

Letters to the Editor

Dear Sir,

I wish to comment on Mr. Fitzsimon's letter in your last issue.

Mr. Fitzsimons is clearly confusing two different but related subjects *viz* biological conservation and landscape conservation. The basic principles of biological conservation are (a) the protection of the genetic resource represented by wild plants and animals and (b) the protection of the ecosystems in which these organisms live. In the context of bogs the objective of biological conservation is to conserve the organisms which can survive in the nutrient poor and harsh conditions and which may be of future value to mankind. Mr. Fitzsimons can hardly argue with that philosophy given that the principal species used in Irish forests have only recently been selected from wild stock. (He should also note that the native stands of Sitka spruce in N. America are not protected and are indeed under threat). By virtue of their development bogs are also of value as a record of past climates and environments and as a baseline against which to measure, for example, air pollution. Like all natural or semi-natural ecosystems they are also of value for education and scientific research, especially for those with a broader vision of life who do not see 'wasteland' wherever only wild plants and animals live.

I am not professionally qualified to discuss landscape conservation but I can appreciate the beauty of the wild, open expanses of bog broken up by lakes and streams against a backdrop of mountains and clouds. So too could Paul Henry as do also the many thousands of tourists who visit the West. Even a former editor of Irish Forestry, N. O Carroll, was clearly appreciative of this landscape when, in 1973, he wondered whether 'we may be in danger of being biased against these areas by a buried folk-memory which associated them with misery and starvation . . .'. He went on to say ' . . . we need to be quite clear about what we are doing before we change too many of these areas (i.e. blanket bogs) by the establishment of blocks of forest, any one of which may visually affect many square miles of landscape'. It does not appear to me that foresters are any clearer now as to what they are doing than they were in 1973, for what is patently lacking is a coherent landuse policy which would accommodate all interests.

Finally, Mr. Fitzsimons may be surprised to learn that I am an enthusiastic supporter of afforestation, provided that the plantations are carefully sited where they do not destroy sites of high biological interest and where they are economically justifiable.

Therefore, if I had been asked whether 'in general, conifer plantations improve the landscape' I too would have answered 'Yes', but that of course is a reflection of the sloppy thought processes in compiling the question. Or was it the venue of the poll?

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Shankill, Co. Dublin.

Reference: *Ir. Forestry* 30, 2, 1973. Have a good hard think about the Western Blanket Bogs.