

## Book Reviews

### **For Love of Trees – Trees, Hedgerows, Ivy and the Environment**

By Ristead Mulcahy. 1996. Environmental Publications, 17 Duke St., Dublin. 79 pp. & Introduction. Price £4.99 paperback; £12 hardback. ISBN 0 9527198 2 7.

Reviewed by J.F. Durand.

The author declares himself in the introduction as not being slow to express his views, and acknowledges that some of what he writes will be seen to be controversial. This slim volume justifies both statements. Professor Mulcahy professes himself as a longtime lover of trees. This book carries his uncompromising enmity for ivy. To use an expression employed on innumerable occasions in the text, the author is “heavily infested” with such enmity. The greater part of this neatly produced volume is devoted to word and picture of this message. We have to wait until page 62 before we leave the repetitive exposition and reach some balanced comments on the lack of agreement on the effects of ivy on tree growth. The author makes a sensible argument that adequate research is required, as the matter is by no means clear.

More than 30 photographs reproduced show nondescript hedgerows or single trees all carrying dense ivy growth. After inspection of a few of these, the reader will be replete. One infested ruin of a senile tree or hedgerow is pretty much the same as the next.

The book is not easy for a forester to relish, as ivy does not rate as a dreaded invader in adequately stocked stands. On page 23, the author puts his finger on the many influences acting on the growth of both the supporting tree and the ivy. The forester will note the emphasis on the aesthetics of single trees. The author speaks of ivy being almost ubiquitous in Ireland and many, from “wren boys” to lovers of the late foraging bees, gardeners and landscape planners, will all be ready to extol the virtues that they would attribute to ivy.

When the author states his belief that ivy takes from the elegance of broadleaf trees, one is prompted to question if all the trees shown in the photographs were elegant. Joyce Kilmer’s renowned tribute to the loveliness of a tree is quoted on the title page, but it is only reasonable to accept that not all trees are lovely and the author’s case is not strengthened by being so decidedly definite, and then laying all the blame on the ivy. With letters from the daily press, he does preserve balance by quoting extensively from those expressing benign views of ivy growth and also from those asserting that ivy gets the upper hand only on trees that have already died or are in gross decline due to senility or disease.

This reviewer agrees with the author when he decries the aesthetic damage done by gross ivy growth in Irish yew. How often, as illustrated by the author, is a specimen seen defaced. Early control of ivy is necessary, as delayed removal will leave long lasting areas of dead tissue on the tree which will take a considerable time to mask or grow over.

This reviewer clearly remembers the author’s approach to the then Forest Service on the subject many years ago, and discussing with him his views and interests in the study then being conducted. The study was carried out on collections of ash and sycamore trees, by setting up a number of similarly aged trees and removing ivy from some and then mea-

suring various characteristics of both trees and ivy during the period of the trial. The sycamore trial ended prematurely as an early visit to the site revealed that ivy had been severed on all the selected trees on which it had been purposely retained. Perhaps the work of a hederaphobic evangelist! Due to the heavy foliage of the sycamore, it was not expected that the species would yield much valuable information anyway.

In the case of ash, however, it was most interesting to measure, for example, the top heights of the trees and the top height of the ivy growth and to plot comparisons. On the vigorous middle aged ash measured over a number of years, the top heights of tree and ivy were precisely related. If the tree had grown a metre in height, so too had the ivy, and this was the pattern throughout. It appeared that one of the considerations was the diameter of the branches, as the ivy did not appear to have any strands attached to branches that had not grown to greater than five centimetres in diameter. It also seemed that the growth on ivy clad trees – and the trees chosen were well clad on the main stem – was marginally greater than on trees from which ivy had been removed. Again, the reviewer must agree with the author that such a trial over a period of a few years was less than adequate. It is not clear if any further studies have been done since those times.

Professor Mulcahy's plea for thorough research on the many aspects of ivy growth is worthy of foresters' support. With projected changes in mean temperature, it is to be expected that ivy would flourish more readily and may become an important factor in the management of broadleaf and second generation conifer stands. It must be admitted that our knowledge on many aspects of its growth is scant. For example, although known for its vigour, the particular form of the common ivy known as Irish ivy (*Hedera hibernica*) has in the past been recommended as a ground cover, as it showed no great affinity for climbing. When our lack of precise answers is evident on such a widespread element of the native flora, the author's heartfelt plea for research is applauded.