

EDITORIAL

Standing up for our own

*I celebrate myself, and sing myself,
And what I assume you shall assume,
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.*

*I loafe and invite my soul,
I lean and loafe at my ease observing a spear of summer grass.*

*My tongue, every atom of my blood, form'd from this soil,
this air;
Born here of parents born here from parents the same, and
their parents the same,
I, now thirty-seven years old in perfect health begin,
Hoping to cease not till death.*

Walt Whitman

Extract from “Song of Myself” from *Leaves of Grass* (1892 version).

Apparently, there are now more Sitka spruce trees in Ireland and the UK than there are in the species’ natural range in North America. Fifty one percent of our forest estate is composed of this species which underpins an industry with a gross annual output of approx. €2.2 billion. We have been planting Sitka spruce here since the beginning of the last century, thus we now have forests where third and fourth rotation crops have been established. Such heritage, as Whitman alludes to above, must soon confer a special status to the species. Short and Hawe (see the third article in this issue of *Irish Forestry*) coined a phrase that was new to me, “future natives”. I wonder how long it will be till we award such a coveted title to Sitka spruce growing in Ireland?

Before the reader chokes with merriment and incredulity, we should remind ourselves of the debt we owe this species. Perhaps it is timely to ask if there is still an inhabitant of this island whose home remains untouched by the products of Sitka spruce – spruce rafters and trusses, doors and kitchens? It is facile to bemoan the monocultures of exotic species marching across our countryside when one has begun the day with a breakfast of cereals grown and managed in exactly the same way and all washed down with milk produced by other non-native species. Should we plant only native species if we are to properly steward the land resource and sequester long-term carbon? The human population now exceeds 7.7 billion and the consequent pressure on the finite resources

of our planet makes it imperative that our forests are managed optimally. Sitka spruce is the “work horse” of our industry and we depend on its bountiful output. No doubt forest management can be improved and the species range diversified to include other coniferous and broadleaved species. However, we are fortunate to have Sitka spruce and we should be prepared to defend against its detractors.

This discussion should become easier as more and more of the private estate comes into production and first rotation crops advance to harvest and reforestation, demonstrating powerfully the forests potential to deliver sustainable rural jobs. To properly inform the tide of popular opinion I enjoin you to take every opportunity to spread the many “good news stories” from the sector! A fine example appears in the “Letters to the Editor” section of this publication where Gerhardt Gallagher reflects on the values and services enjoyed on an autumnal visit to a public forest. Unfortunately, the second letter in this section is *not* a good news story. Dr Catriona Duffy, NUI – Maynooth, warns of the imminent danger posed by the discovery of breeding populations of spruce bark beetle in Kent. However, there are lessons to be learned even from such disasters. Short and Hawe highlight the value of the silvicultural opportunity afforded by the requirement to manage the ash-dieback-afflicted stands across the country. They argue that the remedial management of such stands will boost their productivity and resilience in the longer term. Ardao Rivera and Nieuwenhuis consider how harvesting practices might be diversified to increase the output from stands which are productive enough to sustain it. Surely these two articles are adding jam to the bread and butter serving! On the other hand, Farrelly et al. report how harvest forecasts from private sector forests depend critically on the quality of data available. In the final article Liu et al. change tack completely and report on a study of the impact of roadside land management on deer-vehicle collisions.

Dr Samuel Olajuyigbe provides an interesting “Perspectives” article about forestry development in Nigeria. Donal Magner reminds us of the optimism embodied by trees in the consideration of Philip Larkin’s *The Trees*. Finally, the “Book Reviews” section provides further evidence for such a state of mind as the featured books cover an impressive range of topics from the management of woodland and forest, to plant-hunting expeditions, from Irish soil diversity and the cultural role of trees across the world to how storm-damage losses can be repurposed.

The year has ended well as the COFORD Council presented Minister Doyle with a veritable armful of reports addressing a range of forestry topics. In particular it is welcome to see the management of mixtures and the value of long-term research being highlighted. As such heady matters are given thoughtful consideration in the corridors of Kildare and Merrion Streets, hopefully the case for forestry will be supported wherever possible by all of us.

Dr. Neil Murray became an honorary member of SIF in 2015 (Figures 1 and 2) in recognition of his contribution to Irish forestry and his long-term service to the Society of Irish Foresters.



Figure 1: Dr. Gerhardt Gallagher presented the honorary membership certificate to Dr. Neil Murray.



Figure 2: Dr. Neil Murray is congratulated by Bill Dallas, a classmate from the TCD forestry class of 1954.