

Letters to the Editor

Ranelagh,
Dublin 6.

The Editor, *Irish Forestry*

Re. Forests and capturing carbon¹

Sir,

In the context of ongoing correspondence and commentaries on climate change and other environmental threats, I thought I might share one positive experience.

Near Enniskerry, Co. Wicklow, is a small oasis of tranquillity where a range of wooded landscape and environmental experiences can be encountered in an afternoon. The traffic is barely audible, the air off the Dublin mountains is clear, and at this time in late autumn the woodland colours are still stunning.

At all levels there is a rich diversity of vegetation. Mature broad leaves, conifers and mixed woodlands (oak, beech and birch, pine, fir, larch and spruce) dominating the canopy give way to holly, rowan, oak, ash and birch. The ground is profuse with fern, sedges, briar, bracken, grasses, mosses and smaller plants and home to small animals and birds. A pair of ravens patrol the sky.

It struck me that here was a small but not insignificant repository of both carbon storage and biodiversity, mitigating the impact of climate change, and doing so in an aesthetic way. All woodlands grow in diversity as they mature, accumulating carbon in their wood, biomass and soil.

Irish forests store some 400 tonnes of carbon per hectare in their biomass and soil, while removing more than four tonnes of CO₂ per hectare per year from the atmosphere.

Not alone that, but used timber also stores this carbon for many more years after felling. Yet as a country we are only 11% wooded, and this in many stages of development between seedling and maturity. The remaining 89% includes almost a quarter of the country, in rural areas, subject to conservation regulation or biologically unsuited to tree growth, and which will remain unwooded.

Anyone sharing a woodland experience and considering the deeper underlying processes cannot but be convinced that more trees are a critical part of the solution to our current environmental problems. This is a view shared worldwide.

¹ This letter was published in the *Irish Times* on Monday 26th November 2018.

For me, I returned to the city refreshed in mind and body, hoping that the inheritors of this gem on our behalf, Coillte, will continue to maintain it by light and judicious management so that we, the taxpayers, can continue to experience in a pleasurable way – and for years to come – carbon sequestration in action.

Yours, etc,

Gerhardt Gallagher