We need good students certainly, but we also need to give them good opportunities to gain experience on-the-ground. In this profession more than any other we know the value of investing not only in tomorrow, but also far into a long rotation where we can expect much altered conditions. Let's hope that not too many succumb to the ridiculing retort to the above *seanfhocal* but instead act constructively to bring about change.

To prevent a decline in student calibre, career development teachers should be helped to direct students to a profession that already calls for a wide variety of skilled expertise spanning establishment and silviculture, from GIS and remote sensing technologists, to wood science specialists, to botanical and ecological experts and from research scientists to financial wizards and economists. How else shall we hope to fertilise our ranks to create a dynamic and innovative industry that will provide inspirational and reliable leadership?

To achieve this, a much better appreciation of forestry and its value by society is needed – this is in our hands! Perhaps there is need for direct input to primary and secondary school education (e.g. why does forestry not play an important role in the

secondary schools' Agricultural Science curriculum?), to general television and other media programming, or to organising targeted local forest walks. It is clear from the number of books published on trees and forestry-related subjects (see the list of recent publications in the Book Reviews section) that there is a huge appetite for and interest in things natural. Our challenge is to harness and channel this interest towards a better understanding and appreciation of forestry.

This issue of *Irish Forestry* contains a wide variety of papers on practical aspects of forestry such as silvicultural advice on site considerations and nursing effects on cutaway peats (Black et al. papers). Coates et al. and de Miguel et al. describe the case for short rotation forestry and some of the issues affecting its potential in Ireland. Walsh et al. provide a useful discussion of "minor conifers" and how they may be used to replace larch in response to increasing threat from *Phytophthora* diseases. Fennessy adds to this discussion with advice on the use of Monterey pine. Afforestation targets (both across the EU and in Ireland) are considered by a series of authors from very different perspectives. From Ryan et al., who consider the effects of taxation measures, to Huss who reflects on the attitude to planting broadleaved species in the wake of the publication of *Broadleaf Forestry in Ireland* (a review of which appears herein also). This is topical as the afforestation grant-aid for broadleaved species has recently been increased. A captivating article by O'Brien on the historical timber trade in the south east of Ireland from 1200 onwards describes the ebb and flow of timber exports in the context of forest cover in the region. There is also a fascinating description of the sailing ships employed in this trade, which appear to have had quite an international circulation - for instance, the Canadian brigantine *Dei Gratia*, famous for salvaging the *Marie Celeste* in 1872, spent a period trading on the River Blackwater.

The role of forestry in climate change mitigation is another theme featured in this issue and Cabrera Berned and Nieuwenhuis discuss the implications of management intensification. Ryan et al. also further consider this theme and comment on the unequivocally positive role played by the forestry sector in such mitigation. In the context of potentially huge national fines being imposed for infringing UN climate change convention obligations, it would seem that not enough use is being made of the uniquely positive impact of forestry. It does not bode well that afforestation in 2017 is the lowest for almost 60 years. As Huss points out in his article about the potential for development of the forestry sector, the projected increase in harvestable material will bring about more jobs. However, the true potential of such produce, particularly from broadleaved species, is in real danger of not being fully realised. Thus, to protect the investment to date and to bring about a full return and turn over, it is imperative that we hold firm and continue to invest considerably in appropriate education specifically for current professionals, students and land owners/growers, but also for the general population.

The Society of Irish Foresters was established on Friday, 29th September 1942. The Society commemorated its 75th anniversary by launching a fine reprint of *The Sacred Trees of Ireland* by A.T. Lucas at a ceremony in the Phoenix Park Visitor Centre on the 29th September 2017. In addition, a digital version of *The Forests of Ireland* by H.M. Fitzpatrick has recently been made available on the Society's website. This book was published in 1966, in anticipation of the Society's silver jubilee, for the benefit of "the practising forester and of the general public." Neither the aspirations of the Society nor its closely-felt association with books about trees have changed much in the intervening period.

This year honorary membership was bestowed on two long-serving members, Ted Farrell and Bill Wright (see Figures 1 and 2).

In this anniversary of the foundation of the Society, it is particularly poignant to note the passing of Michael McNamara, the last surviving founding member of the Society, a man for whom the value of forests was "measured not just in narrow economic terms but in their total contribution to society".



Figure 1: Niall Farrelly, President of the Society, presents the honorary membership medal to Ted Farrell, Emeritus Professor of Forestry at University College Dublin in recognition of his significant contribution to forestry education and research in Ireland.



Figure 2: *Gerry Murphy, President of the Society of Irish Foresters, presents the honorary membership medal to Bill Wright in recognition of his service to forestry and his contribution to the Society of Irish Foresters in fulfilling its mission “to lead and represent the forestry profession which meets, in a sustainable manner, society’s needs from Irish forests, through excellence in forestry practice”.*