

IRISH FORESTRY

Vol. 34

1977

No. 1

EDITORIAL

A MAN UPSTANDING IN HIS FIELD

WHEREAS a lecture provides an opportunity for the lecturer to propound his views and direct them at a passive and sometimes captive audience, a discussion is by definition an open forum in which an exchange of views takes place. Discussions are a feature of meetings of this society, both indoor and outdoor. These discussion periods are designed to provide an opportunity for such an exchange to take place, so that those who form the body of the meeting assume, if they choose, the role of participants at the meeting, rather than that of passive listeners.

The discussion period during a well attended meeting of the society has tremendous potential for a valuable exchange of views. Each member of the group has his own distinct background and years of experience in forestry, which no one man in half a dozen lifetimes could hope to match. Each has his own perspective on reality. Sadly, the potential for discussion is rarely realised. The same faces keep popping up. If a research worker presents a paper, another research worker asks the questions. Very often he might as well be questioning himself (not a bad thing to do), such is the similarity of background and research experience. The questions and answers they draw from the speaker may enlighten the audience somewhat, but the really valuable discussion lies in the comments and the questions of those with a quite different perspective on the topic—in the case of a research presentation, the man in the field who observes phenomena not at a laboratory bench, nor in computer printout, but in the forest, every working day.

The specialist has the advantage. He has access to more information in his area of specialisation than the manager can ever have. But this does not make him a defender of the faith, a guardian of truth. He is in touch with his subject, but his view of reality may become rather distorted, if, in his efforts to keep his ear close to the ground, his head becomes buried in the sand.