



CRANN

Ireland's tree magazine

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Cover photo was taken by Kevin Foley at Carrigfoyle Quarry in Wexford

What's in a number?



WHO HASN'T heard 'Ireland has the lowest tree cover in the EU' (though seemingly, we're really 'only' third lowest ...)? For the last few years, this makes me roll my eyes... so what? Someone has to be the lowest, and, relative to where we were only 100 short years ago, we're on the up. Though this brings us to the species debate...

According to the most recent National Forest Inventory (NFI), Sitka spruce now accounts for 45% of the forest estate in Ireland; the first NFI published in 2007, reported this figure as 52%. In the same period, the area of land classed as forest increased by 111,000 ha. More, largely Sitka-based, numbers are that timber product exports were worth €1.2 billion in 2022 and there are over 9,000 jobs associated with forestry, mostly in rural areas. Let's not throw the baby out with the bathwater when arguing about – ahem, discussing – species.

Another encouraging NFI statistic is that the number of forest stands with at least three tree species has increased from 25% to 51.5%; undoubtedly as a result of changing forest policy, more awareness of the importance of mixed stands (and a possible wariness of single species stands – ash monocultures come to mind) and, very importantly, diversification in forest owners' objectives. It wasn't until the late 1980s that annual afforestation by private forest owners overtook that of the public planting programme and currently, 70% of Ireland's forests are less than 30 years old. They are located on more productive land, are more mixed, and the management options are more diverse. Early intervention in many of these even aged plantations can lead to transformation to mixed aged stands that can still deliver high quality, high value timber and provide continuous forest habitats – while acknowledging that continuous cover forestry is not a workable silvicultural approach across all soils and

elevations. From a management perspective, the small, fragmented nature of private forests made them largely uneconomic to manage – but this was when we thought only of production, and mostly only timber production. Now we embrace, and appreciate, the broad range of objectives that forest owners have for their forests – including timber, fuelwood, landscape, recreation, shelter, carbon and biodiversity.

Another number often mentioned is that we only have 1% cover of semi-natural forest. But that figure is close to what we had in the early 1900s. I even heard it announced by a forest ecologist at a conference that 'while forest cover has increased to 11%, the semi-natural woodland cover remains at 1%'. But in the lean early years of our State, the key issues were economic development and employment – we were not planting, let alone actively protecting the remnants of the naturally occurring forests – I for one am relieved and a little surprised that these areas were not cleared for some other 'more productive' purpose. Now that our focus has broadened, there is a significant shift towards the creation of new 'native forests' – which seems to mean forests established with tree species native to Ireland. If we call a spade a spade – it will be quite a while before these planted forests (plantations!) will become native/natural forests – and the management, or lack thereof, will largely dictate whether they gain the characteristics of a natural forest. But what's in a 100 years, right?

To my reading, the numbers indicate that progress is being made, that forest ownership is becoming more of a 'norm' and that integrated land management – including sustainable timber production – can be achieved. Possibly not today or tomorrow but aren't we heading in the right direction? It's tempting to quote you-know-who: "a lot done, more to do".

Marie Doyle
Marie Doyle is a lecturer on the Forestry Degree Programme in UCD and a board member of Crann



OUR MISSION: To enhance the environment of Ireland through planting, promoting, protecting and increasing awareness about trees and woodlands.

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All together now: Crann chairman Peadar Collins raises the flag with Commissioner Mairéad McGuinness, along with ambassadors and EC staff

Crann and National Tree Week

Plant life: Diarmuid McAree, Commissioner Mairéad McGuinness and Crann chairman Peadar Collins admire their work



EU Commissioner Mairéad McGuinness helped Crann get National Tree Week - Seachtain Náisiúnta na gCrann off to a great start by attending a tree planting event with children from Kiltiernan Church of Ireland NS, ambassadors from a number of EU countries and Commission staff. National Tree Week took place this year in early March. This year's theme was 'Planting Trees for A Greener Future'.

The event is also part of the European Commission's #3BillionTrees Pledge to plant at least three billion trees in the EU by 2030, and the EU's new For Our Planet campaign which aims to encourage communities to take action for our planet by planting trees.

The European Commission Representation in Ireland organised the event in conjunction with Crann and staff from the EU agency Eurofound also participated in the tree planting.



Spades ready: Orla Farrell (right) joins Mairéad McGuinness and school children from Kiltiernan Church of Ireland NS before the planting



The way it is: Crann chairman Peadar Collins prepares the eager masses for the day's work.

CRANN Membership applications

Ireland was once entirely covered with woodland. It is now the least wooded country in Europe. CRANN is Ireland's leading tree organisation, uniting people with a love of trees. CRANN's mission is to enhance the environment of Ireland through planting, promoting, protecting and increasing awareness about trees and woodlands. CRANN is pursuing this mission through contributions to urban & rural planting projects, through its schools programme and through this magazine.

Members receive:

- A copy of CRANN magazine.
- Invitations to join with other members on a variety of woodland walks and talks.
- Access to advice and information about trees in Ireland.
- Most important of all, by joining CRANN you will be helping secure a future for Ireland's rich heritage of trees and woods.

Annual Membership rates:	Unwaged/OAPs	€25
	Individual	€35
	Family	€45
	Life	€700
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Payment option: via PayPal www.crann.ie
CRANN is an Irish non-profit organisation promoting and planting broadleaf trees.



Above: The Reverend Rob Clements welcomes EU Commissioner Mairéad McGuinness to Kilternan parish hall

Left: Crann administrator Marguerite Arbuthnot-O'Brien was instrumental in the organisation of the event.

Right: Poster advertising the day.

Below: Some of the saplings, courtesy of Coillte, ready for planting

Below right: David Johnson (DaFarm) and Seán Lenihan (Kestrel Forestry) working tirelessly behind the scenes



Eurofound staff and alumni along with Crann director Diarmuid McAree at Loughlinstown House

Crann and Eurofound working together

From Eurofound press release

EUROFOUND staff and alumni planted 100 silver birch, Scots pine, rowan, and Hazel trees at Eurofound in Loughlinstown, Dublin as part of Irish National Tree Week. The tree planting at Eurofound was organised in partnership with Crann - Ireland's leading voluntary tree organisation dedicated to the promotion and protection of trees. The planting of trees is an important aspect of tackling climate change, protecting and restoring nature in Europe, and can play a role in bonding communities and enhancing social cohesion.

In addition to the tree planting at Loughlinstown, Eurofound staff supported tree planting at Kilternan Church of Ireland National School at the start of National Tree Week alongside Commissioner Mairead McGuinness, ambassadors to Ireland from a number of EU countries, and European Commission staff.

Eurofound is situated at Loughlinstown House, one of the



Eurofound directors with Commissioner Mairéad McGuinness

oldest and largest remaining Georgian houses in the Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown area of Dublin, and a site of considerable architectural interest. In total, Eurofound is surrounded by 13 acres of grounds. These grounds have been planted over centuries in parkland style, with a number of notable trees remaining on the modern site, including Wellingtonia, Cedar of Lebanon, Beech, Chestnut, Lime and Oak.

Staff have endeavoured to replace trees which were lost to old age in recent years by planting on the grounds, with an emphasis on indigenous species. As an organisation, Eurofound is committed to environmental management and improvement and to sustainable development. To this end, the Agency has implemented the Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS)

which is the most credible and robust environmental management tool available.

These activities are in addition to Eurofound's research priorities, which include the key challenges for social cohesion and a just transition in a changing environment and labour market together with social actions that can support the European Green Deal.





Mullingar great tree planting project

MULLINGAR Tidy Towns, along with Westmeath County Council, Coillte and Crann (Trees for Ireland), are working on the Mullingar Great Tree Planting Project that aims to plant 3,000 trees within the town over the next three years.

As part of this project during National Tree Week hundreds of trees will be donated to schools and local communities each year.

It is hoped that these trees will eventually form a green belt around Mullingar and help improve the environment and provide many benefits to the population of the town and surrounding areas.



Students from the GreenSchools committee at Mullingar Community College with PJ, John Bawle, Ger Buckley and Teacher Sinéad McGuirk



Students and staff from Loreto College, Mullingar who planted a mountain ash



Helping PJ to plant trees at Grange, Mullingar; Cllr Bill Collentine, John Connolly (Coillte), Niall Quinn, Ger Buckley (Coillte), Abdulsalam J Solladimeji, Samuel Ahipue, Camillus Flynn, Jemiluyi Emmanuel Taye, Cllr Andrew Duncan and Declan Montgomery.



Students from the GreenSchools committee at St Colmans with PJ, Principal Ger Behan, teacher Sinéad Duffy, SNA Linda Callaghan and John Bawle

Crann at Glenahulla NS



Isabel Shalloo and Aisling Wallace, first and second class teacher, at Glenahulla National School, Mitchelstown, Cork

Crann - 'Trees for Ireland' AGM 2024

Crann Members are invited to attend our 2024 AGM at the National Botanic Gardens. Enjoy a walk before or after the meeting and the café facilities. Please book your place via the Eventbrite link below.

Date: Saturday 21st September 2024
Time: 1.00p.m.
Venue: National Botanic Gardens, Glasnevin, Dublin, D09 VY63

Booking via Eventbrite:
<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/crann-trees-for-ireland-2024-agm-tickets-904384387047?aff=oddtcreator>
 The meeting will be limited to the standard business of a general meeting. If you cannot attend - Proxy Forms are available on request, to be returned by no later than 5p.m. Wednesday 19th September 2024.
 Crann - Trees for Ireland, PO Box 860, Celbridge, Co Kildare
 Email: info@crann.ie or Tel: 01-6275075



Church of Ireland schools' tree project

In his widespread Church of Ireland dioceses stretching from Kerry to Mayo, Right Rev Michael Burrows, Bishop of Limerick, Tuam and Killaloe, spearheaded a pilot project to plant trees in his schools. George Cunningham managed the project and was delighted to procure 350 native trees gratis through Trees on the Land. Normally the trees would have been couriered to each school but owing to late ordering these had to be delivered by George to each school.

Over nine schools participated in the pilot project; Castlemaine, Ballina, Shannon, Pery Square, Limerick, Adare, Rathkeale, Nenagh, Aughrim and Cloughjordan. Species obtained from Imogen and her team at Trees on the Land included apple, crab apple, alder, hazel, hawthorn, Scots pine, rowan, birch and oak. The trees for Castlemaine and Ballina have been potted awaiting later delivery to them. The visit to each school was delightful and the feedback from them has been most encouraging as our picture shows.

Gerhardt Gallagher RIP

We were deeply sorry to hear of Gerhardt Gallagher's passing. Our sincere condolences to his family, friends and colleagues. He was a wonderful advocate for environmental issues and we at Crann have always enjoyed his support and expertise. Suaimhneas síoraí dá anam uasal.





A tree covered in epiphytic bryophytes at Slievecarran

FOR WHAT IT IS WORTH

Emma Reeves explores the hidden in plain sight world of bryophytes

BRYOPHYTES have always been a shame of mine. I have led my ecological career ignorant of them, ignoring them and their importance in ecosystem health and biodiversity. The term bryophyte refers to three closely related groups of organisms which lack vascular systems and require water for reproduction, the mosses, the liverworts and the hornworts. For the most part 'higher plants' or those with vascular transport systems, can be identified from a distance with a bit of practice but their tiny cousins, the bryophytes require a little bit more work to identify. Incidentally, bryologists hate the term 'higher plants' as it infers that bryophytes are somehow less important or worthy. They are in a league of their own in terms of diversity, there are over eight hundred species in Ireland. Indeed, Ireland is important for bryophyte conservation at a European and international level. Shame on me! I decided to resolve this situation at the start of the year and embark on this new path of discovery. I am glad I did even though I am fully aware that I have only scratched the surface of bryophyte diversity. If you are looking for a new hobby or to advance your ecological knowledge, bryophytes are the way to go offering potentially a lifetime of discovery. So, the next time you find a fluffy green carpeted tree you might be able to identify one or two of the epiphytic mosses! Luckily, there are many resources available to help you achieve this goal.

I had hoped to write this piece about epiphytic mosses and liverworts to inspire Crann readers, but I quickly realised how out of my depth I was, so instead I have chosen to write about my experiences with this topic so far in terms of education. A quick online search led me to the British Bryological

Dr Emma Reeves, who lives near Navan, has a PhD in botany from UCD



Society. I went straight to the educational section which informed me of a Field Studies Council run 'Beginners' Bryology' online course. It was only a few days and started the following month, so I signed up. I went back to the BBS and scrolled through the events section and found that it includes an Irish Bryophyte Group with upcoming events (I must explain that I have no online competence what so ever, and I'm a complete technophobe, sometimes my husband types my pieces in this publication to save me time as they're invariably late!). I was rightly pleased with myself.

Luckily, the consultancy I work for recently moved office and equipment we'd forgotten we had came to light including, a hand lens, a dissection microscope and a light microscope. Mosses barely get above 1cm, they really are small, and their individual parts are smaller yet, a hand lens is really a must. Further rooting in the old office uncovered *Mosses and Liverworts*

A Hornwort seen on Dr Rory Hodde's hand



of Britain and Ireland a Field Guide, a book produced by the British Bryological Society. This book has been fundamental so far in my learning and is an essential resource for all bryologically minded folk. It contains a field key, amazing drawings and photographs. Until I completed the FSC online course, I may as well have been looking into a clump of briars as this book, very little made sense. The FSC course aims to guide you gently into the field of bryology, the terminology can be confusing but with a little time and effort I was pointing out acrocarpous mosses and thallose liverworts everywhere I went. The course consists of weekly zoom meetings which last 45 minutes and are presented by a professional bryologist. Even if you don't have time to watch these when they are live you can look at them afterwards as recordings. We had a young lad start at our company recently, he's very tech savvy, he enlightened me that if you've not got enough time speed the video up by x2. This was a revelation for me. The last component of the course required identifying two bryophytes, photographing them and recording field notes on each and their habitats. At this point in time I still had the notion of writing a piece on epiphytic bryophytes, so both I found on trees. *Ulota crispa* is the nice cushiony acrocarpous moss and *Fruillania dilatata* is the delicate liverwort. In all the course took about three hours of my week for four weeks, well worth it as having no idea of bryophyte anatomy and terminology, would leave you at a huge disadvantage.

Back to the BBS website I found the schedule for the Irish events. The first was at Slievecarran at the heart of the Burren. I'd never been to an event like this before, so I hadn't a clue what to expect, except for possibly, that preconception of grey-haired academics with elbow patches. There was



Pincushion moss (*Ulota* species) an epiphytic species typical of hazel and willow

nothing of the sort! Instead, the meeting spot was besieged by 25 ecologists and nature enthusiasts of all cohorts. In amongst the lively enthusiastic group was Dr Joanne Denyer, one of the most well known and respected bryologists in the country. She walked us through the karstic landscape frequently stopping to point out species specialised to this calcareous, often dry, sometimes harsh landscape from 10am-4pm. I would be surprised to think we walked more than a mile over the entire day, such was the frequency of encountering new species. I had had a wonderful experience, and my mind was just a mush of moss afterwards. On route to my accommodation for the night, I decided I'd stop in at Bishop's Quarter to ring the better half and gloat about the awesome day I had. I failed to heed the max height signs and managed to scrape off the fan and solar panel of my roof tent. I decided not to stop or ring my husband and continued my journey in a euphoric moss haze.



A painting by the author of a woman sleeping on a bed of mosses

The second trip was to a magnificent private garden through which the River Dargle flowed in County Wicklow. I met again with bryologists who had attended the Burren outing and with Joanne. Dr Rory Hodd another leading bryologist in Ireland led the group. We were treated to a highly informative walk through the gardens by the head gardener and found some unusual specimens as we progressed. There are very few species of hornwort, they are not that common and

most of the time they look like a green slime on the surface of nutrient rich soils. Eventually they produce little horns on the surface which release the spores. 'It's always a productive day bryologising when you find a hornwort', exclaimed Rory when the inconspicuous little plant was spotted. Further on our walk through the Dargle Glen we were met with fantastic views, 300-foot sheer drops to the river and a multitude of bryophyte species including *Frullania fragifolia* which is a cousin

to the *F. dilatata* I found on a birch tree. Rory started licking his fingers and rubbing them on the liverwort. I noticed a lot of raised eyebrows and then he explained that the leaves of this species are deciduous and come off on moist fingers giving it the common name Spotty Fingers.

I've learned so much since March when the FSC course started, and I have enjoyed every moment of it. My desk is a sea of little green bits and my coat pockets are filled with dry compost. The one thing that comes across from those I've met, especially Joanne and Rory is an amazing passion for an often underappreciated component of the Irish flora.



Tree quiz for Crann readers

This was the TREE COUNCIL OF IRELAND CHRISTMAS QUIZ 2023 devised by Diarmuid McAree
Send completed answer sheet by mail to Crann PO Box 860, Celbridge, Kildare or email info@crann.ie by September 2 to be in with a chance to win a voucher for trees worth €100

- Q1 In what year was the Tree Council of Ireland founded?**
A1
- Q2 What is a Nemophilist?**
A2
- Q3 What colour are the blossoms of a Sycamore tree?**
A3
- Q4 How many letters of the English alphabet (26) are in the Ogham alphabet?**
A4
- Q5 Who wrote the book 'Tales, Traditions and Folklore of Ireland's Trees'?**
A5
- Q6 What is referred to as 'Sakura' in Japan?**
A6
- Q7 What is the oldest known tree species on earth?**
A7
- Q8 What kind of tree is famous for its black wood?**
A8
- Q9 What tree species is known to have the thickest bark?**
A9
- Q10 Which country's national tree is the Golden Wattle?**
A10
- Q11 What is the national tree of India?**
A11
- Q12 What type of tree does a truffle fungus most commonly associate with?**
A12
- Q13 The *Adansonia digitata* tree is better known as what?**
A13
- Q14 Which tree's wood is typically used to make musical instruments like guitars and violins?**
A14
- Q15 Peter Wohlleben wrote a book about how trees communicate. Can you name it?**
A15
- Q16 What country is the Monkey puzzle tree native to?**
A16
- Q17 True or False? Irish forests comprise 28.9 % Broadleaves & 77.1% Conifers?**
A17
- Q18 What is Senator Pippa Hackett's correct Ministerial title?**
A18
- Q19 Germany's famous forest is what colour?**
A19
- Q20 What is the common name of the tree species *Euonymus europaeus*?**
A20
- Q21 What is the Irish name for the Pine marten?**
A21
- Q22 What moth depends mostly on the Alder buckthorn to survive?**
A22
- Q23 What is now the official target for percentage forest cover in Ireland by 2050?**
A23
- Q24 What native Irish tree has root nodule bacteria?**
A24
- Q25 Who painted the Bodmer Oak?**
A25
- Q26 What is the average carbon sequestration rate in Irish forest plantations in tonnes per hectare per year?**
A26
- Q27 What is *Thaumetopoea processionea* commonly known as?**
A27
- Q28 *Corylus* is the Latin name for what Irish native tree?**
A28
- Q29 What is an Epiphyte?**
A29
- Q30 Who founded the organisation Crann - Trees for Ireland? One point bonus if you know the year!!**
A30

IT PAYS TO PLANT TREES

There are 11 forest types available to farmers to plant new forests.

Select the scheme that suits your farm.

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Example 1	Example 2	Example 3
Plant 8 hectares (circa 20 acres)	Plant 5 hectares (circa 12 acres)	Plant 12 hectares (circa 30 acres)
of Native Forest Forest type 1	of Agroforestry (forest type 8, silvopastoral) Forest type 8	of Mixed High Forests with mainly spruce with 20% broadleaves Forest type 12
Annual premium €8,824	Annual premium €4,875	Annual premium €8,952
Total premium payment (20 years) €176,480	Total premium payment (10 years) €48,750	Total premium payment (20 years) €179,040

There are additional grants available for all works associated with establishing a new forest (costs of trees, planting, fencing and maintenance).

Explore your options at www.gov.ie/forestry



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

The acorn of *Quercus cerris*, Austrian or Turkey oak



THE NOBLE OAK FROM NEAR AND FAR

By Mary Forrest

I WILL start with a table quiz question - What is Ireland's National Tree? In 1990 the Sessile oak *Quercus petraea*, was designated our national tree by the then Taoiseach, Mr Charles Haughey TD

There are two species of oak native in Ireland, sessile oak and pedunculate oak, *Quercus robur*. These species are part of a much larger genus of an estimated 800 species native to North America, the Mediterranean, Japan, China and the Tropics. Oaks are long lived trees, 200-250 years, and some species will eventually attain a height of 30 metres or more. Deciduous and evergreen species are seen in parks and gardens in this country. The foliage in the

evergreen species is generally entire and dark green with a felted undersurface, whereas the leaves in deciduous species are often lobed and light green in colour. Clusters of catkins - conspicuous for a short time - are borne in early summer. The fruit is an acorn - likened to an egg in a cup. Some of the deciduous species, the North American ones in particular, provide stunning autumn colour.

The pedunculate and sessile oak both grow to be tall trees (approx 35-40 metres) with a broad canopy. In both the leaves are lobed, some 12cm long. The auricles, or ear-shaped lobes and acorns on peduncles or short stalks distinguish *Quercus robur* from

Quercus petraea. In the latter, the base of the leaf is cuneate - 'v shaped' and the acorns are attached directly to the stem, i.e. sessile. Many of the trees in the Irish countryside are hybrids of these two species.

Remnants of ancient oak forest occur at Killarney National Park, Co Kerry and Glenveagh National Park, Co. Donegal. Many venerable specimens occur in parkland around the country such as Birr Castle, Co. Offaly. Perhaps the most well-known is the old tree in woodland at Abbeylax, Co. Laois. Others can be seen at Ashtown Wood in the Phoenix Park, Dublin. Oak, contemporary with the establishment of the Park in the 1600's, tower above far younger oak trees planted in the 1980s under the Tree Council of Ireland's Family Tree Scheme. What a

sight and a sense of history these trees evoke.

One cultivar *Quercus robur* 'Fastigiata' found in the wild in Germany in the 18th century was propagated and distributed by nurserymen. In 2011, three specimens of this upright form of oak were planted by in *Áras an Uachtaráin* by Queen Elizabeth II, President Barack Obama and President Mary McAleese respectively.

This cultivar is now frequently planted in present day landscape schemes where an upright columnar tree is required. Two landscape schemes come to mind, one urban and one rural namely, the Dundrum by-pass in Dublin and EU Food and Veterinary Office, Grange, Co. Meath.

A form with variable leaves was selected by Messrs. Fennessy and Sons' nursery in Waterford about 1820. It was given the cultivar name *Quercus-robur* 'Fennesseii'.

At first glance, Turkey oak *Quercus cerris*, a tree of great stature, could be mistaken for sessile or pedunculate oak and is native to Southern Europe and SW. Asia. However, the distinguishing features of this species, long downy scales - like whiskers - on the winter buds, which are often held through the summer and a large acorn half enclosed in a 'mossy' cup, tell it apart. It is a large, long-lived tree up to 35m in height, with deciduous or semi evergreen leaves which are deeply lobed, 10-12 cm long. The Lucombe oak, (*Quercus x hispanica* also known as *Quercus x crenata* in after name change in 2017) a hybrid between *Quercus suber* and *Quercus cerris* grows in several arboreta in Ireland.

Of the evergreen species *Quercus ilex*, the holm or evergreen oak is the most common. It is a tree native to the Mediterranean region. Indeed, an Italian colleague was surprised to learn how well this tree grows in Ireland.

It is a slow growing tree with holly-like leaves on young plants and as with the holly, develops entire leaves as the plant matures. This species was used extensively at St Annes, Raheny in Dublin, the estate of Benjamin Lee Guinness, later Lord Ardilaun. From 1870 the estate was planted with many evergreen oak. With *Pinus nigra*, Austrian pine and *Pinus radiata*, Monterey pine it was used to create a formal mile-long entrance avenue. It was also used to line walks within the park and shelter belts on the periphery of the property. Today, St. Annes is a large public park. In 1903,



Lord Ardilaun donated 600 two metre tall evergreen oak trees to the Phoenix Park in Dublin. One hundred and twenty years later, they are a magnificent sight, forming blocks of woodland and shelter belts in both parks. Holm oak also makes a very substantial evergreen hedge.

The Cork Oak, *Quercus suber* is native to Spain, Portugal and North Africa and was introduced into cultivation in 1677. The

thick ridged bark and oval leaves distinguish it from the evergreen oak. Tourists to Spain and Portugal might recall groves of Cork oak, the bark being grown and harvested every ten years or so for cork. While the cork is being grown for the wine industry, the acorns feed pigs grazing beneath these trees. Young trees have a neat compact conical habit becoming domed and spreading as it matures. The foliage is evergreen oval in shape and stiff to



the touch. Even from a distance the semi-pendulous shape and rugged bark signal the Cork oak in the oak collection in the National Botanic Gardens, Glasnevin.

Hungarian oak *Quercus frainetto* is a more recent introduction from southern Italy and the Balkans to Hungary. It is considered the one of the fastest growing oak with large noticeably lobed leaves 15-25cm long and large conical buds. While it was confined to



tree collections it is now being grown as a landscape tree in urban areas.

While oaks are native to Japan, Korea and China, few species have been widely cultivated even in plant collections. One species, Daimyo oak, *Quercus dentata* caught my attention in an Irish garden. The foliage is large, 35- 40cm by 15-20cm with a pubescent shoot. The scientific name *Quercus dentata* hints to the lobing being tooth-like.

A selection of oaks, clockwise from left: *Quercus robur*, English Oak; *Quercus ilex*, Holly oak; the leaves of an adult *Quercus ilex*, Holly oak; *Quercus dentata*, Japanese emperor oak

Even if it never became a large tree, it is a striking foliage plant.

Some of the oaks, in particular the Eastern North American species provide wonderful autumn colour as their common names suggest. Scarlet oak *Quercus coccinea* and red oak *Quercus rubra* have large leaves, with slightly to deeply cut leaves with the main veins and side veins ending in a conspicuous point. The foliage of the scarlet oak is glossy on both sides whereas the red oak has a matt undersurface to the leaf. They are difficult to tell apart as is another North American oak, pin oak, *Quercus palustris*. These oaks are sometimes planted as semi mature trees in urban plazas. Though, a note of caution, red oak has become invasive in Europe and the south-east of England.

Not all oak become large trees and some are not immediately recognisable as oak. But for their acorns I would have taken trees growing in hedgerows at the margins of fields in Israel and Turkey as hawthorn, *Crataegus*. They were Palestine or Kermes oak now *Quercus coccifera* var *calliprinos* with small, stiff spine edged leaves. Though *Quercus coccifera* was introduced in 1683 it is very rare in cultivation. While the common name Palestine oak readily identifies the region of origin, the Kermes oak indicates a functional use of this species. The Kermes insect breeds on this tree, the insect once treated produces a scarlet dye. In the Middle Ages sprigs of *Quercus coccifera* formed the crest of the Dyers' Company one of the London livery companies.

Many oak species from around the world are cultivated in Ireland. In recent years they have become important landscape trees in urban areas. Native oak woodlands are being managed and new ones planted.

Written descriptions can be useful but examination of the trees themselves is more satisfactory. Oaks can be examined at close quarters at the John F. Kennedy Arboretum in New Ross, Co. Wexford and in the oak class in the National Botanic Gardens, Glasnevin. The Gaelic word for oak, *dair* and *doire* or *doirín* is seen in the name Kildare and Derry respectively. These are but two examples of the almost 1,200 place names listed on Logainm.ie, the Placenames Database of Ireland.

Here in Ireland, be it a lone oak a woodland or a place name we are in the company of the noble oak.



White-tailed bumblebee among the flowers of a Rowan tree

Who pollinates our native trees?

The spring blossoms are a food source as they provide lots of pollen and nectar in their tiny flowers when there is little else in flower, critical for pollinators

THE spring blossom of our native trees is always a welcome sight each year, after a long dark winter. The value of our beautiful spring blossoming trees, such as Willow, Blackthorn, Wild cherry and Rowan, is incredibly important for early pollinators.

Pollinators are important for growing insect-pollinated crops, fruit and vegetables, which can contribute to our health and wellbeing and our economy. They can also be an indicator species for the health of our environment. In Ireland we have over 100 wild bee species, one third are threatened with extinction. We also have around 180 species of hoverfly and over 1,500 moth species.

To survive, pollinators need flowers that produce lots of nectar (for energy) and pollen (for protein). Planting an individual or a small group of trees will provide a vital source of food, particularly in spring, and they are relatively low maintenance once planted.

In the spring they provide many flowers in one place for a queen bumblebee, who has just come out of winter hibernation and is desperate to replenish her energy levels.

The flight period of our early flying pollinators is in sync with the succession of pollinator-friendly trees. Willow is the first to flower, followed by Blackthorn and Wild cherry.

Words and images
RUTH WILSON

Other important native species include Rowan, Holly, Guelder rose, Crab apple and Hawthorn/Whitethorn and Elder.

Less common species such as Bird cherry, Irish whitebeam, Alder buckthorn and Purging alder are also good pollinator-friendly trees and shrubs, which are found in their preferred sites. As they flower in succession, they will provide important food for pollinators to help avoid 'hunger gaps,' or times when there are no nectar or pollen-rich flowers in bloom.

Native trees are also beneficial for the larvae (caterpillar) of many moth and butterfly species, which can contribute to pollination in their adult form as moths and butterflies. Here's a few of our wonderful native pollinator-friendly trees and shrubs:

Willow, *Salix species*, Saileach flowers from February to March and is a very important food source as they provide lots of pollen and nectar in their tiny flowers in early spring when there is little else in flower, critical for Bumblebee queens as they emerge from hibernation.

Some of the pollinators that feed from Willow species include Buff-tailed Bumblebee, Common Carder Bee, Early Bumblebee, Chocolate mining bee, Gwynne's Mining Bee, with Clarke's mining bee associated with mainly Willow.

Blackthorn, *Prunus spinosa*, Draighean

flowers from February to March and is often part of a native hedgerow or they can form a thicket, where they are not trimmed or grazed. They make a beautiful display in the spring with small white clusters of flowers which contrast with the dark bark of the twigs.

The fruit are known as Sloes, they're enjoyed by animals like wood mice and finches and have traditionally been used to flavour gin or poteen.

Some of the pollinators that feed from Blackthorn include Buff-tailed bumblebee, Early bumblebee, Red-tailed bumblebee, Common Carder Bee, Garden bumblebee, Early Mining bee and the Furry Drone Fly (a bumblebee mimic).

Wild Cherry, *Prunus avium*, Crann síliní fáin flowers from April to May and is a pretty native tree that will provide food for pollinators as well as cherries for birds and other wildlife. It can be grown as an individual tree, as a hedgerow tree, or as part of a hedgerow.

Some of the pollinators that feed from Wild cherry include White-tailed Bumblebee, Small white butterfly, Small tortoiseshell butterfly, and the hoverfly known as a Common spotted bristleside.

Crab Apple, *Malus sylvestris*, Crann fia-úll flowers from May to June and can be found in many of our old native hedgerows. A favourite with our common bumblebee species with its inviting open cup-shaped flower, and the crab apples provide food for birds and mammals in autumn.

Some of the pollinators that feed from Crab apple include the Early bumblebee, White-tailed bumblebee agg., Common Carder bee, Buff-tailed bumblebee, Garden bumblebee and the less common Tree bumblebee.

Holly, *Ilex aquifolium*, Cuileann flowers from April to June and is widespread throughout the country. It flowers from May to July, and these are followed in late autumn by the familiar bright scarlet berries. Its evergreen, glossy leaves are stiff and leathery with spiny margins. These leaves, together with those of Ivy, are the larval foodplant of the Holly Blue Butterfly.

Some of the pollinators that feed from Holly include Early bumblebee, White-tailed bumblebee, Buffish mining bee, Orange-tailed mining bee and the Chocolate mining bee. Also, several hoverflies including Eristalis species and the less common Wilke's mining bee, Sandpit mining bee and Tawny mining bee.

Hawthorn (Whitethorn), *Crataegus monogyna*, Sceach gheal flowers from May to



A whitetailed bumble bee on a Hawthorn tree



Elder



The flowers of a Holly tree



Wild cherry flowers

June and is also called the 'Maybush' because of its beautiful display of blossoms each May. It is a common hedgerow species but can also be grown as a standalone tree, producing lots of flowers for pollinators and red haws in autumn for birds to enjoy.

Some of the pollinators that feed from

Hawthorn/Whitethorn include Early Bumblebee, Buff-tailed bumblebee, Red-tailed bumblebee, Garden bumblebee, Early-mining bee, Ashy/Grey mining bee, Buffish mining bee, Gwynne's mining bee, Common Drone fly, Marmalade hoverfly, Common snout fly and the rarer Tawny mining bee.

Rowan, *Sorbus acuparia*, Caorthann flowers from late April to May and is also known as 'Mountain Ash' as it has similar leaves to the ash tree. It is a very attractive tree, with white flower clusters in spring for pollinators, and red berries in autumn, especially enjoyed by thrushes, who are said to defend a Rowan tree

in the winter for its feeding territory. It can grow at high altitude even on rocky ground up to 10 metres.

Some of the pollinators that feed from Rowan include the Tapered and Eurasian drone fly (hoverflies), the Buff-tailed and the less common Mountain bumblebee.

Elder, *Sambucus nigra*, Tromán flowers from late May to June and is sometimes known as the Bour tree, it is a common shrub that can tolerate enriched ground. Elder has wide heads of cream scented flowers, followed by clusters of black berries.

Some of the pollinators that feed from Elder include the moth species - Treble Lines, White Ermine and the Flame shoulder. Hoverflies species - Long-winged Duskyface hoverfly, Thick-legged hoverfly. Also, the White-tailed bumblebee, Buff-tailed bumblebee, Chocolate mining bee, Ashy/Grey mining bee, Common Carder bumblebee and the less common Tree Bumblebee.

The branches have a soft and pithy centre, such hollow branches provide chambers for wild bees and hoverflies and their larvae and shelter for other hibernating insects.

Ruth Wilson, Farmland Pollinator Officer, All-Ireland Pollinator Plan, implemented by the National Biodiversity Data Centre. The post is funded by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

THE SIGN OF PEACE

George Cunningham tells the story of the Olive tree and the part it has played in the history of mankind

'The olives make a perfect match with the tombs, giving the necropolis a cheerful sense of immortality. No other tree can combine the sense of resurgent life – of sprays of silver green foliage heavy with fruit – and heavy with senility. The trunks of olive trees, bowed under the weight of 600 or 700 years, become gradually perforated like a colander. Then they die or blow down or are cut down by an invading army – only to leap up, young trees again, from their ancient roots. If only we could imitate the olive!'

S O WROTE that remarkable tree man, Thomas Pakenham in his *Remarkable Trees of the World* (2002) about the olives guarding the necropolis in Kekova in SW Turkey. That short excerpt encapsulates the very essence of one of the most historic of trees: their longevity, fecundity, and many uses giving them an honoured place in the history of mankind. 'The First of Trees' as they are rightly called from the olive branch brought to Noah's Ark to the everlasting symbol of peace which it represents around the world, they continue to survive and indeed prosper in spite of adversity.

The longevity of the olive tree has never been in question but recent research has copper fastened that claim. As old olive trees' centres rotted away over time and many had been grafted sending out multi-stems they were never a candidate for tree ring chronology, and, so, in their case it was rarely used. But in 2018 researchers from the University of Arizona obtained samples from ancient olive trees in Bshaaleh, some 50 miles north of Beirut. From eleven olive trees tested using carbon-14 the results showed the trees to be between 500 and 700 years old with one tree approximately 1100 years old! Reporting from Beirut for the *New York Times*, Rachelle Alwan quoted a former mayor of the village and an owner of one of the trees: 'They represent the cultural heritage of Bshaaleh...every autumn residents of the village gather at the trees to harvest that year's fruit. Working by hand or with devices that resemble

fluttering rakes, the villagers collect hundreds of pounds of green, and purple-hued olives...some to be preserved to be eaten, and some is pressed for oil.'

Over the recent past as I sporadically researched the olive tree I was struck by the many and diverse direct and indirect references to it that I came across. None more powerful than Wendy May Jacobs' recent 'Thinking Anew' article in the church notes in *The Irish Times*. From her own olive tree, now planted anew in front of her vicarage, and now 'a statement of faith as we root ourselves into this community,' she recounts how precious the olive has been from early biblical times to the heartbreaking, inhuman and wanton war in Gaza: 'The olive tree, its fruit, its oil, is precious to Palestine, and its rugged nature a symbol of the Palestinian struggle for national identity. It is also a symbol of peace. Perhaps this is due to its longevity, and the need to wait years before an olive tree will be properly fruitful. Olive trees will never be planted in times of war. Their deep-rootedness in the soil is long-term, a commitment of faith and hope and love and family. Writing of the pilgrims for peace, 'resilient as olive trees,' she ends with a Canadian haiku,

*Hopeless night...In the morning an olive tree...
Sprouts from the ashes.*

The olive tree is mentioned fifty-seven times in the bible, starting, of course, with the dove and the olive leaf, now everlasting symbols of peace. It became vital for the ordinary everyday living of so many people. It had so many uses that it may well have been the first to be brought into cultivation: bread with oil, a daily diet; its oil for lamp light and soap; its timber for heat; its foliage for shade; and, of course, its sacred oil for social and religious ceremonies and blessings.

I'm afraid that the one planted in my small garden will never come to have so many uses, but it gives great pleasure as it struggles with the Irish climate. In spite of all it is doing well; maybe it knows it is loved and respected.

We will leave the last word to Thomas Pakenham, 'if my ashes are scattered at Kekova, I hope the nightingales sing in the olive trees.'



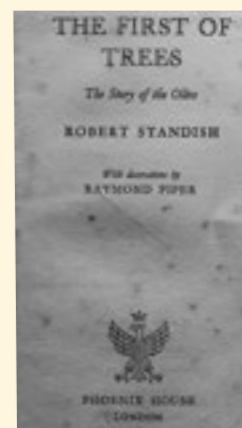
The olive has become vital for the ordinary everyday living of so many people. Photo by Don Fontijn on Unsplash

FOUR BOOKS ABOUT THE OLIVE TREE TO DISCOVER

Carol Drinkwater novels centred on the olive tree... the olive farm, season, harvest among others... are a marvellous read not only for the facts, modern and historical, about the tree but also for capturing the ambience and unique atmosphere of the landscape, heritage and culture of the south of France.



The First of Trees This delightful little volume (1960) adorned with decorations by the Belfast-born artist, Raymond Piper came about as the author found a great paucity of books on the subject.



Plants, Flowers and Herbs of the Bible: chockful of interesting facts, 'a completely unique book, a book for young and old, for family reading, for schools and libraries...'. Billy Graham.



God's Trees: 'the first authoritative book to focus on trees, forests and woods in the Bible including how they were used and sometimes abused...'





David Mulcahy tells the remarkable and ongoing story of the 100 Million Trees Project

LOOKING AFTER NATURE WE CAN ALL MAKE A DIFFERENCE



Powerscourt Estate had a group of women gather to mark International Women's Day by planting a mini native Irish forest of 1,900 trees on the Estate to support the national tree planting initiative – "100 Million Trees Project".

FOR THOSE who have more than a passing interest in nature and all the increasingly frightening statistics revolving around climate change, the last number of years have resulted in ever louder alarm bells being heard concerning the fact that our way of living was at odds with the simultaneous protection of our natural world. In short, climate change, a product largely of human activity, and which has always occurred over a slow pace, was now happening too fast for nature to adapt quickly enough.

As with many other individuals, I realised that 'the State' was struggling with its commitments to climate action, and in part due to the fact that the enormity of what is happening at a climate level is genuinely hard to fathom – the urge to kick the problem

down the road is influenced, not just by financial imperatives, but also because of an inability to accept that there may be a point of no return for our natural world.

In 2020, in an attempt to make my own tiny contribution to protecting the environment, I set up "Bugs, Bees and Native Trees". This is a small environmental group, set up and funded by friends, with the aim of planting trees around the country in schools, institutions etc. The pandemic hit almost immediately after we started the tree planting project but we still managed to plant a significant number of semi-mature trees around the island of Ireland. Funding became a problem, and it was difficult to generate much enthusiasm with



institutions in particular.

My brother Richard, a businessman who bought a farm which had effectively been converted into a single 160 acre field, and, who planted more than 140,000 trees on it, correctly argued that, in order to make a meaningful impact, we needed to be planting millions of trees. We knew that, despite its image of being the green isle, Ireland was one of the least afforested countries in Europe (11.5% in 2022), and most of those trees were non-native conifers, planted for rapid growth, building potential, and financial gain. Des Walsh, a successful Irish businessman in the USA, who was conscious of his carbon footprint, offered a significant contribution to allow us to set up

the 100 Million Trees Project in 2022, using the concept of high intensity planting of native trees (the Miyawaki method) in small sites (typically a quarter acre for 2,500 native trees of 15 different varieties). The benefits of such an approach were obvious; we could involve the population in the project (anyone with a small plot of available land); avoid the enormous problem of destructive forest fires by planting thousands of mini-forests throughout the island; prevent entry to (and damage to) the forest by people, due to the closeness of the planting; and also, to avoid dealing with delays caused by regulatory issues (sites less than a quarter acre are not subject to licences or 'approval').

We used the 2022 season (and Des Walsh's philanthropic contribution) to set up a robust website (with the amazing support of David Carroll of West Cork Online), and to trial



the Miyawaki method of planting. We were helped, particularly, by the very progressive Wexford County Council, and its CEO Tom Enright, who made multiple sites available to us, both urban and rural. Vitally important was to detail all plantings on the website, the number and type of trees planted, and their location. It was important to also include videos of everything from how to prepare sites, to the different types (and benefits) of native trees to the volunteers who took part. We planted 20,300 native trees at 18 different sites, invariably using volunteers, and covering many well-known locations from Tintern Abbey to Powerscourt Estate.

Having ironed out some of the problems of planting mini-forests we decided to aim for 200-250,000 native trees for the 2023-24 planting season. This was made possible with a large and unbelievably generous contribution from Ger Rabbette, CEO of the Uniphar group, who also strongly believes that tree planting is an essential for trying to mitigate against climate change, and was prepared to trust us in seeing through such a project. We met with the wonderful staff of None-So-Hardy and Annaveigh nurseries, to ensure that we could get a steady supply of native trees, which would be delivered to each site at the appropriate time. We also realised that planting such numbers would not be possible with volunteers, and so struck up a relationship with the excellent Forestry Services Ltd, so that we would have professional planters to ensure that all planned mini-forests were completed on the day, and to assist with any volunteer planting. We planted 47,000 trees between mid-November and Christmas time, and, while we were receiving a slow but steady flow of requests for mini-forests, when a planting from Glenstal Abbey in early January was featured on the RTE news, the floodgates opened, and we had over 260 requests to plant mini-forests within a week, mainly on private individual's land. We gained great publicity from plantings at Ballymun Kickhams GAA, and Fairyhouse, Limerick and Ballybritt racecourses amongst other sites, with further television coverage helping to boost the enthusiasm of people for the project.

Fortunately, at the beginning of the year, our sister Tina, having recently retired as executive director of the youth centre in the Council of Europe, took over the administration of this burgeoning project, corresponding with all the potential mini-forest owners, organising for land preparation, dates of planting, etc, while Richard organised the tree orders and delivery. We spent our



The Benedictine Monks at Glenstal Abbey with assistance from Uniphar workers planted 2,500 trees



The Pat Blake memorial mini-forest in Kiltegan which has 2,200 native trees



Interested party checking that the "house building" is being appropriately done

time, when not doing our day jobs, wandering the countryside visiting potential sites, and meeting a wonderful array of naturally concerned individuals who all wanted to make a difference, and not for financial gain. As of today April 24, and despite almost constant inclement weather over the past number of months, we have planted nearly 193,000 native trees in 78 sites across 18 different counties with, hopefully, more to come before the end of this planting season. Furthermore, we currently have requests for 120 mini-forests for the 2024-25 season (300,000 native trees).

I have taken the planting of a mini-forest with the IDA in Athlone as an example of what can be done to help with biodiversity and to give back to nature. Having met with Sarah O'Connell and her wonderful staff, and Darren Lancaster, who organises our linked-in site for the 100 million tree project, we agreed to proceed with an IDA day out to plant a mini-forest. We chose a disused car-park that is part of their Athlone property, which served no useful purpose, and the plan was to remove the hard-core, bring in topsoil, and plant the native tree forest with the help of 50 IDA staff. This was done on a beautiful morning in late March, after meticulous planning by those at the IDA, the 100 million tree project and our horticulturalist Catriona Taylor

(Blessington Garden Centre), and now we have a beautiful 2,620 native tree mini-forest full of Cherries, Rowan, Birch, Scots Pine, and Oak, to name but a few, where previously stood a wasted stony site. The planting involved spreading each species throughout the site, with smaller numbers of (eventually) larger trees, such as Scots pine and Oak, and larger numbers of smaller trees such as Rowan, native Cherries, etc. The whole planting took less than 3 hours, and the business park



The disused carpark in Athlone that now is home (see opposite page) to a mini forest of Rowan, Birch, Oak and many more

now has a new and beautiful home for birds, bees, and insects, all having been previously displaced in man's constant race to develop.

For such a project to work, there needs to be a very close link between the organisers (100 Million Trees Project), the tree growers (None-So-Hardy and Annaveigh nurseries in this case), the tree planters (Forestry Services Ltd), and the public (that is all of you). For us to plant 1,000,000 native trees next year, a corporate sponsor is essential, and we need funding of €1,300,000. This will allow us to guarantee the tree growers that we will buy 1,000,000 trees from them, to organise for their planting, to commit to further requests



50 IDA staff members planted 2,620 trees in March this year on the site in Athlone

for mini-forests, and to maintain an efficient and informative web-site.

Corporations still find it difficult to move from the drawing board to positive action, but hopefully, in time, this will change, and green references running through business will convert to actuality. In the meantime, if we are unable to find a sponsor for next year's programme, we will plant the 300,000 trees, already booked, over a six week period before Christmas, to show that, with the right intent, anything can be achieved, and then, as they say, let nature take its course. It should be noted that, when talking about €1,300,000, it is estimated that the Covid Pandemic cost

the state over €30 billion in the first two years, independent of the huge human cost, and so we should be trying to do everything that we can to try to support our natural world, and act in any way we can to mitigate against climate change.

So you want to be a native mini-forest owner, and play a part in helping the environment?

- (1) Go onto the 100 million tree website, and you can fill out a form to request to take part. <https://100milliontreesproject.ie/>
- (2) If you have a site that is suitable, we will organise a date for planting, once you have prepared the site (ploughed/rotovated). If you have rabbits, hares or deer, appropriate fencing will be required.
- (3) We will organise delivery of the trees, and for professional planters to help (during weekdays), even if you have volunteers.
- (4) While we would hope that those requesting a mini-forest would protect and nurture it, we have no legal claim, and the owner can do whatever they wish to do with (their) forest. Please consider your neighbours before embarking on a mini-forest project.
- (5) The 100 Million Trees Project pays for the trees and the planting. Preparation and fencing are the responsibility of the land-owners.

Levy Ireland teamed up with Fairyhouse, Horse Racing Ireland and the Project to turn a small plot into a 2,500 tree plantation



(6) All information on the planting, trees, volunteers, and location will be entered on the website.

(7) We are fortunate enough to have access to a full video/photographic crew (Bailey and Blake), and some plantings are recorded, especially if groups or individuals wish to sponsor their own mini-forest.

For Ireland to significantly increase its afforestation figures, government needs to focus more clearly on achieving its targets. The people also need to engage themselves, where possible, in such a vital process. We can all make a difference; however small each contribution is. The 100 Million Trees Project is not looking for donations but for meaningful corporate support. Uniphar PLC can put its environmental hand on its heart and say 'we made the planting of 200,000 native trees happen in the past five months'. As well as rehusing a considerable number of our feathered friends, bees and insects, and generating multiple new areas of biodiversity throughout the island, they have also made a big impact on future carbon trapping. When people say there is no way you can plant 100 million trees, they are absolutely



right, unless everyone actually wants it to happen, unless corporations are actually prepared to fund it to support our tree growers to expand their services in the knowledge that we will buy their trees, and plant them in our own country, instead of exporting them, and unless people are prepared to give up a small and invariably unused piece of land to have their own little bit of environmental heaven. Do not forget that we only need 40,000 mini-forests to achieve our aim!

Dr David Mulcahy is a consultant Cardiologist

NB: The people organising the 100 Million Trees Project (RM, DM, TM) do not receive anything more than the pleasure of knowing that they are making a small contribution in mitigation against climate change.

Many thanks to Martin Blake and Frankie King for the wonderful photography.

Addendum: Since submission of this article, we have received corporate funding which will allow us to plant 550,000 native trees in the 2024-25 planting season.



1,000 trees were planted at Bride Street Church in Wexford



REVIEW

Native Woodlands of County Donegal

IN HIS book *Native Woodlands of County Donegal*, the author Seán Ó Gaoithín has really broadened my view, interest, and knowledge of that county's woodland heritage.

From the outset, Sean brings a strong sense of awareness to of the beauty and value of every facet of our biodiverse land and its while simultaneously conveying a sense of urgency to save some of Ireland's ancient oak woods. In tracing the climatic botanical and human evolution of the island of Ireland. Sean's book gives a deep insight into the dynamic leadership role of nature notwithstanding the constant evolution of climate over 30,000 years.

As I read how our forefathers flourished at the expense of trees a few questions arose for me including do we value short term benefits from nature more or less than long term benefits? Why did our forefathers not plant trees they cut down for farming? It begs the question, do we humans really care? Surely having regard to how many places in Ireland are named through their association

with trees it does seem we have a regard for their heritage. The book highlights the importance of the native woodland scheme established in 2000 to start the creation of a reserve and it cleverly highlights with the word 'Woodstory' as a measure of the ecological value of the woodlands. The more I read the book, the more I realise how important it is not just to invest but actually allow the 'Woodstory' develop around our future woodlands. This will determine the success or failure of the 'Woodstory'.

I really enjoyed this book for the listing of our native trees, and detailing the locations of our remaining native botanical treasures. There are some wonderful aerial photographs of these locations together with an impressive and extensive knowledge on each location.

All in all, *Native Woodlands of*

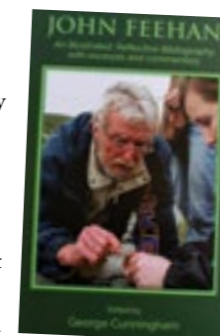


County Donegal is a most enjoyable and informative read, for all with a nature lover's eye and a thirst for more knowledge of ancient forests of Donegal.

*Peadar Collins
Chairman, Crann*

John Feehan An Illustrated and Reflective Bibliography

In early May 2024 in the Presentation Brothers NS Birr, *John Feehan, An Illustrated and Reflective Bibliography with excerpts and commentary*, edited by George Cunningham was launched. Both have long associations with Crann as directors, members and lifelong supporters. This quarto, pictorial hardback volume of some 160pps is a limited edition of 300 copies signed by both John Feehan and the editor. It is not the usual bibliography with just publication details and data but has added illustrative essays and excerpts which reflects the extraordinary output of this extraordinary scholar, one of Ireland's best from any age.



Published by Parkmore Press it is on sale for €30 (€50 for two copies) or €35 post paid for Crann members. Orders to Parkmorepress@gmail.com, or the editor at Parkmore, Roscrea, E53YK02.

PHOTOGRAPHIC COMPETITION 2024

Our annual photographic competition, sponsored by Coillte, attracted another record entry last year. Standards were very high and we look forward to receiving equally good images for this year's contest.

Theme: **Trees, Forests & Woodlands**

Sponsored By: **Coillte**

First Prize **€250**

Second Prize **€100**

Third Prize **€50**

ENTRY IS FREE!

Closing date: September 13, 2024

Digital entries should be emailed to

CrannCoillte2022@gmail.com

Prints should be posted to **Crann – Trees for Ireland, Photo Competition, Crann, PO Box 860, Celbridge, Co Kildare.**

RULES

- This competition is open to all amateur photographers.
- Entries can be digital (emailed) or prints (posted).
- Emailed images must be in jpg/jpeg format, minimum file size 2MB, maximum file size 8MB.
- NOTE: Emailed entries must be as attachments to the email (not embedded in email).
- Prints of photos should be minimum size 6x4 inches (15x10cm) up to maximum size A4.
- A certain amount of manipulation of digital images to enhance the subject matter is allowed but gimmicky special effects are not.
- Each photographer may submit up to 3 entries.
- Prints should have the following information on the back: Name, Address, Telephone Number, Title of Print, Location and Date Taken.
- Prints should NOT be mounted.
- Prints cannot be returned.
- Emails should have the following information: name, address, Telephone number, email address, title of picture, location and date taken.
- The copyright of the image remains the photographer's. However, Crann and Coillte retain the right to use any images in future publications and on related social media and websites e.g. Crann may use some of the competition pictures in related third party publications, tweets, website, social media and promotional literature like calendars.
- Entering this competition implies full and whole acceptance of the competition rules.
- The judge's decision will be final and no correspondence or communications will be entered into in relation to the results

PHONE CAMERAS

We have a special section for phone camera photographs.

Entries should be emailed to

CrannCoillte2022@gmail.com, with the words

'Phone camera' entered in the subject line.

The winner will receive a special prize of €50.

CALENDAR

Photographers who enter our competition may see their pictures selected to appear in a wider range of platforms, thus promoting Crann – Trees for Ireland.

Apologies: Maria McCormick was credited with a photograph in the last competition 'Self-reflecting' - which was taken by Elizabeth Murphy



A splendid specimen of a Burren Pine. Photographer: Donal Hogan

Restoring a nearly 'lost' tree to Ireland's native flora

By Pranjali Bhave

THE beautiful *Pinus sylvestris*, Ireland's only native pine tree, was once widespread in Ireland and particularly flourished in the Burren region. This assertion is evidenced by pollen records and archaeological excavations here, which also show a rapid decline in the face of climatic shift to a wetter climate and woodland clearance by humans around 4,000 years ago. It held on in a few locations for the next 2,000 years but was thought to have become extinct 1,500 years ago. Much later, about 300 years ago, this tree was re-introduced from Scotland, became commonly known as 'Scots pine' and has been widely planted here since.

However, in 2016, a remarkable discovery was made by a research team from the School of Natural Sciences, Trinity College Dublin*. They discovered that Ireland's original native pine was not entirely lost: a small stand of native pine trees continued to survive at a remote site in the east Burren, Co. Clare. The pollen analyses done at this site showed continuous existence of this population over the last 2,000 years, making it the only known stand of Irish native pine. The research also suggested that this isolated native population of pine trees is of high conservation value but its rarity increases its extinction risk.

The site of this native pine stand is currently being managed by The National Parks and Wildlife Service who oversee and regulate seed collection from the trees at sustainable levels under strict licensing.

The Burren Pine Project

The Burren is renowned for being an



A close up of a Burren Pine. Burrenbeo Trust

important refuge of Irish biodiversity, providing a home to 75% of Irish flora on its modest 1% of Irish landmass. The finding of Ireland's only native pine in the Burren has added significantly to the conservation value of this wonderful region.

As Ireland's oldest landscape charity, based in the Burren, engaged in heritage education and community-led conservation for over 20 years, we at Burrenbeo Trust strongly felt that we have a part to play in bringing back this nearly lost species to Irish flora.

In December 2020, we launched the

Burren Pine Project – an initiative to restore the Irish native pine or the Burren pine to this landscape. The aim of this initiative is to create native pine-dominated woodland communities in the Burren, close to the original site, to act as nurseries for the native pine trees, the seeds from which will be a valuable resource for the future expansion of the species in Ireland.

How do we go about it?

The Burren Pine project is a collaborative effort with huge input from local landowners,

volunteers, ecologists, and sponsorship support from individuals and businesses.

The sites for the project are donated from our network of landowners who are committed to farming for nature in the Burren. Only species-poor land is chosen so there is no overall biodiversity loss. We source saplings grown from the seeds of the Burren pine. These seeds are collected under NPWS licence.

We plant the Burren pine saplings along with a mix of native companion species following best practice guidelines. We fence off these sites to protect them and carry out regular maintenance work with the help of Burrenbeo Trust Conservation volunteers.

We maintain a database of trees with unique identifier numbers, planting and maintenance dates, location, and maps. Each pine tree is connected to its sponsor with a unique ID number. As all trees are planted on private land there is no automatic right of access, but we provide annual email updates (including images) of the pine trees to the sponsors. Additionally, visits to Burren Pine Project sites are hosted for sponsors annually during the October bank holiday weekend as part of the wider Burren Winterage Weekend celebration.

What are the benefits of this project?

By establishing a living seed bank, this project first and foremost works to restore an endangered native tree species, making an important contribution to Irish biodiversity. While the Burren pine trees are not treated as 'genetically different' to the Scots pine trees (recent research from January 2024 shows that while there is a genetic difference, this difference is negligible**) the Burren pine trees are an extant population and represent a rare and invaluable source of Irish native pine with local provenance.

By creating these special woodland habitats on degraded or species-poor sites the project also addresses habitat loss, creates long-term carbon stores, and offers mitigation against effects of climate change such as flooding and soil loss.

For us, an equally important benefit of this project is the eco-social one, with the opportunities it provides to connect with various stakeholders with a shared goal – interested individuals, farmers, landowners, conservation volunteers, community groups and local businesses.

What have we achieved so far and how can you help?

To date, this project has enabled planting of over 1,000 Burren pine trees along with



The finding of Ireland's only native pine in the Burren has added significantly to the conservation value of the region. Photographer: Donal Hogan

3,000 other native trees such as alder, birch, oak, hazel, hawthorn, and holly at nine different sites in the Burren. Each site has volunteer 'guardians' that regularly visit, photograph, and maintain the site, reporting back to Burrenbeo Trust.

Many of the trees have been sponsored by individuals as gifts to their friends, family or in memory of loved ones. Businesses have given gifts of Burren pine tree sponsorships to their staff – particularly at Christmas time and some corporate partners have sponsored planting of entire project sites.

We continue to invite individuals and businesses to join hands with us in the Burren pine project, supporting the planting of Burren pine trees in return for sponsorship or gift certificates, annual email updates and invitations to visit the Burren Pine Project sites. The funds generated go towards the cost of the trees, selection, and management of the land on which they grow and their chemical-free maintenance. Any remaining funds support Burrenbeo Trust's education work in shaping a brighter future

for the communities of the Burren and their special place.

Who are we?

Established in 2008, The Burrenbeo Trust is Ireland's only landscape charity, dedicated to connecting all of us to our places and our role in caring for them. This is carried out through

Burrenbeo volunteers out planting Burren Pines Burrenbeo Trust



over 25 different programmes each year in Learning, Events, Active Conservation, Research, and Advocacy.

Outside of the Burren Pine Project, Burrenbeo Trust also facilitates planting of the Burren pine trees through The Hare's Corner initiative (burrenbeo.com/thc) – where landowners beyond the Burren are

supported (through targeted advice and microfinancing) in taking small but impactful actions for biodiversity e.g., planting a native woodland, a heritage orchard, digging a pond for wildlife or creating a 'plan for nature'.

Our education work in the form of the national Heritage Keepers programme (heritagekeepers.ie) is delivered for free to schools and communities across Ireland to help participants discover their own local heritage – built, cultural and natural – and take funded actions to enhance it.

Our Farming for Nature initiative (farmingfornature.ie) works to support, encourage, and inspire farmers across Ireland who farm, or who wish to farm, in a way that will improve the natural health of our countryside.

Further reading and resources

Burren Pine Project: Our webpage burrenbeo.com/pine hosts further information on the project as well as a list of scientific literature and media articles on the



There it grows: A Burrenbeo volunteer measuring the growth of a young pine Burrenbeo Trust

Burren pine trees published so far.

Burrenbeo Trust: If you would like to find out more about what we do, what events we have coming up or how you can support us – please visit burrenbeo.com where you can also sign up for our free monthly e-newsletter. We are a small, independent charity with no core funding and we truly appreciate every support we can get. Find @BurrenbeoTrust on Facebook, X, YouTube, and LinkedIn

References:

* *Re-defining the natural range of Scots Pine (Pinus sylvestris L.): a newly discovered microrefugium in western Ireland (Alwyne H. McGeever and Fraser J. G. Mitchell) Journal of Biogeography (J. Biogeogr.) (2016).*

** *Molecular characterisation of Pinus sylvestris (L.) in Ireland at the western limit of the species distribution – Samuel Belton, Philippe Cubry, Jenni R. Roche & Colin T. Kelleher*

With 500,000 trees planted with Ireland's school children and their communities - **Orla Farrell** and Easy Treesie are halfway to their million target!
That's something that to celebrate certainly!

GETTING CLOSER ALL THE TIME



Getting ready to plant with Dr. Niamh Shaw at the launch of National Tree Week. Finbar O'Rourke



Our 500,000th sapling is planted with members of the Diplomatic community, the EU in Ireland team and Commissioner Mairead McGuinness in Kiltarnan, Dublin with local school children
Right: Orla, Easy Treesie with Aileen O'Meara, Chairperson, Monkstown Farm Residents' Association after a successful planting party with two local schools and the DLR Co.Co. team at Dunedin Park.

no time to linger, sheltered from the now-driving rain eating the home made tree-ts. Here's a note from Wells Fargo's Aditi Singh, whose team left their banking halls to help us out; "A huge thank you; the volunteers



really enjoyed their days out planting trees, mulching & fitting tree protection and stakes as well as learning how to propagate their own free native trees like elder, willow and aspen. We managed to pick the wettest day of the year on Day One yet still we managed to learn lots and enjoy being out in the elements with our colleagues in the country having a good time!"

It had been with a feeling of great joy our Climate Advisor, Evelyn Murphy and myself set off to plant trees with National Tidy

Towns 2024 Winners Abbeyleix the previous day. They had such an impressive entry in the Tree element of this competition. The suggestion that the Tree Week Annual launch would take place there with a tree planting with local school children was made by senior Tree-Judge, the great Christy Boylan. It was a chance to hear of wonderful projects - and indeed all the many current obstacles to tree planting, to tour their great Bog Boardwalk and yes, enjoy more home baking hospitality!

With all the mud washed off the spades



Staking trees and applying deerguards at the establishment of a shelterbelt with Aidan French, Crann, Evelyn Murphy, Easy Treesie and WP Engine volunteers at Da Farm, Kiltarnan.

and gloves, on Tuesday bright and early it was over to join Aileen O'Meara, Chairperson of the newly-formed Monkstown Farm Residents' Association. Here's her report on our planting day with them. "One of the big priorities for the Association was to improve the living environment of our neighbourhood - even though it's called a farm, it doesn't

IT'S NEARLY dawn on the Monday of National Tree Week and though I'm high up in the Dublin mountains, apart from the low-lying fields of snow I can't see the mountains ahead for threatening black clouds. No visibility of the sweep of Dublin Bay out the back window either. Shutting the tailgate on the Leaf with all the spades, wellies and wetgear wedged in tight for today's planting was challenging. "It's raining again" plays on the radio after the alarming wet-weather forecast as I park in front of Stepside Centra. The staff all know us there and our love of chocolate prizes; they joined us on our first planting party of the season over the road in at our newest tree nursery, Da Farm. There's just barely room to fit a large bag of hazelnut mini Easter Eggs for the VIP Very Important Planter children who'll be joining us first thing.

We're in the Kiltarnan Church of Ireland Parish grounds today and the entire local community is coming out to help. Our Crann crack team have organised other volunteers as well to plant trees with us and this morning joining in we'll have the EU Commissioner for Financial Stability and Services, the EU-in-Ireland group and the Diplomatic Corps!

Base Camp is set up swiftly behind the

national school; the first batch of the 1,000 trees, carefully chosen for this site, which were dispatched by Ronan and the Coillte team from their Carlow nurseries now appear through the mist in the bucket of David Johnston's serious yellow JCB. Peadar and Diarmuid have the earthworks sorted and Marguerite has the running order on the clipboard. We love to start the day with a coffee so, as all the helpers arrive, Diarmuid and I direct them to the cosy 'Gathering Grounds' café. We enjoy ours al fresco and cheer on our schoolboy helper and his mum, matching gloves for us out of the laundry bag and into the wheelbarrow!

The photos in this magazine tell the story best of the fun we had. Mairead McGuinness charmed the children with talk of her new triplet lambs, the snow and her love of tree planting and of having trees on her own farm. When the rain came we retired to celebrate the planting and plan next steps (deer guards!). There was time to hear of stellar tree tales from EU Ambassadors to Ireland and their Embassy staff from all across the Continent and their ambitions for nature restoration.

We had a fresh team of Wells Fargo bankers coming to finish the work with us in the afternoon across the road so there was

have a lot of greenery". Aileen added "It was really great to work with Easy Treesie, the Tree Council, our local Dun Laoghaire Rathdown Council and our two local schools for a community planting event – one of our first activities since setting up the association. The Easy Treesie team really enjoyed joining with the older and younger generations from the area to work together to create a sense of belonging around what is called locally "The Field", otherwise Dunedin Park.

Initially the plan was to replace the vandalised trees which had been damaged during the Halloween bonfire but the Council and Easy Treesie went much further by creating a beautiful, almost like a little forest area, with a lovely sense of semi-mature trees that were there already, the new trees and then the Easy Treesie trees. Everybody is talking about how wonderful it is, it was really great to work with Easy Treesie and Orla. We were so delighted about the great work that they have done" commented Aileen.

Following that The High School Rathgar invite me back to visit their assembly. Their Agricultural Science teacher (who has worked with us in the past at the "Adventure" conferences), Geoff Langrell, commented "We are very excited about our ongoing secondary school project with Easy Treesie. Our school had no space for 150 trees we wanted planted to celebrate the High School's 150th anniversary so instead we sponsored workshops with schools who were planting in Dublin City Council's Tolka River Valley Park.

Easy Treesie sourced and supplied all the saplings and in addition donated two lovely oak trees – for which the school did have room – for a ceremonial planting in the school grounds. These have been added to during the schools 2024 Biodiversity week with a mini hazel wood. This species was chosen as a homage to past pupil and Nobel Laureate William Butler Yeats whose poem, *The Song of Wandering Aenghus* is set in a hazel wood. The initiative forms part of The High School's Green Schools' Education programme. It is part of a suite of climate solutions; bee keeping, fruit and vegetable production, promotion of cycling and of active travel – championed by past pupil and Olympic sailing medallist Annalise Murphy. Geoff added "Our school is proud to have committed to participation in the Easy Treesie project again in the 2024-2025 Academic Year and look forward to planting trees to commemorate 175 years of our girls' school in Ireland".

We get to hear Dr. Mark Johnston's Urban Forestry Masterclass at the Botanic Gardens



Left: Wells Fargo volunteers follow the lead of Evelyn Murphy, Easy Treesie Climate Advisor at our Kilternan Deer Fencing and Tree Propagation and Planting Party. Above: High School Rathgar, Alma Mater of W. B. Yeats sponsor 150 trees to mark their 150th anniversary. Below: Members of the North Mayo Autism Group and their families join local volunteers for a third planting party in a third century with Easy Treesie - Crann at Enniscoke House, Mayo. Below centre: Marino Garden Suburb celebrates 100 years since its foundation at an Easy Treesie - Dublin City Council - Residents' Association Planting Event. Below left: Minister Malcolm Noonan receives an Elder Wand propagating in a Go Nature Positive Water Bottle at the TCD Business School Conference.



later that day and wish him well with his upcoming book featuring many of his Irish landmark planting projects which all started with his visit from our own Crann fountness, Jan Alexander. His message to us... "You and your colleagues are doing excellent work and long may you continue."

It's Day Five and we get to attend the #GoNaturePositive conference at the Trinity College Dublin Business School organised by our good friend Prof. Yvonne Buckley and her colleagues. Prof. Buckley had previously arranged for an undergraduate student, Rachel Byrne, to undertake a research project into the survival rates of the saplings we had been planting. Her thesis *Building Habitats: An Analysis of Irish Tree Planting Projects in Urban Environments* has provided some very valuable results. "Strategies must be implemented to merge the human and natural world and allow urban habitats to become greener as we attempt to regenerate our native woodland habitats." says Rachel in her abstract. The great news is that our

tree survival rates at the three Dublin sites she researched are at an average of 90%! Her paper, which you can read here; <https://easytreesie.com/2024/04/30/great-work-by-trinity-college-dublin-research-team/>, describes the factors contributing to our good outcomes including the benefits of planting younger trees, the optimal placement of new planting and the importance of fencing and of having different age profiles in woodlands. There's a chance to present Minister Noonan with an Elder Wand before meeting the Lord Mayor later in the day at the *Crainn agus Toir* book launch.

It's Friday and back to Dublin's northside where we have been planting saplings with the pupils of several schools with Steven Doody's Creative Clusters celebrating 100 years of Marino in this Garden Suburb and surrounds. Here's a report from St. Fiachra's National School in Beaumont. "Our second class were so excited to be planting their first ever trees. A lot of the children here at St. Fiachra's don't have a garden and to

have spades and trowels and to set to work growing lines of trees in our school yard on a sunny spring morning was such a joyful event. We were inspired to do this when a lot of trees were cleared from the boundary between our school and Beaumont hospital when a new car park was built. We really missed the shelter and shade of the trees and were so happy to make a start on growing our own new shelter belt. We know that patients in hospitals have been shown to heal faster when looking at greenery so we hope seeing our trees from the hospital as they grow will also help anyone sick and in need of some nature therapy!" commented Teacher Sheila Harrington. "Following the planting the Senior Infants, First and Second classes were asked to come up with a slogan for the theme of our Biodiversity fifth Green Flag. The response was super as can be seen from the short selection below!

"St. Fiachra's love plants and bugs
It's our way of giving Nature hugs!" by Fiadh

"A green St. Fiachra's benefits us all,
With wild flowers, bees and trees stand tall"
Caoilfhionn

"Don't forget every bird, bug or tree,
At St. Fiachra's Biodiversity is key!" Dylan

"Greenery is a thing of beauty,
St. Fiachra's kids make this our duty!" Laoise

"Didn't those children do well? Hopefully we
can all learn from their example and do a little
bit every day to be planet aware!"

Finally it's the weekend – this time it's the turn of County Mayo and Enniscoke House, on the wooded shores of Lough Conn and in the shadow of Nephin mountain, for a particularly special event. The Easy Treesie – Crann project started planting in Mayo during the Covid 19 Lockdown, when Peter Timlin and Richard Grimes of sustainable brand Pure Clothing, who were remote students at Dublin City University at that time, organised

the planting of 1,000 native saplings with three local schools. The Straide community picked up the baton and have added hundreds more saplings to the count, distributing trees from their community hall to Toomore, Bohola, Foxford and Newport in time for national Tree Week.

This particular initiative at Enniscoke House was conceived in a conversation between Enniscoke's D J Kellett and myself, the Easy Treesie – Crann project founder, in the run up to National Tree Week. I was organising additional planting in the county to support reaching our half-way milestone of planting 500,000 trees. "After a memorable dinner featuring lots of their garden produce and entirely cooked by the doyenne of the house, Susan Kellett, I got chatting to fear-an-ti D J and of course my conversation turned pretty soon to the trees on their magnificent grounds. I was fascinated to hear that the house had two previous initiatives planting beech on the estate; one in the 1820s and one in the 1920s. I asked D J what planting of beech has been done in the 2020s. Alas, none so far. Why? Well the 2020s of course got off to a slow start in terms of many people's plans. I asked if D J could enlist some local children to do a hat-trick, a third project in three centuries and he said indeed he absolutely could! I pledged to do what we could and we secured the last 100 beech trees available to us in the country through the generosity of the Coillte nursery in Carlow.

It proved a hectic time at Enniscoke House with the recent premiere of the film *Prospect House*, which is set in the house and local area, in Ballina. "After staking out the location for the trees, planning their layout and digging the holes a fantastic day's planting was had with the support of a large turnout from the north west branch of the Mayo Autism Club and local children. The families of the Mayo Autism Club absolutely loved the tree planting and marked out the trees that they planted so they can visit them as they grow. We left a space in the centre of the planting so that we can place a bench there to enjoy the new woodland as the trees grow" commented D J.

THANK YOU

We extend a huge thank-you to our many supporters and volunteers including the Dept. of Agriculture, Forestry and the Marine, Maxol Greenprint and all our friends; full list on our website. You can donate to our project at <https://buy.stripe.com/biYaI4cDMcPV7p6144> and you can get in touch at orla@easytreesie.com and through www.easytreesie.com and www.crann.ie

IT'S THE DIFFERENCE THAT BRINGS US TOGETHER

IN THE morning I look out the garden window at our apples trees, a Red Devil and a Granny Smith, planted two years ago as bare rootstock and now am waiting for their fruit. The memories come back, slowly, with uncertainty, nonetheless bringing a smile to a craggy old face.

There was a lovely old apple tree in Mrs Stokes' back garden – just seven houses away. Hers was an end house and it was easy to get into the back garden to share her apple trees' bounty of scrumptious eaters – variety unknown to this day!! Ah there's the catch – the wild urban feral boys never thought to ask. There was a challenge, almost a rite of passage that had to be passed on the way to an uncertain adulthood. Get the apples without getting caught!!!!

But Mrs Stokes was up to the challenge and was always on the look-out to ensure her great crop of apples was guarded tighter than entry to Dáil Éireann. She had a wee black dog, that was a noisy, yappy little mongrel but ever vigilant and always barked at intruders. Thus armed, Mrs Stokes was mostly successful at keeping the predators at bay.

However, there was a narrow wall about six-foot-high that ran along the back of all the gardens. So, with good balance, sharp night vision and no fear of falling off the four-inch concrete blocks that formed the wall – you had a chance. All you had to do was run along the wall, ignore any neighbour shouting at you to get off the wall, grab an apple or two, jump off the wall and run like blazes to safety, leaving a yapping dog and a smiling Mrs Stokes knowing she had lost that battle. Was I that boy – I can't remember.

In the afternoon, out in the front garden, lots of children accompanied by their Mams or Dads or in some instances by their Grannies go past on their way home from their busy school day. Every day they pass under a great old chestnut tree that's at least eighty years old – some of the old photos of the road show a very small sapling unidentifiable from the street scene – so it might be nearer a century and waiting for the Presidential bonus for

By **MICHAEL BRUTON**

longevity. It set me wondering about the challenges faced today by children in a world so transformed by technology that the evocative pleasures of tree-based learning seem utterly remote. The passage of the seasons is so well marked by our chestnut tree. As with the changing of the clock the growth spurt is really noticeable over the past few weeks and there is a wonderful green leafy canopy interspersed with the pinky white flowers. The leaves give plenty of shelter for those who get caught in a shower, having being enticed out in bright sunshine, for a walk without a rain jacket and it's also a grand place to have a chat when I am caught pottering around the garden, in that same shower. They might be strangers to the area who want to know about the village or neighbours glad to rest with their shopping and happy to talk about all and nothing. It's almost as if the chestnut tree has become a friendship

tree under which people share a few moments of precious time.

When the conkers start to fall the excitement of children finding them on the ground, some still in their husk, others bright and shiny brown, is a joy to behold. The exchanges between parents and children – the string of questions – Can you eat them? Can you put them in a curry? Can we grow them? Can we play with them? So many questions from their inquisitive minds. Sometimes the parents demand the child to hurry along. Other times the parents, haltingly at first, start to share their own experiences of playing conkers and their exploits – perhaps magnified through time, give way to a great sharing educational and family moment.

Should playing conkers be part of the school curriculum or at least part of their play-time in learning how to open them properly to avoid scarring, how to cure them to give the hardness to be on their way to being the champion conker. Learning to bore a hole and choosing the right tread or twine to make the best knot and ensure yours was not lost in combat was a rite of passage for those of a certain age.

When all the leaves are shed, and there are many on this great and gracious tree, the bareness gives the opportunity to see the sea.

A limited vision through all the houses on the other side of the road, but a welcome view nonetheless. The white topped waves of stormy windy days giving way to the iridescent greeny blue of the calm sea are clearly visible and beckon a brisk walk. Not to everyone's taste but a strong reminder of the passage of the seasons.

In the night – the shimmering light of the ships on their way to and from the Continent remind us of our island heritage.

This chestnut tree shares so many times in the lives of so many people. Sometimes unconsciously, it gives a place of shelter and serenity – other times the chance to share memories of childhood, growth and decay. But always it is a source of companionship and social interaction.

Ah, the happiness of a tree.

Michael Bruton is a retired management consultant



THE SPEAKING TREE

The concept of The Speaking Tree dates back to the 5th century BC in India when the founder of Buddhism meditated for 49 days under a Pipal tree, or *Ficus religiosa*, and became enlightened. This column in Crann is a platform for thoughtful comment that may stimulate debate or just reflect on the way of the world.

RDS Spring Agricultural & Forestry Awards

In May 2024, as part of a wider event - RDS Finding Common Ground Festival - the RDS Spring Agricultural & Forestry Awards were presented to the following winners :

RDS Forestry Awards Winners

- Production Forestry Award – **Ross Buchanan**, Co. Donegal
- Teagasc Farm Forestry Award – **Derek and Yvonne Mc Cabe**, Co. Cavan
- Community Woodland Award – **Mallow Castle Grounds & Town Park**, Co. Cork
- Native Woodland Conservation Award – **Coill an Fhaltaigh**, Co. Kilkenny

RDS Livestock Awards Winners

- Economic Breeding Index (EBI) Award - Best Dairy Cow – **Donal Martin Murphy**, Wexford
- Euro-Star Index Award - Best Beef Cow – **Ciarán Lenehan**, Co. Meath
- Dairy Herd Index Award – **Terry Cassin**, Co. Kilkenny
- Beef Herd Index Award – **Paul Keating**, Co. Wexford
- LambPlus Breeders Index Award – **Jim & Frampton Jeffery**, Co. Cork

RDS Sustainability Awards Winners

- Sustainable Farming Award – **Broughgammon Farm**, Co. Antrim
- Sustainable Rural Start-Up Award – **Lvlogics**, Co. Meath
- Sustainable Rural Enterprise Award – **Bó Rua Farm**, Co. Cork
- Sustainable Rural Innovation Award – **Fiorbhia Farm**, Co. Laois
- Sustainable Rural Social Impact Award – **CycleUp**, Co. Roscommon

For more information regarding these Awards :

- ✉ agriculture@rds.ie
- 🐦 @theRDS
- 🌐 www.rds.ie/agriculture



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