

## Book reviews

*Sitka spruce in Ireland*. Padraic M Joyce and Niall OCarroll. COFORD, 201 pp. Price €30.

The successful partial restoration of Ireland's forest cover in the 20th century can be attributed for the most part to the performance of Sitka spruce. First discovered by Archibald Menzies, a Scottish naturalist, in North America in 1787, the species is now the backbone of the country's forest industry. It is a species the industry can be proud of, including the thousands of forestry employees in rural Ireland whose weekly pay cheques derive directly from its attractive and versatile wood and fibre. Nursery owners, establishment, tending and harvesting employees, in addition to hauliers, sawmill and panel mill employees and a host of other direct and indirect interests all benefit greatly from the presence of the species.

Following the success of the earliest plantings in Ireland in the first half of the 19th century Sitka spruce gradually grew in popularity gaining a firm presence, based on performance, in the 20th century. By the year 2000 it represented 65% of the public forest area and almost 60% of all new plantings in the country.

The authors document the story behind the successful performance of the species over the years and the many lessons and mistakes that have been incurred along the way. The book is an essential read for those with an interest in plantation forestry covering all aspects from the growing and management of the species through to the processing side. It is a book that should also be read by many of the ill-informed critics outside the industry. However, one has to question if they will given the one hundred and sixty one pages of at times highly technical script (plus an excellent bibliography and glossary). As with many other books on forestry the text is pitched at a forestry audience. The industry needs to get the other stakeholders on board.

The book is well laid out and the various sections fit together smoothly. There are some excellent photographs but one has to wonder why the camera stayed so long at Glendine and did not source out opportunities elsewhere given the many opportunities in this regard. A small irritation is the use of both metric and imperial measure in the earlier sections. Are we not full Europeans yet!

Ten main sections cover the background to the species, provenance and breeding, establishment and nutrition, injurious factors, the environment, growing space, wood properties, quality and uses, growth and yield predictions together with guidelines on investment analysis in forestry. A number of the themes running through the sections such as the one on investment analysis are common to forestry generally and not just Sitka spruce. Interesting snippets of information surface along the way making it an essentially easy read despite the high technical content.

*Sitka spruce in Ireland* draws heavily on the results from research on the species and reflects the authors direct involvement in a number of the programs in earlier years, notably crop establishment and nutrition and growing space (thinning/respacing and yield prediction). Research on breeding and provenance is also well covered and the book serves as an excellent reference document. One could question the need for so much detail in some of the sections, particularly for instance on the thinning and spacing trials which extend to twenty five pages compared to nine lines on deer damage which is now a widespread problem in the Wicklow area. A section on Sitka spruce and the environment

covers a number of topics including carbon sequestration, landscape, amenity and recreation considerations in addition to water, soil, game, diversity and global warming. Although the authors put the record straight in relation to a number of misleading findings on water influences in the literature in recent years a more holistic approach to the species and its environment might have been adopted. Rather than emphasise the positive impact of the species they tend to go on the defensive and in doing so virtually acknowledge that the negatives outweigh the positives. No mention is made of the positive social impacts in areas such as the Slieve Blooms and in Wicklow for instance and instead a somewhat defensive discussion on landscape aesthetics is afforded three full pages. However, the text rightly acknowledges the need for values other than the visual to be considered when dealing with the landscape issue.

Section 9 which deals with managing Sitka spruce for quality wood will be of considerable interest to farmer growers in particular whose small plantations will need to be tended and nurtured in order to ensure they attract buyers in the future given the scale involved. The recommendations for practice on page one hundred and forty two might have been considered at the end of some of the other sections thereby making the book a practical manual for growing Sitka spruce effectively.

Surprising omissions perhaps are any discussion on the possible use of the species for energy or on the use of continuous forest cover rather than conventional clear felling systems in the future. However, as the authors state in their brief reference to global warming, the book is concerned “primarily with the present and historical past “ rather than” to speculate in a realm which is as yet mainly hypothetical”.

All in all an excellent publication and a good buy. Read it.

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