

*Native trees and forests of Ireland.* David Hickie (with photography Mike O'Toole. Gill and Macmillan, 141 pp. Price €30.

This is a book principally for the reader who seeks a very broad view of the native trees and forests of Ireland. It represents a new style in popular (as contrasted with technical) forestry publications in that it is lavishly illustrated with beautifully reproduced photographs by Mike O'Toole and with illustrations by Austin Carey. There are approximately 81 full-page photographs and 60 pages of text.

The book is presented in seven chapters with a foreword by Michael Viney and an appendix which gives some details of the Millennium Woodlands. It is intended as a celebration of the People's Millennium Forests Project and relies heavily upon a mixture of folklore, myth, spirituality and history. Most of the mythology and history is contained in the first three chapters which consist largely of a skeletal distillation of previously published material concerning the landscape and woods of Ireland by such authors as Frank Mitchell and Eileen McCracken. Chapter 2 includes a very brief account of the remnants of native woods in such places as Wicklow, Killarney, Charleville Estate and Macroom.

Chapter 4 deals with individual native trees and presents some useful (though not new) information about the trees and the woods they produce. However, the technical content

is sketchy and is diluted by interpretation of tree and place names. Some very surprising omissions in this section include whitethorn and spindle tree although details on crab apple and strawberry tree are included. The purpose of the photographs and sketches of the individual species is not explained but they will be of little value to the amateur for identification purposes. Some of the detail is also difficult to accept, e.g. on page 60 the reader is informed that "Oak grows slowly as a seedling but at a faster pace as it matures, which is up to 200 years". It is widely acknowledged that oaks have rapid height growth in the early years and that current annual height increment can culminate between 10 and 40 years depending on site quality. The scientific proof for birch as a soil improver is also tenuous.

The chapter entitled *Using Native Wood* provides little detailed information about using native wood *per se* but includes sections on the Sustainable Use of Woodlands and the Certification of Wood Products. It features native wood products such as Hand Made Kitchens, the Dunbrody Replica Emigrant Ship and Sculpture in Bog Oak.

The final sections cover a wide variety of topics including the Conservation of Irish Native Woods and the Native Woodland Scheme. Many of the individuals and organisations active in the protection and promotion of native trees and forests are acknowledged in this chapter as are the actions which they have taken in saving a number of native woods from destruction.

*Native Trees and Forests of Ireland* is a handsome book. There is no indication in the book as to the intended audience but amateur ecologists and nature lovers will find it an excellent read and it will broaden their knowledge. The photographs and illustrations are superb, there are few typographical errors and the entire book is well presented. While my academic colleagues and I could quibble over many of the points that I have highlighted in this review, I would be pleased to buy this book as a present to my suburban neighbours or members of my family. For the specialist, this book has some interest, but its tendentious style (plantations are bad) makes it one that is unlikely to find a lasting place on the bookshelves of many members of the Society of Irish Foresters.

John J. Gardiner

(John J. Gardiner is Professor of Forestry at University College Dublin)