

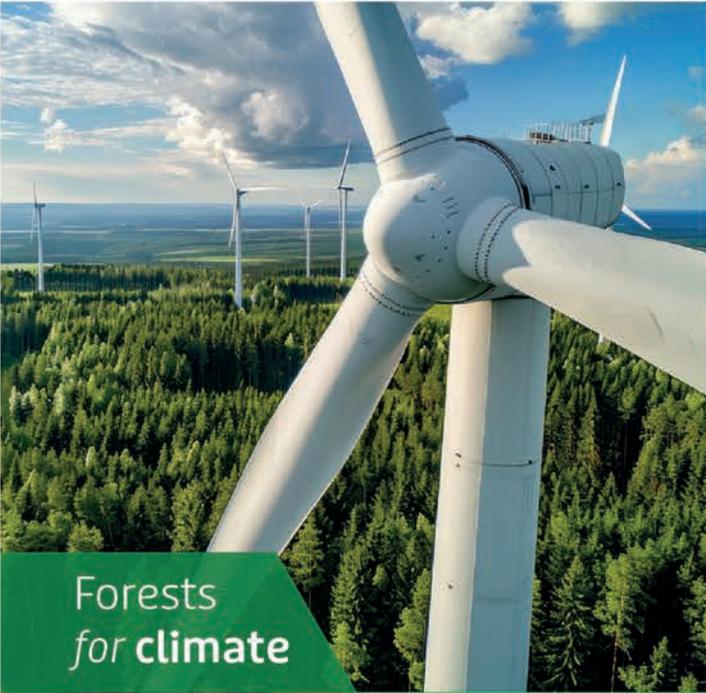


CRANN

Ireland's tree magazine

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Is it time to give forestry back to the foresters?



I'll repeat the above question: Is it time to give forestry back to the foresters? What do I mean by that? Back in the early years of the State we had a forestry service which set out to build a lumber industry with local forests supplying the raw material.

In those days there were no John Deere tractors or combine harvesters. F1 hybrid seeds, artificial fertilizers and advanced soil science were also innovations that had yet to depart from the realms of fantasy.

The number one priority for the Irish state of the 1920s and 1930s was food production. And for that reason it was decided that forestry would be restricted to the hills and uplands, or less productive ground. It was certainly kept away from the most fertile farmland.

This policy changed in the late 1980s when there was a drive to significantly expand the overall land area under trees, through the provision of attractive planting grants and 20-year premiums.

But there was a downside for farmers – all lands planted had to stay in forestry for perpetuity.

This replanting requirement is now proving extremely unpopular with landowners in general and with farmers in particular. Since the imposition of milk quotas in 1984, farmers have generally been cultured to resist anything that restricts their progress.

And for farmers, the replanting requirement and milk quotas are very similar restrictions. Indeed, the requirement to replant has actually given trees a bad name for many farmers.

And, yet, our economy badly needs more land under trees, and more land given over to commercial forestry.

So how do we square this circle?

There is a growing cohort who believe the choice should be left back to the landowner.

Farmers could either opt into the State's lucrative forestry regime and live with the replanting restriction, or work outside the forestry programme and build a new industry on the rich fertile lowlands by growing commercial stands of hardwoods and softwoods.

Not all farmers will want trees. However, there is a cohort of farmers that value trees and the biodiversity they support. Moreover, these farmers also appreciate the financial benefits of forestry – albeit a long-term investment.

If these farmers can be rewarded through a biodiversity payment – based on actual validated biodiversity improvements over a 10-year period, for example – then such financial supports would make planting trees more attractive financially, while still leaving landowners free of the dreaded replanting requirement.

The Irish forestry programme, in all its various iterations, has failed to nurture a forestry culture or encourage a widespread appreciation and love of trees among farmers over the last four decades.

Instead, the forestry scheme has been viewed by farmers primarily as a transactional matter; and one that is managed and policed by the State.

It is possible that a forestry culture could develop organically among farmers, if they were allowed to plant and remove trees without restriction.

Longer-term, Ireland needs a forestry sector that is driven by foresters, rather than one that is hobbled by administrators and ecologists. More immediately, the country needs to stabilize forestry plantings.

To tackle the first challenge the Department of Agriculture must halt the haemorrhaging of dedicated foresters and the consequent loss of their valuable field craft.

The Department will have to consider easing the replanting requirement to address the second challenge.

Ireland has struggled over the last three years to get new plantings above 2,000 hectares. This is a long way off the target level of 8,000 hectares per year.

Something needs to change.

Dr Micheál Ó Fathartaigh is a historian and member of the Social Sciences Research Centre, University of Galway, and a research fellow at the Archives of Rural History, Bern.



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OUR MISSION: To enhance the environment of Ireland through planting and protecting the right trees in the right places and promoting and increasing awareness about the benefits of our trees and woodlands.

The views expressed by contributors to the magazine are not necessarily those of the Editor, the Board of Crann or its committees. We welcome all articles on trees and related topics. Crann Magazine is the periodical publication of People for Trees (Ireland) Ltd, trading as Crann. Crann is a voluntary, non-profit organisation dedicated to planting trees and protecting Ireland's woodlands. Crann ISSN 1649-5217 Registered Charity No: CHY13698



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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.

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Left: the Crann board meeting and, right and below, following the meeting, the board visited the oak woodlands of Siobhán Moloney at Tomcoyle Woods near Aughrim, Co Wicklow.



Crann-BTA project gets assessor's seal of approval

By SEÁN BUCKLEY

Crann's partnership with Brown Thomas Arnotts (BTA) – which aims to plant 10,000 trees per year over the next decade – has the potential to be one of the most impactful projects in the history of the charity, according to Crann chairman Peadar Collins.

Mr Collins was speaking following a recent board meeting where the Crann-BTA project received a very positive appraisal from independent assessor, Dr Michael John O'Mahony.

Dr O'Mahony's report, and the fact that the target of planting 10,000 trees in the first year was surpassed, has given the Crann-BTA Project a real boost, Mr Collins said following the board meeting.

"Dr O'Mahoney has been the independent assessor over the Crann-BTA project since it started its first project in Co Louth last year," Mr Collins explained.

"He has followed each project; assessing not just the numerical values of the trees but also getting involved in the onward improvements needed to make this one of the best Crann projects going forward for the next 10 years," Mr Collins predicted.

"Dr O'Mahoney's highly informative and professionally laid out report was very impressive," the Crann chair said.

Dr O'Mahony's appreciation of the importance of relationship building to the successful delivery of the project made the

report "very genuine and valuable", Mr Collins said.

The Crann-BTA project aims to plant 100,000 trees in Ireland over the next decade. It was launched last year.

Looking back on the first 12 months of the project, Mr Collins said it had been "an amazing year".

"Our target was to establish 10,000 trees and to involve as people as possible across Ireland. We had to stay on time and stay on budget. We have achieved this," Mr Collins pointed out.

Following the meeting, the Crann board visited the oak woodlands of Siobhán Moloney at Tomcoyle Woods near Aughrim, Co Wicklow.

See more, Pages 32-35

Marguerite's 20 years of Crann service

Twenty years of dedicated service to Crann by Marguerite Arbuthnot-O'Brien was celebrated at a recent board meeting in Wicklow.

Marguerite has been Crann's chief administrator for close to two decades, and her importance to the charity was recognised by the board.

"Those of us currently on the Crann board and those who have been board members over the history of Crann going back over 20 years know how well Marguerite has served our charity," Crann chairman Peadar Collins said.

Mr Collins said Marguerite was "forever diligent, on time and ahead of the game".

"We are very grateful to her and have learned a lot from her. Many thanks Marguerite and wishing you many more years at Crann HQ," Mr Collins said.

Meanwhile, James Lowry, Crann's newly appointed education co-ordinator, set out his plans for the period ahead.

Over the summer James will start with his summer programme and roll out the new term programme from September.

"James brings with him a number of years' experience as a national school teacher, as well as a deep-rooted appreciation of the beauty and true value of trees," Mr Collins said.



CRANN BOARD NEWS

Adieu to Marie

Marie Doyle has left the board of Crann. Marie joined our board a number of years ago. While serving on the board Marie has always been willing to support the Crann team, especially with her educated contributions to the magazine. We thank Marie

for taking time out of a very busy professional and family life to attend meetings and events over the years. She is a true forestry educator with a deep sense of history and how the industry has evolved.

Go n-éirí an bóthar leat.



Members of the Crann board at Tomcoyle Woods near Aughrim





Above: Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture, Michael Healy-Rae, TD, plants a Scots pine with Crann Director Diarmuid McAree and Crann Chairman Peadar Collins. Right: Michael Healy-Rae plants a Bird Cherry tree at Eurofound with Crann, Eurofound staff and local



Minister Healy-Rae plants Crann trees to mark Eurofound's 50th

The Minister of State for Forestry, Michael Healy-Rae, was on hand to mark the 50th anniversary of the EU agency Eurofound when he planted a number of signature Irish tree species at their headquarters in Loughlinstown House, Co Dublin. The trees were chosen and supplied by Crann.

The event on March 21 coincided with National Tree Week and, along with celebrating five decades of Eurofound, also sought to highlight the vital role of Ireland's trees, forests, and woodlands in building a greener, more sustainable future.

Minister Healy-Rae met with Eurofound staff, as well as local schoolchildren from St Columbanus National School at the event.

Fifty Irish Bird Cherry, Scots Pine and Silver Birch trees were planted to commemorate Eurofound's five decades of supporting better policies for a strong social Europe.

The tree planting was part of Ireland's National Tree Week. Eurofound partnered with Crann – Trees for Ireland for the occasion. Several other events were organised across the country to promote

the Plant for the Planet campaign, and the #3BillionTrees Pledge from the European Commission.

Commenting following the ceremony, Minister Healy-Rae noted that trees are planted to mark significant moments, and it was an apt occasion to reflect on the growth of Eurofound as an organisation.

“Eurofound is scientific, and produces evidence-based, well-researched information, by a team of dedicated individuals; this work is

supported by this Government and throughout the rest of Europe,” the minister said.

When speaking with local schoolchildren, Minister Healy-Rae also emphasised that evidence-based information was vital to navigate the digital age and combat misinformation.

Reflecting on the ceremony, Eurofound executive director Ivailo Kalfin said: “We were very pleased to be joined by Minister Healy-Rae and our partners in Crann for





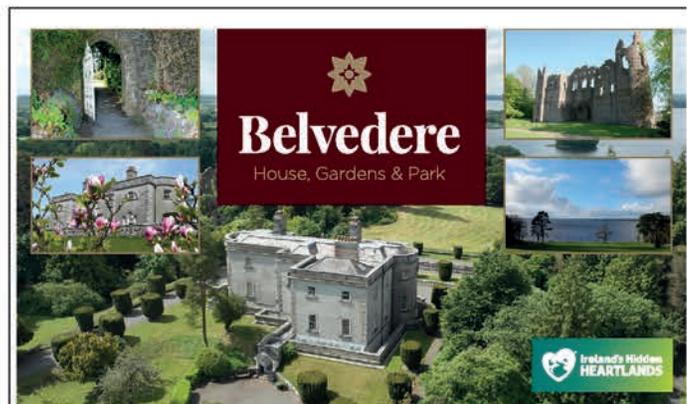
Left: Crann Chairman Peadar Collins extolls the wonders of trees to two young pupils from St Columbanus National School at the event to mark the 50th anniversary of Eurofound at Loughlinstown House.

this event, as well as to branch out once again and connect with the local community. This event was not only about marking 50 years of Eurofound but also looking to our development and growth into the future.”

Directors Peadar Collins and Diarmuid McAree represented Crann at the event and gave a PowerPoint presentation on the benefits of trees and biodiversity.

The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions – or Eurofound for short – is an EU agency, whose role is to provide knowledge to assist in the development of better social, employment and work-related policies. It was established in 1975.

Opposite page: Department of Agriculture Principal Officer, Patricia Kelly; Ivailo Kalfin, Eurofound Executive Director; Minister Michael Healy-Rae, TD; Diarmuid McAree, Crann Director; and Peadar Collins, Crann Chairperson.



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Some of the attendance at the Hometree conference in Ennistymon, Co Clare.

Forestry licencing placed in the dock in Ennistymon

By **MÍCHEÁL Ó FATHARTAIGH**

HOMETREE, the nature restoration charity headquartered in Ennistymon, Co Clare, recently held its second 'Changing Landscapes' conference. During a day of high-energy panel discussions and compelling, rapid-fire, keynote addresses, it threw down a gauntlet to the several hundred people in attendance. They were from all walks of life, all concerned by the cataclysm of climate change, and were exhorted to go 'beyond good intentions'; to take 'rhetoric to impact'.

Trees, and the need for more of them, especially in Ireland, was a major theme.

Marina Conway, head of woodlands with Hometree, put it starkly: Ireland needs to plant 20,000 hectares of trees a year, but currently it is only managing 1,500 hectares.

The people required to plant the trees, landowners for the most part, have lost faith, she explained. State licencing for forestry is not conducive, rather it is antithetical, and compounding the cynicism is the poor handling of the ash die-back problem.

Since the destruction of trees caused by Storm Éowyn in January, too, the State has been slow in supporting replanting, Ms Conway claimed.

One of the solutions proposed to break the 'logjam' was a move away from licencing, before any planting can take place, and a move towards the self-regulation of forests after they are planted.

For such an approach to work, more foresters are needed badly, the conference heard – Ireland has only around 172.

A dedicated forestry school to train foresters, in a concerted way, is needed as well, the conference heard.

Planting at scale on State land was also promoted, with the question could, or moreover should, the National Parks and Wildlife Service, for instance, take a lead?

James Moran from Atlantic Technological University painted a picture where trees must be prominent in the Irish landscape within a generation. In the interior of Connacht for example agroforestry must become the norm, with dairy cows supplying milk to Aurivo grazing in and around trees.

To bring this vision into reality

there is an argument to be made for agroforestry becoming a new type of land designation, ending that piecemeal approach of farming and forestry, and bringing both together, Moran said.

In his contribution, your writer identified lessons from the past, and how Ireland has already had a version of farming and forestry in cohesion in the form of the shelterbelts that were planted vigorously around farmsteads a century ago.

Brendan Dunford of Burrenbeo Trust called for farmers to think once more about such small woodlands, not least as an expedient to get around licencing red tape.



Historian Micheál Ó Fathartaigh addresses the Hometree conference in Ennistymon, Co Clare.

Manchán Magan, the writer, documentary-maker, and broadcaster, gave a keynote address reflecting on what our heritage in Ireland can teach us in terms of resetting our relationship with trees.

Ireland, both its landscape and people, was born of trees. One of the original names for Ireland was Inis na bhFia, the island of trees, Magan explained.

Our home, our refuge was once an island of trees, and today our home and refuge from climate change should once again be an isle of trees.

Many Irish surnames evoke our arboreal DNA – Coll, for instance, is a surname evoking the Irish word for hazel. It was the surname of Éamon de Valera's mother, Catherine; so, when de Valera claimed: 'If I wish to know what the Irish want' 'I look into my own heart', this was perhaps because his heart was rooted in Ireland.

Changing Landscapes 2025 encouraged everyone who participated to become change agents in the face of the climate crisis. Specifically, it made us all ministers for trees, responsible for their promotion.

Let the evangelisation begin.



Crann to support new native woodland alliance

By SEÁN BUCKLEY

CRANN has confirmed that the charity will be involved in a new organisation which aims to protect and expand Ireland's native woodlands.

The Irish Native Woodland Alliance (INWA) was launched in May at the 'Changing Landscapes Conference' in Ennistymon, Co Clare which was organised by the forestry group, Hometree.

The organisations which have committed to the INWA held a meeting on the fringes of the Hometree conference in Clare.

In a letter inviting Crann to join the alliance, Hometree described the INWA as a "voluntary partnership of charities, environmental organisations, community groups, landowners and academics, all united by a shared commitment to protecting and restoring Ireland's native woodlands".

The letter stated that the two key functions of the alliance are:

- ◆ **Advocacy:** To provide a coherent voice for native woodlands, their conservation and their restoration.

- ◆ **Information:** Provide resources and a shared space for those interested in our native woodlands.

Hometree insisted that while it is supporting the creation of the new alliance, it will act and be run as an "independent organisation".

"Our goal is to help initiate its launch, bringing together organisations that are passionate about woodland restoration, protection, and expansion through collaboration, knowledge sharing, and community engagement," the Hometree letter stated.

"We've established a provisional governance code, a clear set of objectives, and membership criteria," the letter outlined.

"We are currently seeking an independent chair to guide the



A panel discussion at the Hometree conference which was held in mid-May in Ennistymon, Co Clare.

alliance through to its first official nomination of positions," it explained.

Reacting to the formation of the alliance, Crann Director Diarmuid McAree said the move was a positive and welcome development.

"We at Crann – Trees for Ireland wholeheartedly welcome the initiative to form an alliance dedicated to sharing a commitment to protecting and restoring Ireland's native woodlands," he told *Crann* magazine.

"We believe that this collective effort will significantly contribute to the preservation of Ireland's natural heritage and biodiversity," he added.

"We look forward to collaborating with like-minded organisations and individuals to achieve our shared goals," he said.

Committing to care and to Crann

SVC Care Communications has reaffirmed its commitment to its ongoing tree sponsorship initiative with Crann – Trees for Ireland.

Since the initiative's launch in 2020, SVC Care Communications has sponsored the planting of over 2,500 native Irish trees.

As part of this year's National Tree Week in March, SVC aligned its tree-planting sponsorship to the growth in its services.

For every Nurse Call System that SVC install, a tree is planted to represent each resident or patient in that healthcare facility. Furthermore, SVC sponsors a tree each time a customer makes a purchase from their range of Fall Management products.

"This initiative is a meaningful way for us to give back to the environment while strengthening our relationships with the care providers we work with," noted Trevor Lucey of SVC Care Communications.

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Eye of the storm

John Sherlock of the North East Forest Group at his windblown forest in Gainstown near Navan, Co Meath.
Picture by Donal Magner

January's Storm Éowyn wreaked havoc, but it's not the first time our forests have been blown to the ground. **Donal Magner** looks back at how some of Ireland's greatest writers have recorded historic storm events for posterity

I made some of the poems walking among the Seven Woods, before the big wind of nineteen hundred and three blew down so many trees & troubled the wild creatures & changed the look of things ...

William Butler Yeats, 1903.

Although Ireland has historically escaped major human casualties and damage to property from storms, our forests, woodlands and individual trees, are not so lucky. Reports of past storms

would verify this with many writers placing strong emphasis on damage to trees including William Butler Yeats and James Joyce.

In 1903, when Yeats observed the storm damage to the woodlands in Coole Park, Co Galway, Ireland's forest cover had reduced to little more than 1% of the land area. Like most of the major storms to hit Ireland, comparisons were drawn with The Night of the Big Wind or *Oíche na Gaoit be Móire*, in 1839, which acts as a meteorological and folk memory metric for all future storms. In *The Big Wind* (1991), Peter Carr documented the damage caused throughout Ireland by

the 1839 storm. Unlike subsequent storms, Carr showed that the damage caused was widespread as no city, town or village escaped the fury of the storm apart from Wexford, which explains why it endured in the folk memory.

In their account "The 'Night of the Big Wind' in Ireland, 6-7 January 1839," Lisa Shields and Denis Fitzgerald believe that two other factors would help retain it in folk memory: "it occurred at night, and it came without warning".

It was inevitable therefore that comparisons were drawn between the storm of 1903 and The





Victor Barber at Castlereagh. He said good revenue returns are achievable in blown forests aged 27 and over but owners of younger crops will have major problems both in revenue generation and getting harvesters to fell and extract low-value timber. Picture by Donal Magner

Night of the Big Wind, especially as there is no record of major storms in the intervening years.

“The storm on the night of 26th -27th February [1903] was probably the most severe one to affect Ireland since The Night of the Big Wind,” according to Met Éireann which adds:

It was reported that 2,000 trees were uprooted on an estate near Birr and 4,000 on an estate in Kilkenny. In the Phoenix Park, Dublin the storm uprooted a large number of trees (chiefly elms) estimated at 1,000 to 3,000, in different accounts. In parts of the country it was reported that whole woods were laid low. Damage to roofs, chimneys and whole buildings was correspondingly great.

Damage caused to trees feature strongly in the reportage of the time, such as this dramatic account of the storm in the *Irish Times*:

The general aspect of the [Phoenix] Park suggests a battle field in which the rival powers were wind and wood. The army of the wind has swept in triumph over it, and left the wood maimed and disabled and cast prone. The braver and statelier the tree, the greater was the fury of its fall.

James Joyce mentions the storm on three occasions in *Ulysses* including the “Oxen and the Sun” episode. He begins by portraying an

Irish barren landscape without shelter before describing the onslaught of the storm:

The rosy buds all gone brown and spread out blobs and on the hills nought but dry flag and faggots that would catch at first fire. All the world saying, for aught they knew, the big wind of last February a year that did havoc the land so pitifully a small thing beside this barrenness.

The country was indeed barren of trees in 1903 and the storm demonstrated the perilous nature of Irish forestry at the time as it wreaked havoc on the few remaining woodlands scattered around the country. But it also brought with it a degree of action by the then Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction (DATI) which had been established in 1899 to improve the quality of Irish farming, forestry and fisheries.

The storm of 1903 prompted officials at DATI to begin the restoration of Ireland’s forests. A few months later, DATI commissioned Professor John Nisbet of the West of Scotland Agriculture College to report on ‘plantations and waste-lands in the southeast’. When Nisbet delivered his report in 1904 he made an important – and for the time – radical proposal, which would shape Irish forest policy for most of the century. Regarding the creation of a forest resource, he wrote: “If this be a duty at all, it is the duty of the State and not of the private landowners.”

The following year, the State acquired

Avondale House and estate in Co Wicklow, along with bare mountain land for planting, to begin a new chapter of State forestry in Ireland. Virtually all afforestation was carried out by the State until the late 1980s when EU-exchequer grants and later premium payments were introduced to encourage farmers in particular to plant some of their land. Over 320,000 hectares of privately owned forests have been established since the late 1980s by private landowners – mainly farmers.

Major windblow damage caused in 1974 and other storms up until the turn of the century was mainly confined to State forests. This changed on the 12th February 2014 when Storm Darwin caused damage not only to State-owned Coillte forests but also privately owned forests mainly in the southwest. By now, many of the privately owned forests established since the late 1980s were reaching top heights in excess of 20 metres which is when they become vulnerable to windblow.

Since 2014, there have been seven storms classed as “violent” or “hurricane-force” by Met Éireann. Three of those caused damage to forests ranging from serious windblow by storms Darwin (2014) and Darragh (last December). Damage caused by storm Éowyn is catastrophic as it is 12 times greater than Darragh both in area and volume of timber.

Continued on page 10

Harvesting 29-year-old Sitka spruce after windblow outside Castlereagh.

Picture by Donal Magner



Continued from page 9

As the 808,848-hectare forest estate is now divided almost equally between Coillte and private owners, it follows that future storm damage is likely to be shared by both. This “sharing” of the windblow burden was illustrated during the damage caused by storms Éowyn and Darragh when an estimated 28,500 hectares of forests were damaged.

The area affected comprises 14,500 hectares of Coillte forests, 11,500 hectares of private forests and 2,500 hectares of forests in Northern Ireland, mainly managed by the Forest Service in the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs.

During the days after storm Éowyn, I contacted a number of forest owners and foresters in my role as forestry editor of the *Irish Farmers Journal*. Victor Barber, of Western Forestry Co-op probably best

summed up the prevailing mood at the time. “The extent of the damage is shocking and the worst I have ever seen,” he said. “Counties such as Sligo, Leitrim, Cavan, Roscommon and parts of Mayo have experienced severe windthrow,” he added.

A picture was quickly building up about the extent of the damage. “We are seeing damage in west Clare, counties Leitrim, Cavan and Monaghan, while our staff also report windthrow in parts of Co Laois and the Castlecomer Plateau in Co Kilkenny,” said Daragh Little, Veon Forestry Ltd. “We have received calls from staff reporting serious damage in Clare, Galway and Mayo where large areas have been blown both in thinned and un-thinned forests ranging in age from 15 to 30 years,” said Conor Daly of The Forestry Company.

Most of the 12 million cubic metres of timber damaged across the island, was caused by storm Éowyn. It represents 30 months’

harvest based on recent annual production data. The 11 million cubic metres damaged in the Republic represents 11% damage to the total growing stock of 142 million cubic metres as estimated in *Ireland’s National Inventory 2022*.

Post storm lessons

Ireland was ill-prepared to cope with the damage caused by storm Éowyn. It’s vital that an emergency plan is put in place to manage future disasters to forests not only caused by storms but also future climate change induced disasters including insect pest and disease damage as occurred during ash dieback. Issues such as emergency harvesting, forestry and climate change issues, forest insurance and reconstitution grants for damaged forest need to be part of a future forest emergency plan.

Severe storms will always cause windthrow regardless of tree age or species. However, we need to examine the resilience of future forests including forest structure, forest locations, species choice and silvicultural systems.

Research into species diversity including native, naturalised and exotic species is required. In this regard the establishment of a Forestry Development Agency with a dedicated Forest Research Institute is essential.

Ireland’s Climate Action Plan has identified forestry as a major contributor in achieving carbon neutrality by mid-century. Private – mainly farmer – afforestation will be required to achieve the stated goal of 18% forest cover. Farmers will be slow to enter a long-term land use commitment such as forestry unless a State-private insurance scheme is introduced to offset future losses caused by storms and other natural disasters. A State-private insurance scheme is supported by COFORD, the Government’s forestry advisory body, which recommends “a Government-funded insurance scheme to provide confidence and underpin the sector”.

Many forests damaged during the recent storms still provide excellent revenue as the salvaged material at roadside has the same value as a non-windblow harvest. However serious losses will occur, especially in younger plantations where most of the timber is in the low value pulpwood category. Revenue from this material may not even cover the replanting costs.

Severe financial hardship could have been avoided if a State-private forest insurance scheme was introduced, as it is virtually impossible to insure a forest against disasters such as windthrow and disease attack. Until an insurance scheme is introduced, the Department of Agriculture needs to fund a storm damage reconstitution scheme to ensure damaged crops are replaced.

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Since 2014, there have been seven storms classed as “violent” or “hurricane-force” by Met Éireann... Damage caused by storm Éowyn is catastrophic as it is 12 times greater than Darragh both in area and volume of timber





George Cunningham with the Coolderry Central School sixth class with their potted plant. A lovely ash was planted in the grounds by the class. George Cunningham was the founding principal at Coolderry Central School.

Crann embraces National Diversity Day

George Cunningham flew the Crann flag for National Diversity Day in the Roscrea area again this year.

Every year he engages with two schools, his old school Coolderry Central School, located between Birr and Roscrea, and Sacred Heart Primary in Roscrea town.

In each school every sixth class pupil receives a potted tree or plant and a memorial tree is planted in honour of that sixth class.

Relevant books are also presented to each school library. In Dimma's Books in St Vincent de Paul, Roscrea there are many special bargains with environmental books on display.

Also, a special event was held in Cloughjordan Church of Ireland Primary School. The school was enrolled as special members of Crann and received a lovely cert to that effect.

In addition, each family was presented with a copy of the most recent *Crann* magazine.



Above: The pupils and teachers of Cloughjordan Church of Ireland Primary School proudly display their Crann magazines. Below: Sixth class at Sacred Heart Primary, Roscrea planting their memorial tree.



Arboreal musings

Ella McSweeney

To begin our new series where various people talk about why they fell in love with trees, journalist and RTÉ presenter Ella McSweeney talks about why Scots Pines, hawthorns and sycamores have a special place in her heart



‘I’m fortunate to have a garden, where the trees feel like part of the family’

The trees I feel most connected to are naturally the ones I encounter daily. It’s a privilege to live in a part of Dublin where old trees are often left standing, and new ones are regularly added to the landscape. I’m also fortunate to have a garden, where the trees feel like part of the family.

A few years back, I transformed a semi-shaded patch of the garden into a small woodland, packed with around 45 native

trees. The soil has flourished, and the area has become a haven for birds, moths, and butterflies – a pocket of wilderness in the middle of urban Dublin. Walking through this dense little wood, the air feels cooler and fresher.

It’s a privilege I wish everyone could experience in their own neighbourhood. No matter their size, woodlands are fascinating, calming, and beautiful. My next plan is to introduce some nut trees into the mix.

This is why I pine for Scots

I’m continually impressed by the grey willow, which draws in insects and birds effortlessly. But I’m especially fond of the Scots pine (*pictured*) – a tall, charismatic tree. I have a few in my garden that originally came from the Burren, and they’ve clearly thrived in their new home, growing with remarkable speed and vigour.



Why the hawthorn feels like a ‘spirited teenager’ to me

Like many people, I’m always struck by the grandeur of the oak (*right*) – its distinctive, curved leaves, its powerful upward and outward growth, and the way it naturally draws your eye and commands attention.

But I’ve always had a soft spot for our native hawthorn (*above*), especially for the show it puts on in early summer. As John McGahern described, it “foams into streams of blossom each May and June.”

If the oak is the wise elder among trees, the hawthorn feels like the spirited teenager, full of life and vitality.





Donegal sycamore with roots in the bloody Somme

Over the years, I've found that planting new trees brings a deep sense of hope and optimism – a simple but meaningful act for the future. Every time I do it, I feel uplifted.

I recently made an RTÉ radio documentary about people who decide to plant trees; the emotion behind their stories was remarkable. One particularly moving story was about a young 18-year-old boy called John McGowan who came from Gortahork, overlooking Tory Island in Donegal.

In 1914 he went to serve in the British Army in the First World War, and before he left, he planted a sycamore sapling into the ground beside the house so his family

would never forget him. No doubt he feared he would never return. He was killed in the Somme on August 2nd, 1916.

In 2013, the local TD Dinny McGinley brought a branch from the tree and placed it on John's grave in France. Dinny said this while he was standing at the grave: "I bring you greetings from your nephew Paddy, who is now 90 years of age, they never forgot you."

"Paddy told me to tell you that the tree you planted the morning before you left is in full bloom; it is one of the finest trees in the Gortahork area. I am falling down on my two knees now and bringing you a branch of your own sycamore tree".

What I would do to nurture Ireland's love of trees...

Trees offer us tangible benefits: timber, carbon capture, flood control, and shade. But we might also value the intangible gifts they offer – the sense of peace, belonging, and hope they inspire, and their power to ease loneliness. Trees have their own identity, their own right to exist.

If I could champion two actions, it would be this: first, to launch a nationwide urban tree-planting initiative with children and young people from inner-city areas at the centre of it.

Second, we should greatly expand the use of tree preservation orders to better protect them and treat any decision to cut them down with the seriousness it deserves. If a tree must be removed, it should be done with full awareness and care.





It's Easy Treesie to plant hope

From Peace Poles to Whomping Willows, peace can take root very easily. **Orla Farrell** introduces Easy Treesie's summer log

Cycling out to Santa Sabina Dominican College in Sutton with a lollipop willow tree, a Scots pine and a big yellow spade can be hot work, even with a sea-breeze tailwind. So, the sight of an ice-cream van giving out '99s' at the school front door was a very welcome one.

While chocolate is an essential element of our planting parties, ice cream isn't – but in this golden week as the summer term begins, it was the perfect treat to take the chance for a little rest sitting on the grass. I joined the schoolgirls with my companions under a cherry tree and admired a hazy blue sea across Dublin Bay.

Tree planting isn't typically considered a warm-weather activity, but today we are planting a Peace Pole and presenting two final trees to round off a three-year project at this school on Dublin's sandy coastline. We always mix tree planting with 'tree-ts'; tomorrow is May Day, and this week we've been busy marking seasonal milestones. As we sat licking our cones, I chatted with Evelyn Cockburn, an old teaching college friend about peace – and what we can do about it.

"When things go pear-shaped," Evelyn said, "we have a tendency in Ireland to turn to W. B. Yeats for wisdom." And yes, we do love pears on our project – my son once sponsored three pear trees for a school planting on the condition that he could make schnapps from

the fruit. Evelyn searched her phone and read aloud two quotes I hadn't heard before:

"Happiness is neither virtue nor pleasure nor this thing nor that, but simply growth. We are happy when we are growing."

That's certainly true of all who join our tree planting efforts – we're thrilled to have now surpassed 650,000 trees planted with our Easy Treesie – Crann Project.

The second quote?

"Do not wait to strike till the iron is hot; but make it hot by striking."

A fine motto to go alongside our global one: "Stop Talking, Start Planting."

Children love planting trees – they want to plant more and more.



Main: Planting the seeds of peace at Santa Sabina Dominican College in Sutton.

Picture by Aidan Li

Right: Santa Sabina, Sutton students accepting willow, Scots Pine and the Raheny Rotary Peace Pole; and leaders of seven religions received tree gifts at the All Hallows' Rotary Peace Conference



While we wait for the perfect climate action plan, the ideal budget or flawless weather, we just dig another hole and keep going. Our goal is not for Ireland's children to solve the climate crisis single handedly, but to highlight it and inspire action.

So why was I cycling to school with trees, while our electric car – the 'Leaf' – sat fully charged at home by our solar PV panels? Because being the change we want to see is noticed. Trees can't sort climate change by themselves. Pope Francis showed us what it means to practise what we preach. As we welcome Pope Leo XIV with renewed hope, do you know if your parish or community engaged in tree planting yet?

It was an honour this spring to present saplings and tree certificates to seven representatives of different faiths at the Rotary Peace Conference in All Hallows. All religions welcome trees. Working with Trócaire, Easy Treesie shared resources to help parishes respond to the 'Laudato Si' encyclical's call to action to all humanity: "Responding to the Cry of the Earth". Stop waiting; start planting; now is the perfect time to organise a symbolic tree planting in your own parish or community.

I'm proud to serve as environmental officer for our local Rotary Club, a global organisation whose past efforts include polio vaccinations, disaster relief shelter kits, and one of my favourites – funding peace studies. As a

conversation starter, Rotarians often donate a 'Peace Pole', similar to a totem pole, for planting in suitable places. Wherever they get planted, Easy Treesie supplies a Peace Tree too.

At Santa Sabina, students gathered at the school entrance to enjoy the sunshine, read poetry, pray, and remember the late Pope Francis's call to action during the Peace Pole dedication. At nearby St Paul's College in Raheny, in a similar project, we planted another 100 trees with the boys to mark the school's 75th anniversary – some extras were planted just to be sure we'd have 75 survivors.

This project was supported by Rotary and we presented another Peace Pole to their principal teacher for their college entrance. The college playing fields adjoin the avenue at Dublin City Council's magnificent St Anne's Park, where ancient Scots pines and Holm oaks have been battered by recent storms. In fact, this broad walk leads down to another

special Peace Tree, planted with local school children and others in 2017 in an initiative led by our official Easy Treesie poet, Anto Kerins that year. The Norwegian and Israeli ambassadors were involved. It felt good to add to this evergreen belt, bringing shelter for my Saturday walks with my friends and maybe a grandchild in a buggy, for all the athletes and spectators for years to come.

Why are we bringing willow, though, to Sutton – doesn't it like lots of space? Well, some saplings planted last year didn't survive. Some were trimmed inadvertently, hiding as they were in long vegetation, and some succumbed to weedkiller. (Note Bene; weed trampling usually fixes these issues). The school plans to propagate replacements from locally growing native willow, poplar, and elder. This fun 'lollipop' variety will add to the resilience of the new planting and will itself be a tree nursery by next winter. These species are easy to identify now in their full spring splendour.

If you've lost trees, like in Sutton and west Wicklow through various mishaps (see page 16), why not join our 'Plant a Whomping Willow' initiative this season? Or visit your local nursery – may we suggest copying Bloomin' Crumlin and Baldoyle Wild Towns – and purchase fruit trees like our native crab apple for a treat for both people and nature.

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Our goal is not for Ireland's children to solve the climate crisis single handedly, but to highlight it and inspire action

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Continued from page 15



Left: Students of Mitchelstown Boys' Primary School planting trees and shrubs along the entrance roadway to their school. Above: Jeffrey, Eva and Darren Bermingham, in Rathdangan, West Wicklow Reforestation Project

West Wicklow tree losses and the 'Whomping Willow' Project

There was incredible community commitment during National Tree Week, writes Orla Farrell

Join our replanting campaign to replace storm-damaged trees. Our fast-growing willow (we have four native species), elder, and poplar are excellent for propagation from a cutting. Local nurseries can also supply fruit and nut trees suited to your soil and space.

The GAA has also been fantastic this season. At Grange, Carlow, we helped plant a protective hedgerow near the club grounds, extending council efforts. The local calves came over to inspect our work and seemed pleased. Of course they were; hedgerows offer shelter and foraging for livestock and people alike, say the agri-foresters. At Grangecon, the project had a rather curious supervisor – a neighbouring emu.

Children of all ages got involved this

season. At Easter, I visited my cousin's garden where her husband, Drew, showed me the plum tree he planted the very day his daughter was born. (He also planted their first Christmas tree – now a proud evergreen beside the garden shed.) If you think your own bit of tree planting is too small to matter, join our monthly Plant-for-the-Planet conversations online to see how small actions are building big momentum worldwide as part of the world trillion tree campaign during this UN decade on Ecosystem Restoration.

From Ongar Tidy Towns, planting by torchlight, to St Mary's Secondary School Baldoyle, doing infill planting with Fingal County Council and the Wells Fargo team, we saw incredible community commitment during National Tree Week. Some highlights were touring the St Laurence NS Climate Art Exhibition at Seagrang Park and dancing a céili with the ETB Cathal Brughá Ecology Class and their fine collie dog before our planting in Dublin City Council's Memorial

Garden. It has become a peaceful garden, boasting a new holly shelterbelt, a peaceful haven for students at the very site of the WW2 bombing of the North Strand.

Portmarnock Community School added to their shelterbelt on the day of their Green Schools Assessment – we know the 'cigire' was impressed. At Le Chéile Donneycarney, the Prosper Fingal Green Team called on locals to collect a tree and map their impact. In Rush and Skerries, early Easter chocolate and tree consignment top-ups helped supplement shortfalls of energy and saplings by these highly qualified planters. The Retired Teachers' Organisation, ever efficient, took trees for their home areas after a scenic hike along the new Dublin Port Greenway. Stephen Pendle and our own Crann chairman Peadar Collins got 1,000 trees to local Cork schools near Mitchelstown. And the Crann team's expert turnout at Belvedere House wrapped up what we're calling our most engaging National Tree Week ever.



Go greener with Grangecon: West Wicklow reforestation update

Jennifer Page on the birth and growth of the Go Greener with Grangecon initiative

The seed for the West Wicklow Reforestation Project group was sown in March, 2020. As a community environmental group focussing mainly on waste prevention, we hadn't previously been involved in biodiversity projects. Our tiny village, Grangecon, boasts a very active Tidy Towns organisation that took on any tree planting events in the village. National Tree Week was coming up and our group had been offered a bundle of native tree saplings from Wicklow County Council should we wish to hold a tree planting event. We declined the offer, knowing that Grangecon Tidy Towns would be availing of it.

Then, of course, everything changed with the arrival of the Corona Virus. All events were cancelled, including National Tree Week which was to take place from March 21. It was upsetting to think that all the trees that had been offered might now have nowhere to go but this led to a little idea. One of our group members contacted the council and asked if we could still accept our allotted number of trees. A few days later, a mixed bundle of 37 native trees – rowan, alder, oak, and birch – arrived at her doorstep. We used our social media pages to announce our 'Social Distance Tree Planting Event' and invited community members to request a tree to be planted in their gardens. All of the available trees were requested, and each one was delivered to the doorway or gate of each participant. Tree planters were asked to send a photograph of themselves planting their tree, and a video was circulated on social media to showcase the event.

As a result of the traction gained from our video, we were contacted by Steven Doody who volunteers for the Easy Treesie Project, led by Orla Farrell. The aim of this project is to plant one million trees for Ireland's one million school children, with native woodland and hedgerow trees provided by Coillte, Trees on the Land and other nurseries, and in partnership with Crann – Trees for Ireland. Steven asked if we would like to be involved in the project by encouraging more tree planting in our community, and we were delighted to participate. As a result, we took a delivery of



Charlotte and Sam Glynn from Stratford Lodge School, Baltinglass – Going Greener with Grangecon

3,700 trees in March, 2021, all by request from tree planters in and around the Grangecon area. The following year, and with additional support from tree planting group, Reforest Nation, we decided to go a step further and introduced the West Wicklow Reforestation Project which encourages landowners in the area to put aside small plots of land to reforest for the future. That year, we had requests for 9,000 native tree saplings, and that number has grown each year since. We have continued to work with Easy Treesie every year and are incredibly proud to have facilitated the planting of more than 35,000 native tree saplings in West Wicklow over five years.

We are fortunate to live in a community of tree lovers here in Grangecon and the wider area of west Wicklow. We see a great appreciation and respect for all forms of wildlife and nature here, and a desire to protect our environment for future generations. Even so, it has not all been smooth sailing and we (and our tree planters)

have had to learn some hard lessons in the world of tree planting and ongoing care. It is a given that not all saplings will survive, but it is hard not to have a strong feeling of responsibility when we are handing over these vulnerable, young treasures to their fosterers. We can't always guarantee that our tree planters, even with the best of intentions, will give the saplings the care and protection they need, whether from weather conditions, competing plants, or animals looking for a chew. On occasion, when we have followed up with a tree planter, we have been disappointed to hear that many of their trees have not survived, whether it be due to over-exposure to the elements or a flock of sheep with the munchies. But we are heartened by many more reports of trees thriving, and we especially enjoy receiving photographs of the saplings as they mature each year.

There is work involved in collecting expressions of interest in our project each year, and distributing the trees when they arrive, but this is the most enjoyable and rewarding of work. Knowing that we are helping groups like Easy Treesie and Reforest Nation to provide a greener, healthier future for the children of Ireland, is a source of immeasurable satisfaction and pride. And it all started with the seed of an idea, and 37 homeless trees during a pandemic.

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The aim of this project is to plant one million trees for Ireland's one million school children



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The Balcony Project

This inspiring collaboration with the Project Arts Centre in Temple Bar – “the city’s most interesting venue,” according to Lonely Planet - featured handcrafted tree planters on wheels which brought nature into the heart of the city. On the greenest Saturdays of the year, March 15th and 22nd, we joined artists Louis Haugh and Steven Doody on the street to give out saplings. Our youngest helper, aged 11, braved the chill with the help of some superior hot chocolate and urged our visitors not to be afraid to take a tree – “these saplings thrive in pots, balconies, and small gardens.” Meanwhile, the exhortation from our giant billboard read: “Let’s hide a forest in plain sight”.

We’ve also been in Dublin Castle, invited to host a session at the Dublin Book Festival. Artist Evelyn Murphy lent us some Harry Potter robes to support our ‘Plant an Elder Wand’ initiative, which also made an appearance at Google Giving Day alongside stalls, speeches, and performance art. A generous donation followed, after earlier tree maintenance outings at Stonebridge.

Whether you have a balcony or a back garden, a school or a parish, now’s the time to get planting. Each tree planted is a vote for peace, for shelter, and for hope.



Above: Orla Farrell with volunteer Evelyn Murphy lining out for the Dublin Book Festival Plant an Elder Wand Workshop.

Right: A big shout-out for Katrin’s Team, Google Docks’ star supporters! And thank you for the mulching too



What they’re saying about Easy Treesie

“Thank you Orla for visiting St Joseph’s yesterday. The children had a wonderful time and went up to water and inspect their trees today to see if they had grown. In an urban DEIS area, nature deprivation is a reality for many of our children and it is vital for us to recognise the importance of a child’s learning being shaped and nurtured by their physical environment and by planting trees, the children gain a deeper understanding of their own surroundings and develop a love of nature. Thank you again for everything.”

Rachel Dowling, St Joseph’s Junior National School, Ballymun.

“The Okta team recently had the immense pleasure of partnering with Crann – Trees for Ireland for a truly impactful Earth Month initiative at Shankill Park with Easy Treesie. It was a deeply rewarding experience for our team to actively contribute to Crann’s

inspiring mission of planting a million trees with a million schoolchildren across Ireland.

“Our team not only got their hands in the soil, learning firsthand about the importance of native trees, but we were also proud to make a donation of 50 trees to support this vital cause. This commitment was further amplified by our EMEA circle, who generously matched our donation with another 50 trees to be planted in the autumn.

“What made this day even more special was the incredible diversity of our participating ‘Okta’ team, representing nations across EMEA and beyond, including Ireland, Spain, Wales, the Netherlands, France, Switzerland, California, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Italy. This truly highlighted the universal desire to contribute to a greener future.

“Being out in nature, enjoying the therapeutic benefits of the fresh air and sunshine alongside the dedicated Easy

Treesie – Crann and Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council team, was a fantastic experience. We left the Park feeling a profound sense of connection to the land and a deep appreciation for the crucial work Crann does.

“Okta is honoured to support Crann’s vision and looks forward to continuing our partnership in the autumn, helping the young trees thrive and further contributing to a greener Ireland for generations to come.

“We wholeheartedly encourage other organizations and individuals to support Crann’s invaluable efforts.”

Irma Varivoda, Dublin Site Manager at Okta

“Thank you for including us in your Easy Treesie initiative and for your energy and passion for making our communities greener and healthier for all to enjoy. It was great



Go raibh maith agaibh – a heartfelt thank you!

We are deeply grateful to all our incredible supporters and volunteers. Special thanks to Crann and to the Tree Council of Ireland, to our tree growing partners especially Coillte Nurseries, to the dedicated teams at Google, Wells Fargo, Kelsius, Raheny Rotary, Maxol Greenprint, Okta and WP Engine, for Dublin City Local Enterprise Office, our many tree planting local authorities, and the many friends who help us grow this movement.

You'll find a full list of our wonderful supporters on our website, <https://easytreesie.com/>. If you'd like to support our work, you can make a donation at <https://buy.stripe.com/bIYal4cDMcPV7p6144>, and we'd love to hear from you at orla@easytreesie.com.



Take care of each other: two proud owners of new tree groves for their gardens. Picture by Louis Haugh

to feel that we were all part of something bigger, making a small difference one tree at a time!"

Alan McKenna (Okta)

"The rapid advance of climate change is a compelling reason to get involved with organisations like Crann and Easy Treesie. In fact, I was with Orla when she decided to start this initiative. It has inspired many others to volunteer and companies to allow their employees to donate time to planting and maintaining trees – one of the methods of reducing CO2 and increasing O2 to help our life-support system to continue to allow us to remain alive."

Evelyn Murphy, volunteer with Easy Treesie, an Artist with a background in Meteorology, Climatology and Oceanography and the first woman weather forecaster on RTÉ



PHOTOGRAPHIC COMPETITION 2025

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 15, 2025

Digital entries should be emailed to CrannCoillte2025@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 three 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. You may be requested to supply the images in high resolution eps/jpeg format for this purpose.
- ◆ 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 CrannCoillte2025@gmail.com, with the words 'Phone camera' entered in the subject line.

The winner will receive a special prize of €50.

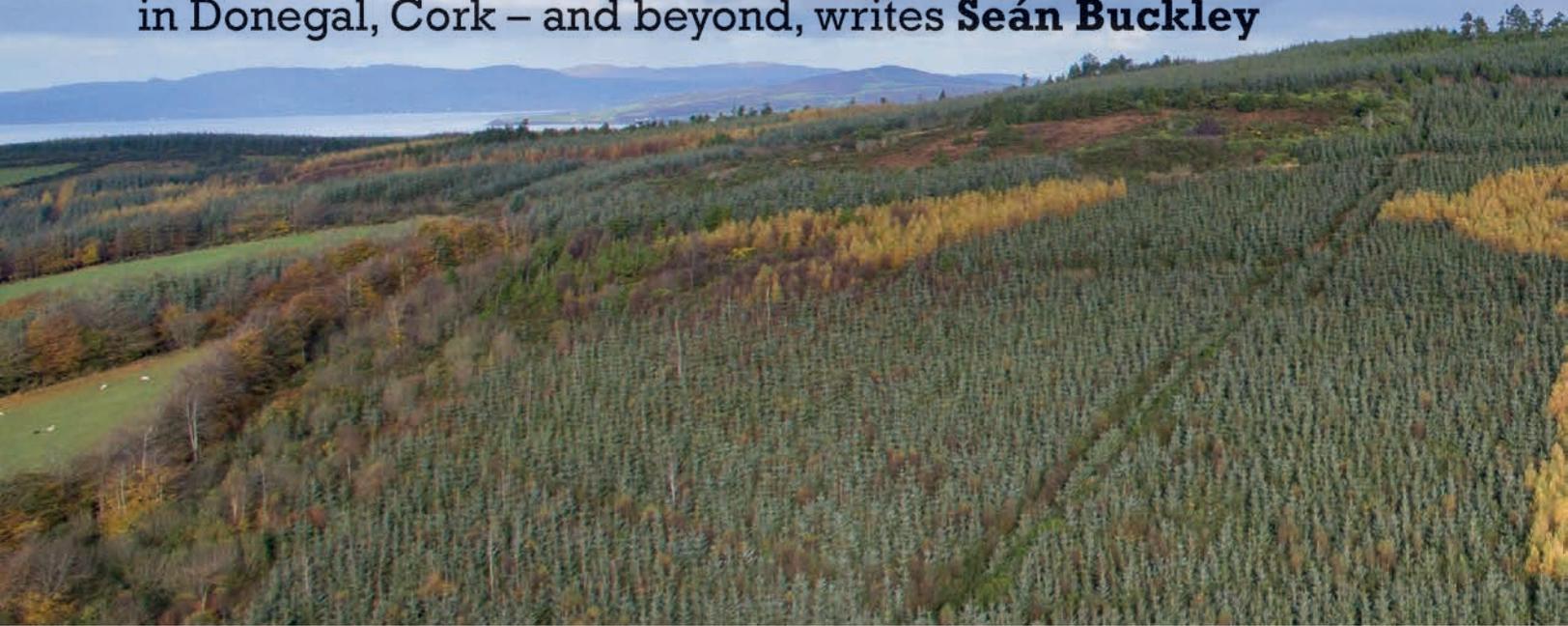
CALENDAR

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



The man who ‘cr

Liam Emery leaves a truly breathtaking legacy for his family in Donegal, Cork – and beyond, writes **Seán Buckley**



On a south-facing Donegal hillside that overlooks the Derry border stands a forest unlike any other planted in the last 40 years.

For although the forest appears similar to the hundreds and thousands of commercial plantations dotted around the country, this wood had a very special secret – and one that its creator, sadly, never lived to see reach maturity.

Liam Emery’s love of forestry had taken the Cork native from the country’s southern ‘capital’ to the opposite end of the island for his work with Coillte.

However, he was to leave his mark on his adopted northern home; and a mark that continues to hit the headlines nearly a decade-and-a-half after it was ‘discovered’.

For in the middle of the forest overlooking the historic Lough Ui Lappan, or the modern day Portlough, Liam laid out and planted a giant Celtic Cross.

His creation is best seen from the air, and comes into its own in the back end of the year when the autumnal golden yellow of the Japanese larch – that makes up the Celtic cross – stands in sharp contrast to the evergreen spruce of the forest.

Then the great Emery Celtic Cross can be seen in all its splendour, and all its glory.

Measuring approximately 125 metres by 70

metres, the cross took 3,000 trees to create and is etched on the side of Bogay Hill at Killea outside Newtowncunningham, at the northern end of Donegal’s Lagan Valley.

That the cross is expertly proportioned on the ground, despite its size, and the difficulty of the terrain in which it was created, is testament to the imagination, foresight, planning and skill of Liam as a forester – and, arguably, as an artist.

Only a handful of people had any idea that Liam had something special planted on Bogay Hill, but no one was sure exactly what the secret entailed.

“I am in a position to make a statement, but if I tell the powers that be [in Coillte], I’m

afraid they won’t allow it,” Liam told his wife Norma back in 2003 or 2004 when Bogay Hill was being planted.

“Then don’t tell them”, was Norma’s simple advice.

Norma recalls Liam drawing the design at the dining room table over the following few evenings but she never realised the significance of what he was doing.

Liam’s sister Bernie also remembers her brother saying that there was a “secret to be revealed” in a plantation in Donegal. However, she was unaware what the secret was until it was spotted by passengers on a plane coming in to land in City of Derry Airport almost a decade later.

The Emery Celtic Cross immediately became a media phenomenon and attracted attention on both sides of the Border and across the world.

Unfortunately, Liam Emery did not live to see the fruits of his labour.

Liam had battled back from a serious injury suffered in a canoeing accident during the Liffey Descent in September 2008. However, he sadly passed away while hill walking almost two years later. He was just 51 years of age.

Nobody knows for sure what motivated Liam to plant the Celtic Cross on Bogay Hill.

He was a very spiritual guy, his sister Bernie recalls.

Meanwhile, his fellow canoeist Colm McDaid maintains that the location chosen



Liam Emery with his sisters Mary, Eileen and Bernie

'crossed' the forest



Left: Liam Emery with his wife Norma and their children Niamh and Declan

Above: the spectacular legacy he has left them

for the cross suggested a cultural and historical motivation.

It is sited on a hill adjacent to the historic Grianán of Aileach, Colm claims, “to symbolise the important historical significance of this area of east Donegal, and the important part trees and nature have played in the evolution of Ireland, and to hopefully continue this link between nature and our history for future generations to enjoy”.

The outdoors and sport were certainly an important part of Liam’s life. Given that both Liam and Norma hailed from the adjacent Cork city districts of Togher and Ballyphehane, it was inevitable that hurling was in the blood.

And Liam brought that north with him, ensuring that hurling was part of the mix when he helped establish Letterkenny Gaels GAA

club. Indeed, he had also taken to making hurleys before he died, Norma says.

“Liam first and foremost was a Cork man and very proud of that. He was the youngest of four, he had three sisters. He had great love of nature and was passionate about the environment and the importance of keeping it right for the next generation,” Norma says.

“

Liam’s sister Bernie also remembers her brother saying that there was a “secret to be revealed” in a plantation in Donegal

“He was a very kind and gentle person, who always took a genuine interest in our lives and the life of his family and friends. He was passionate about his work and a great teacher to those who were willing to listen,” she adds.

“And Liam was the kind of man who, if he took on a project, would give it 100%, and that can be seen with the results of the cross,” Norma points out.

Whatever his motivation was for constructing the cross, there is no doubt but that Liam Emery has left a fantastic gift for his family and the people of Donegal to enjoy.

“He has left us a wonderful piece of heritage, and something to be treasured,” Bernie says.

It is something the Emery family are immensely proud of, Norma admits in her own modest way.

“Last year was my first time seeing it from the air; I was on a flight back into Derry after visiting Niamh [their daughter] in Glasgow. And I kind of wanted to shout out that my husband did that,” she tells *Crann*.

Norma says it was a beautiful legacy for Liam’s two children Niamh and Declan, and for their two grandsons.

“It is absolutely amazing what Liam has left for his children and grandchildren.”

And Liam’s gift will keep on giving, as it is estimated that the cross will be visible at different times of the year for the next six or seven decades.



Left: Plastic deer tubes at Trooperstown adjacent to a stream unplanted setback area. Note: nearby conifer regeneration is due for removal at some point.

Picture by Trevor Seery



Regenerating diverse woods

Is ‘climate resilient reforestation’ a pilot measure that’s tried, tested and good to go, asks **Joe Gowran**

As this was to be my first article for the *Crann* magazine, I was intending to include a biographical note on how being selected to be a participant on the Crann/AnCO (FÁS) Woodland Management Certificate one-year training course in 1987/88, had set me on my current career trajectory. The innovative course was also run in 1986/87.

Committing wholeheartedly to Jan Alexander’s original mission of ‘Releafing Ireland with Broadleaved Trees’ was made easier through the grounding in the basic technical skills I, along with 12 other trainees, received from our chief instructor Tom Hobson at the Killegar Estate in Co Leitrim. But what happened workwise in the following decade or so, is for another day.

Fast-forward to 1996 and the appointment of the late Freda Rowntree – former Crann chair – as chair of the Heritage Council by our current President Michael D. Higgins (patron of Crann) was also crucially important. Her facilitating a gathering of stakeholders led to the formation of Woodlands of Ireland in 1998 and the rolling out of the People’s Millennium Forest Project two years later.

Most importantly, in my view, was the emergence of the Native Woodland Scheme measures in 2001 as a result of the stakeholder

collaboration with the Forest Service of the Department of Agriculture, the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) and the Heritage Council. The decision around 1999 by Diarmuid McAree, then the Forest Service’s chief inspector, to set Kevin Collins the task of producing a workable scheme – in conjunction with a Woodlands of Ireland steering committee and an internal Department of Agriculture group – facilitated significant change in Irish forestry from that period.

This change included grant aid, through the Native Woodland Conservation measure, for the restocking of conifer sites after clear-fell with native tree species of indigenous genetic stock. There are many early examples of this in the 2001 to 2008 period, with several

in Wicklow for example at Deputy’s Pass, Trooperstown, Derrybawn and Glenmacnass. These were a mix of Coillte, NPWS and privately-owned sites.

Many of these sites had been ‘ancient’ or ‘long established woodland’ prior to being converted to conifer crops, as indicated on old maps and surveys. Potential remnant seed sources remained in patches or in adjacent compartments.

In most cases, deer fencing was employed after the conifer timber harvest was complete and consequently the disturbed ground provided ideal conditions for a surge of mixed species natural regeneration that can be seen at thicket stage on these sites today. The other option for protecting planting stock in this



A woodland craft scene at the Woodland Festival at Killegar Estate in 2019, organised by Western Forestry Co-op, with the late Brian Rogers, thatcher (Crann founder member and course participant 1986) on the far left, charcoal-maker Wesley Seery on the right, and hurdle-maker Joe Gowran in the centre.

Photo courtesy: Killegar House





Derrybawn natural regeneration from remnant potential ancient woodland stock.

Picture by Joe Gowran

situation is the use of deer guards/tubes of plastic or metal mesh as illustrated in the image on the left from the Coillte site in Trooperstown.

A 2021 assessment of applications approved for Native Woodland Scheme (NWS) grant aid indicated that the majority of the applications were for the reforestation of conifer sites with native species. In most cases the restock with native species was near watercourses to create or strengthen buffers. This assessment process informed a Woodlands of Ireland discussion document which reviewed the form and function of the Native Woodland Scheme's (NWS) conservation measures. The lessons learned from the review are reflected in two of the three current Department of Agriculture Climate Resilient Reforestation (CRR) Scheme measures and more recently an additional Continuous Cover Forestry (CCF) measure where non-native species can be included in the development of mixed species stands for timber production. Therefore, for the most part, the piloting of this measure had already taken place prior to the current forestry programme.

In fact, as early as May 1996 forester Michael Doyle was flagging up the potential of natural regeneration. In a presentation to a Muintir na Coille Conference in Mountshannon, Co Clare – which had as its theme ‘The Potential for Broadleaved

Woodland Management in Ireland’ – Michael illustrated that an area of predominantly birch natural regeneration on a former Sitka spruce site could possibly yield a higher financial return than Douglas fir (using the Net Discount Revenue valuation method), given that there were no replanting costs, fertiliser input, early maintenance or fencing requirements. He based this contention on what he observed adjacent to his childhood home at Deputy's Pass. The same stand continues to be managed in a CCF silviculture system today.

No counter arguments against Michael's assessment were made at the time, or since to my knowledge, and consequently the fate and status of birch changed, it seemed to me, almost overnight. Up to that point – which coincided with Ireland's ratification of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (UNCBD) that year – the criteria for grant aiding work on semi-natural woodland under the Department

of Agriculture's main forestry scheme, known as ‘Scrub clearance/Afforestation’, included grubbing out or chemically killing off all of the non-commercial native species present on a site before restocking with Sitka spruce, beech, sycamore or occasionally oak. This requirement had increasingly contradicted commitments made by the State when it signed up to the UNCBD in 1992.

By 1998, seed collection for the Teagasc Birch Improvement Trials had begun, yielding the good quality planting stock produced by Irish tree nurseries that we have become accustomed to for many years now.

The CRR scheme launched in July 2024 should be made readily accessible by the Department of Agriculture as a choice to those whose conifer crops have suffered significant storm damage and windthrow recently. During the month of April 2025, eight of the first CRR applications had been approved for a total of 50 hectares, according to the Department of Agriculture's weekly Forestry Licensing Dashboard. A recent reply to an Access to Information on the Environment request to Department of Agriculture indicated that there are about 30 CRR applications in the system currently.

If even 10% of the c.24,000 hectares of forestry which was severely damaged by storms Darragh and Éowyn was restocked using these measures in the next three years, then the current target of 200 hectares per annum for the ‘pilot’ scheme would need to be adjusted upwards to facilitate the necessary shift to more CCF and protective tree cover in river catchments. The 12-hectare limit per application for the CRR scheme may be too little in some cases also.

Given the massive underspend in the afforestation budget for many years, it should be possible to make the case for increased spending on this measure, particularly when the CRR scheme can contribute to Water Framework Directive targets for 2027. Moreover, the scheme will help in meeting the challenging EU Nature Restoration Law targets for both oak and wet woodland re-establishment which come into play from next year.

Joe Gowran is CEO, Woodlands of Ireland

INFORMATION BOX

If you have any queries about any of the details in this article, please contact the author at joegowran@woodlandsofireland.com.

For more information on the CRR scheme please visit:

<https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-agriculture-food-and-the-marine/services/climate-resilient-reforestation-pilot-scheme/>

For more information on the work of the Woodlands of Ireland please visit:

<https://www.woodlandsofireland.com>





Left: Eoin Donnelly stacking the kiln; right, the hazlewood 'cooking' process; above right, the final contents of the kiln; and far right, the charcoal ready for bagging



Does an active weekend with a difference interest you? Then a trip to Tomcoyle Woods near Aughrim, Co Wicklow for an immersive weekend retreat learning traditional charcoal making and woodland crafts may be just the business.

The retreat, which is led by master woodwright Eoin Donnelly, offers hands-on practical workshops, insightful talks, wild and homegrown meals and the opportunity to explore and unwind in an ancient oak and hazel woodland.

Each participant will take home their own bag of charcoal and the items they have crafted over the weekend, with the three-day event – which takes place from Friday, July 4 to Sunday, July 6 – promising a unique blend of learning, crafting and relaxation.

Tomcoyle Woods is an ancient oak and hazel woodland which offers the perfect setting to reconnect with Ireland's rich forestry heritage. Traditional charcoal making in Ireland is an ancient craft that involves converting wood into charcoal through a process known as pyrolysis.

Eoin Donnelly is an expert in the process and will use hazel that he coppiced in the same woodland.

The process begins with stacking the hazel inside a large metal kiln in layers. The kiln is then sealed, and a controlled fire is started. The fire is carefully managed over the next 24

A weekend with a difference in Wicklow

Master woodwright Eoin Donnelly offers hands-on practical workshops and the chance to unwind in an ancient oak and hazel woodland, says **Siobhán Moloney**



Mullingar tree planting project hits new heights

The benefits of an ambitious plan to plant 3,000 trees to create a green belt across Mullingar will be felt for generations to come.

That's according to the chair of the local Tidy Towns committee, Bill Collentine, which has joined forces with Crann and Coillte for the three-year project.

The Mullingar Great Tree Planting Project has been well received locally, with trees planted in several estates and green spaces around the town.

"It is great to see trees being sown again. A lot of trees fell during Storm Eowyn. One good thing to come from that is that it has made many people more aware of the importance of trees," Bill said at a recent tree planting event in the Bellview Heights estate.

"People appreciate what is happening here, in Mullingar, and across the country. They also realise that we need to sow trees, especially for the future generations," he added.

Oak saplings were planted in Bellview Heights recently on the same plot of land that is home to some of Mullingar's oldest

trees – which it is believed could be almost 250 years old.

Crann's PJ Fitzpatrick, who is playing a central role in the project, says that initiatives like the Mullingar Great Tree Planting Project are important for environmental and social reasons. In Bellview Heights, the new saplings will eventually replace the ancient oaks which dominate the skyline in this part of the town.

PJ believes that older oaks were part of the first large-scale tree planting project ever undertaken in Ireland.

"The RDS gave out trees between 1766 and 1803, and I think some of these trees were planted then. If that is the case, then we have something unique here," he said.

This is the third round of tree planting by Mullingar Tidy Towns in Bellview Heights in the space of a year.

The most recent round occurred just before Easter, and some of the children in the estate were on hand to learn about the importance of trees from PJ and his fellow Crann member James Lowry, who is also a member of the Bellview Heights Residents Association.



hours to maintain high temperatures without introducing too much oxygen. This controlled environment allows the wood to slowly cook and release volatile gases, leaving behind carbon-rich charcoal.

The kiln's design includes air vents which enable Eoin to regulate airflow and temperature over a 24-hour period. Once the process is finished, the kiln is cooled, and the charcoal will be harvested.

While charcoal was used historically for metalworking and blacksmithing, it is now very popular amongst BBQ enthusiasts. It has a cleaner burn compared to mass produced charcoal and offers a natural flavour to the food. It is a sustainable wood product and is also steeped in tradition and craftsmanship.

Other woodland crafts demonstrated over the weekend include a choice of working on a traditional pole lathe or whittling an item of choice, such as a spoon or other utensil. There will also be an opportunity to cleave hazel rods and help construct a traditional wattle hurdle.

Introduction to Traditional Charcoal Making and Woodland Crafts

With Eoin Donnelly, Woodwright

Tomcoyle Woods, Aughrim,
Co Wicklow

July 4-6, 2025

Further details at:

<https://www.eventbrite.ie/e/134359350734?aff=oddtcreator>



James Lowry (left) and PJ Fitzpatrick speaking to some of Bellview Heights' youngest residents about the importance of trees.





Above: offerings to the Tuatha Dé Danann, and copper triskeles on hazel roots.
 Right: Deirdre Hannon's garden, Hazel Triskele. Inset below right: Deirdre at the Birr Castle gardens

Hazel triskele: A walking meditation for the peace and unity of Ireland



There are now 75 hazel triskeles across the country thanks to **Deirdre Hannon** and her deep reverence for the land

Since November 2020, I have been planting hazel trees in the form of the ancient Celtic triskele – an unbroken, three spiraled line symbolizing unity and the oneness of spirit. This motif, carved into the entrance stone of Newgrange over 5,000 years ago, guides my work: the hazel, Ireland's venerable native tree, embodies knowledge and peace.

My inspiration comes from the phrase: *"Peace on this land, on this Island, will come when Hazels are abundant once more – peace on all levels, peace of mind, peace and stillness within thy heart."*

Originally, I crafted copper triskeles for Ireland's wells and rivers. It soon struck me that the triskele pattern itself would make an ideal planting scheme for hazels.

Drawing on my background in design and pattern making, I constructed a 12m x 12m template from upcycled sheets and duvet covers. Divided into 12 squares, each of

which is 3m x 3m – so I could wash the fabric between plantings – I used it to shape each living triskele.

From November 2020 in the Red Hills of Co Kildare to my final planting in March 2021 at Coosan Point, Athlone, Co Westmeath, I completed one hazel triskele in each of Ireland's 32 counties.

Word spread, and now there are 75 hazel triskeles across the country. It has been an amazing journey travelling the highways and byways of Ireland, north, south, east and west. Planting on people's farms, in their front and back gardens, in a few schools and Birr Castle near the giant telescope.

Each triskele features 33 hazels – 11 per spiral – and a single birch tree at its centre. The birch representing new beginnings.

This land art project offers gratitude back to Éire and honours its sacred heritage. At each planting, seven offerings are made to the earth:

1. **Oats:** staple food of our ancestors;
2. **Bread and butter:** fat of the land;

3. **Milk:** cream of the land;
4. **Eggs:** fertility of the land;
5. **Hazelnuts:** abundance, peace, and health;
6. **Honey:** the sweetness of life;
7. **Whiskey:** enjoyment of life.

These gifts are dedicated to the Tuatha Dé Danann and our ancestors. I bring:

- ◆ The 12m x 12m triskele template;
- ◆ Sage to cleanse the land;
- ◆ Three copper Triskeles, placed beneath the central trio of trees;
- ◆ Tobacco, into which we blow our prayer for the peace and unity of Ireland before laying it on the soil.

Through living trees and ancient symbolism, this hazel triskele becomes a walking meditation – rooted in tradition, growing toward peace, and uniting us with the spirit of the land.

This project is my way of giving back to Éire – a labour of love and deep reverence for the land. As long as people want this on their land, I will continue to be of service.



Poetry Carmel Cunningham

A Tree

A tree stands tall, or sometimes twisted
And gnarled beyond reason,
Fully dressed or bare, it still has soul
No matter what the season.
In winter its bare branches
Show beauty of shape and frame.
In summer it has fresh new leaves
Of green or red or yellow,
Some pruned to look quite tame,
Though most grow unfettered free,
Their beauty unhidden
For those with hearts to see.

And if they are somnolent and undressed,
Their shape, bent, tortured and distressed,
Their once youthful energy, drooping and
mired,
Consider living things need slumber when
they're tired –
But yet they tell a tale of a life lived and
cast,
And keep still secret all that has elapsed.



April in Carlingford

The blackthorn flowers,
The whitethorn leaves burst open
With rapid eagerness,
The birch begins to slowly green
The willow catkins, intricately designed
Catch the eye
The dogwood leaves unfurl,
The ash flower so rich and beautiful
Waits to see how much more it should do
All getting ready for their summer fest.
Lambs frolic in the fields,
And suddenly the maple leafs,
The beech tree yet not moving much,
The shoots just maybe growing
But hiding safe the leaf
'Til it is time.
Some oak have gallantly leafed,
The hazel dressed,
The alder – full of style and beauty
In its preparation.
Hedges, fields that have been bare
Squashed in 'twixt grey skies
And ground that's also slate
Begins to shade.
Sights that have made us yearn for
This coming colour and frivolity
Now are being arranged,
Hedges green, and trees in fields
In growing stages
Sandwiched between brighter skies
And not-grey ground
Because 'tis almost summer.

*These two poems are from
Carmel Cunningham's
second collection,
'Unfolding Images'
(Parkmore Press, 2011).*



Deirdre Hannon

Deirdre Hannon was born and reared in Athlone, Co Westmeath. Now married with four children, she lives at Kilnamanagh, on the Roscommon side of Athlone.

The third youngest of nine children, Deirdre was born into a family rooted in the fruit and vegetable wholesale trade - Heavy Brothers Fruit Importers.

Deirdre studied fashion design at Limerick School of Art and Design from 1985 to 1989, and afterward worked in a local jean manufacturing company for several years.

After experiencing postnatal depression following the birth of her third child, Deirdre turned to Reiki healing.

Her spiritual journey in the intervening years has taken her all around the world, and back home again to Ireland.

Since 2012, Deirdre has been sharing her skills, and her love of making, through teaching sewing in the community with Longford-Westmeath Education and Training Board, and also since 2023, with Galway-Roscommon ETB.

Susan Flynn

Áit na Síochána

An domhan go léir bun os cionn,
ina ruaille-buaille ceart,
déanann cairde 's strainséirí fiú
geabaireacht faoin mí-ord.

Dá bhrí sin, siúlaim amach
chun bheith i measc na gcrann,
ar bhruach abhann fíoruisce,
éisc ag snámh faoi rún,
na h-éanlaí ag neadú
faoi chosaint na geraobh láidre
in áit na síochána.



Susan Flynn has published two collections of poetry, 'The Animal Woman', and in 2022, 'In a Woman's Skin' (Swan Press). She is a member of Ratbmines Writers' Workshop. She is deeply interested in natural history.

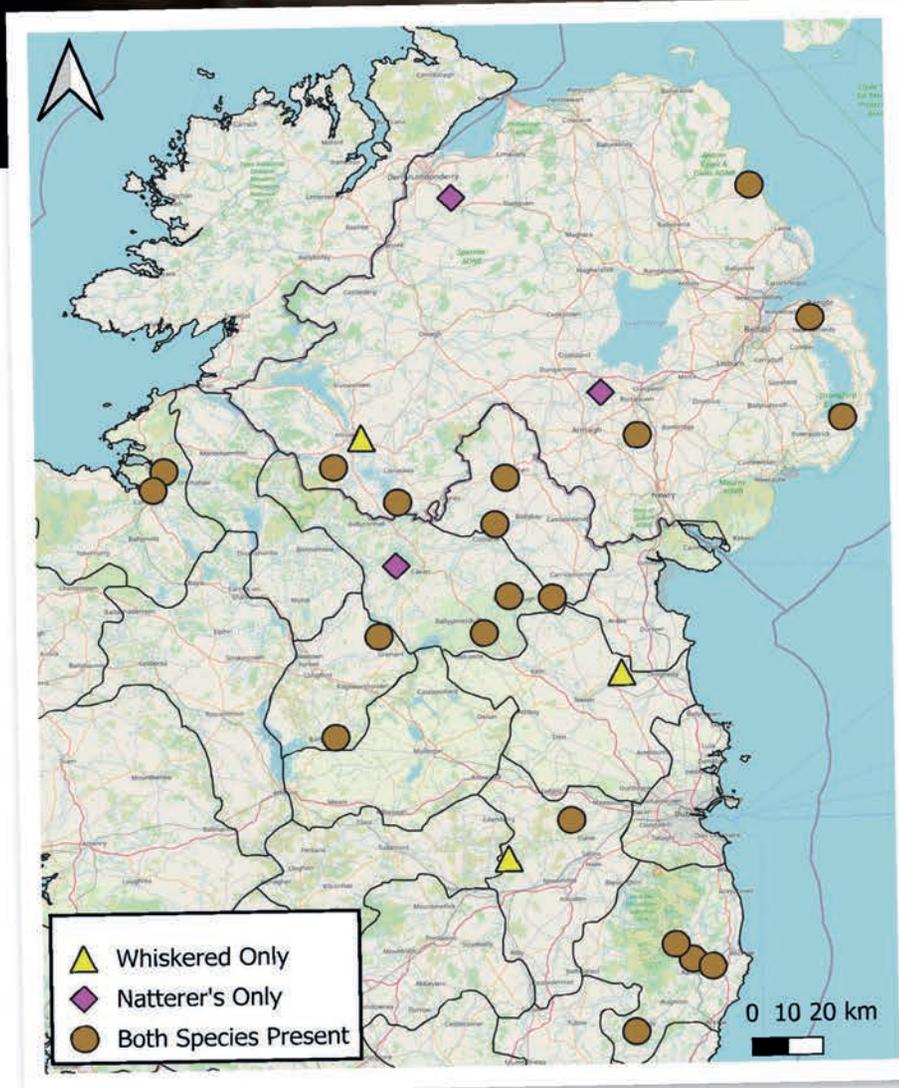




Main photo: A Natterer's bat. Picture courtesy of Daniel Hargreaves
 Inset far left: A whiskered bat in hibernation. Picture courtesy of Gilles San Martin under a CCA-SA 2.0 licence
 Inset left: Example of a Woodland Bat Monitoring walking route – this site is Tomnafinnogue Woods in Co Wicklow.
 Below: Woodlands surveyed in 2024 as part of the Woodland Bat Monitoring Scheme.

Tracking Natterer's through the trees

Dr Niamh Roche details the work carried out to track the movements of bats in Ireland's woodlands



Bats have always been strongly associated with Ireland's woodlands. But while broadleaved and riparian woodland provide cover and foraging for most of the nine bat species resident in Ireland, four of these would be considered woodland specialists.

These include the brown long-eared bat, the lesser horseshoe bat, the whiskered bat and Natterer's bats.

Bats are very easy to miss, given that they are active at night and their high-pitched echolocation calls are not usually audible to human ears.

In the summer, female bats gather in nursery colonies and give birth to a single pup. In Ireland nursery roosts are often, but not always, in buildings – sometimes in attic spaces or behind soffits and fascia boards – since these places heat up nicely in the summer sun and babies have a better chance of surviving their first year.

The young are fed with their mother's milk for six or seven weeks and are usually weaned and able to fly by August, at which point the nursery roosts disband. Mating takes place in



Following a number of pilot studies over the years, we have now settled on a walked woodland transect method to track trends in whiskered and Natterer's bats

autumn and bats then hibernate through the cooler winter months.

Bat Conservation Ireland (BCIreland) has been monitoring a number of bat species with the help of citizen scientist surveyors for over 20 years. Brown long-eared bats and lesser horseshoe bats are counted every year in summer roosts. These bats tend to return faithfully to the same buildings each year so we can collect robust data from these counts.

BCIreland's other monitoring schemes rely on bat detectors, with volunteers detecting bats along rivers or driving slowly along roads with bat detectors clamped to car windows.

However, it has taken us quite a while to come up with a robust way to track the trends in the two remaining woodland bats in Ireland – whiskered and Natterer's bats.

The whiskered bat is one of the most rarely recorded bat species in Ireland. The lack of records may be partly because it is hard to tell some of these closely related bats apart using a bat detector, and because it tends to roost in low numbers and regularly moves between roosts.

The whiskered bat is found in all provinces but tends to be more frequently recorded in the southern half of the island.

Natterer's bat has been recorded more frequently than the whiskered bat, although this may be because it tends to roost in higher numbers and is very roost faithful.

It favours woodlands early in the evening and later, in darkness, moves to forage in hedgerow and pasture habitats. Similar to whiskered bats, its core areas tend to be in the east and south – although it has also been recorded across the island.

Following a number of pilot studies over the years, we have now settled on a walked woodland transect method to track trends in whiskered and Natterer's bats. We provide training and a bat detector.

The survey is carried out by volunteers



An Anabat Scout full spectrum bat detector used for the Woodland Bat Monitoring surveys

who have a roughly 4km transect mapped in a woodland. They start surveying 40 minutes after sunset during dry weather in June and again in July. The surveyors walk slowly along the mapped route and stop at a number of points to record bats while stationary. The detector records all bat activity and we identify the bats after the survey.

So far we have recorded at least one of the two species in all of the woodlands surveyed (see the map for 2024 results). The plan is to continue extending the programme so that we eventually have survey sites in each county – although it will take us a few years to get to that point.

We intend to return to each site to do the survey every year so that we will have enough robust data to track the yearly trends in these two elusive species. It will take a few years before we can present trend graphs though.

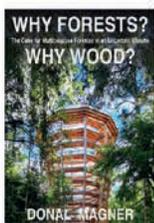
In 2025 we will be setting up new survey sites in Meath, Offaly, Limerick, Kilkenny and Donegal. Anyone who is interested in the scheme can contact the co-ordinator David Clarke clarked@batconservationireland.org

Dr Niamb Roche is a senior projects manager with Bat Conservation Ireland



Making the case for multipurpose forestry

In his new book, forester Donal Magner argues that multipurpose forestry can only be achieved by balancing economic, ecological and social objectives



**WHY FORESTS?
WHY WOOD?
THE CASE FOR
MULTIPURPOSE
FORESTRY IN
AN UNCERTAIN
CLIMATE**

By Donal Magner
The Lilliput Press, Dublin, 284pp

By PAT O'SULLIVAN

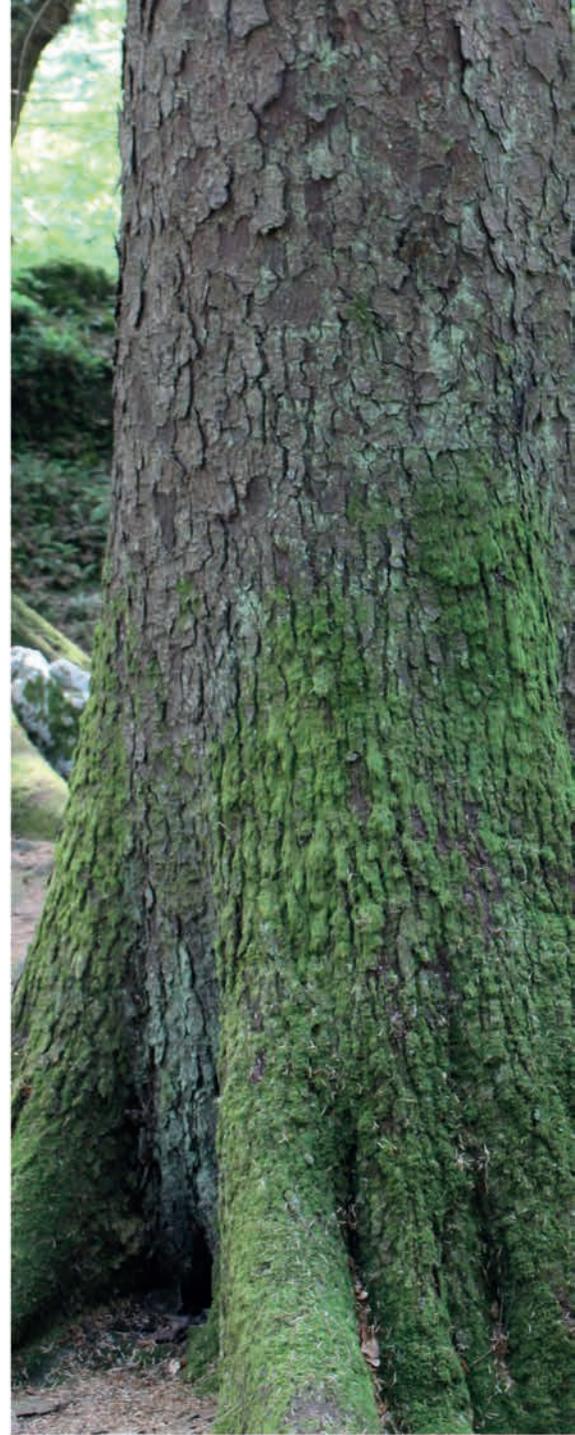
The dual questions posed by Donal Magner on the need for forests and wood are more relevant than ever. Ireland's Climate Action Plan 2023 maintains afforestation is the most important land use to achieve net zero carbon emissions by mid-century, while wood in construction is a key medium to displace fossil-fuel based materials such as steel and concrete. The Danes and Swedes demonstrate that wood energy outperforms all other renewable energy sources especially in heating.

Magner accepts that achieving greater use of wood in construction will take time especially in a country with a masonry rather than a wood culture but says the question "Why forests" should be redundant. But it's not, and while he is upbeat about the role of afforestation, planting over the past decade has been abysmal. Given his role as forestry editor of the Irish Farmers Journal, he is a strong proponent of farm forestry. He believes that farmers can play a major role in achieving

climate change targets and maintains that "the desired 60% increase in forest cover up to 2050 can be achieved without reducing agricultural production". This would allow farmers to not only "farm trees" for much needed wood, as David Attenborough suggests, but would "also to protect and enhance our badly depleted native woodland resource".

Books on forestry rarely create the link between the forest ecosystem and the end product but Magner argues that they are inseparable. To make his case he traces forestry development in Ireland from the first settlers to the eventual dramatic decline in our forests. He even questions our definition of a forest and what it means. He seriously questions where our forests should be located and is critical of our move away from planting unenclosed land as it has broken any chance of connecting with the primeval forests.

Magner has a major advantage over other writers on this subject as he has experience as a State forester and as a promoter of wood through Wood Awards Ireland (WAI). He has been project manager of the biennale WAI since 2014 which he organises with the Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland and Forest Industries Ireland, the forestry group in Ibec. His experience as a forester in Glendalough forest taught him one undisputable lesson: "Forests are first and foremost about people; the people who care for them, who depend on them for a living and the people who experience them as places of recreation and refuge."



He delves into recreation forestry which has been a key element in forest management since the 1970s. This was the decade that an open forest policy was initiated, so that today an estimated 38 million annual visits are made to almost 400 forests across the island. This policy is enshrined by Coillte, Forest Service Northern Ireland, National Parks and Wildlife Service and a number of local authorities. It is also becoming more apparent in the creation of new community forests which are funded by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine's NeighbourWood scheme. He is well-placed to write about recreation forestry as his book *Stopping by Woods* – now out of print – is regarded as the definitive work on our amenity forests and woodlands.

While he acknowledges the role of large-scale timber processors, he shows how designers, architects and woodworkers illustrate how wood can be our greatest





Left: Donal Magner beside the 62-metre Sitka spruce tree in Glendalough, which is the tallest tree in Ireland. It's situated in a grove planted in 1933 by a forest staff member Magner worked with when he was a forester here in the early 1970s.

Right, top: homegrown glulam Sitka spruce, *Beyond the Trees*, Coillte's recreation project, Avondale, Co Wicklow uses engineered spruce as a major structural timber.

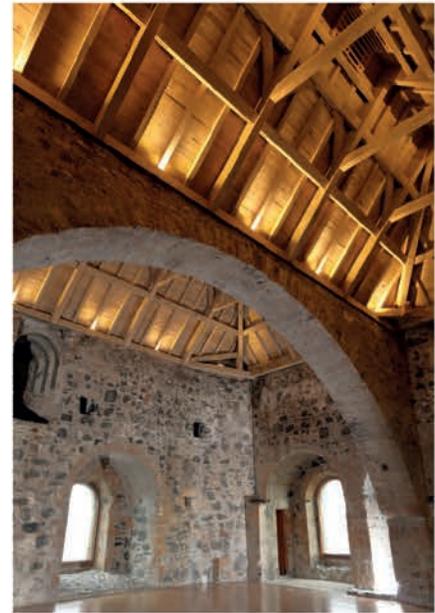
Picture by Shane Walsh

Right, middle: the principal trusses of the new roof of Carrickfergus Castle were constructed from wind-blown Irish oak. The ridges of both hipped roofs are topped with louvered timber ventilation lanterns providing a passively ventilated space beneath.

Picture by Tony Corey

Right, bottom: Joseph Walsh and his team of master craftsmen in Riverstick transform living, and secular spaces in works such as *Enignum VI*.

Picture by Joseph Walsh Studio



aesthetic and renewable resource. He says many of these designers “are taking wood beyond its traditional boundaries where the lines between art and craft, utility and virtuosity are continuously being redrawn”. For example, Joseph Walsh, founder of Joseph Walsh Studios in Riverstick, Co Cork has been taking wood in a new direction by engineering it into curvilinear shapes through lamination into works that are part functional and part sculptural. Projects from large-scale engineered wood construction are featured as well as craft, furniture, boat building and conservation projects.

Producing wood products is a key to sustainable living, Magner argues, but it must be backed by sustainable management which ensures the flow of non-wood benefits “including biodiversity enhancement, recreation, landscape improvement, water protection and climate change mitigation”.

While he is positive about forestry in Ireland, he believes the current structures seriously inhibit its development. He believes Irish forestry needs an independent State Forestry Development Agency (FDA). It is the only natural resource without such an agency. Few sectors “have a greater degree of interdependency than forestry” he argues in making a claim for an FDA.

“How the various links along the forest value chain perform and interact determine the viability of the sector as a whole,” he says. “This includes the quality and productivity of our forests, the performance of downstream industries and how effectively the sector delivers a range of social and environmental benefits.”

This magnificently produced fully illustrated book provides a unique insight into all aspects of sustainable forestry. It should be read not only by foresters and ecologists but

by designers, architects and engineers who will need to use wood to achieve climate change goals. Above all it should be read by the general public who visit our forests in increasing numbers and who wish to know more about this unique and vital 21st century natural resource.

Pat O'Sullivan is technical director of the Society of Irish Foresters

‘Why Forests? Why Wood? The Case for Multipurpose Forestry in an Uncertain Climate’ is available at bookshops nationwide priced €25.00 softback or from the Irish Timber Growers Association Online Shop at forestry.ie for the special price of €24.00 (normal price €31.00 including post and packaging €6.00). ITGA supports this and other publications including its Forestry & Timber Yearbook.





Launch Project at Ardee Coach Trim, including Anne Lennon, Ciara Crilly of BTA, and Peadar Collins. Right: Avril Ni Shearcaigh, parent and member of Aran Island Energy Co-op, along with children working on Project Inis Mór. Inset right: Crann-BTA project leader Peadar Collins hand selecting all of the 10,000 trees personally...

Crann-BTA project hits the mark from Ardee to the Aran Islands

The first year of this nature restoration project is down and so much has been learned and done, writes **Peadar Collins**

Our first 12 months of the Crann-BTA (Brown Thomas Arnotts) tree project saw us find the right people who would host our project. These people are truly the kingpins of this nature restoration project.

People like Anne Lennon in Ardee whose company Ardee Coach Trim pulled out all the stops to launch the project on time. In essence, they accommodated our tree-based nature restoration project with their existing nature reserve.

Anne's mission was two-fold; that of restoring nature, while also providing a haven

for people at one with nature. This approach has benefitted all of the 140 staff who work with Ardee Coach Trim. Over 150 people were involved in delivering this project.

Our Tipperary project was hosted by Mark O'Connor. A retired Dublin gentleman who has a small holding – or country retreat. Working with Mark proved to be a great privilege.

In advance of Crann coming on board, Mark had employed two ecologists to help advise him on the most suitable areas for planting. In total, we established seven different small groves and helped boost the wild hedgerows as well.

Continued on page 34





Below: Mark O'Connor was our host at Project Tipperary.
Right: materials for protecting the young trees from rabbits in Tipperary



Continued from page 32

Mark's particular holding has not been abused by commercial agriculture. It hosts a serious amount of wildlife and a large stock of trees – many of which are 180 years plus.

Our independent assessors Dr Michael John O'Mahoney will outline in his reports the wealth of biodiversity this site holds and how significant and positive the Crann-BTA project will be for this treasured spot.

We were delighted with the interaction we got from the neighbouring secondary school, the Ursuline day and boarding school Thurles. Over 50 transition year students participated in the project. Many thanks to their principal Ms Triona Gleeson and the various teachers and co-ordinators.

The two local Burren Projects were planted by a qualified horticulturist Liz Griffin and her husband Alan. Both Liz and Alan are strong advocates for nature restoration and living in harmony with nature and by nature's way.

One of our most exciting and challenging undertakings this year was the Aran Islands project. It was the most difficult to organise – it involved six months of meetings – but the most satisfying to deliver.

We owe a huge debt of gratitude to both Avril from the energy co-op on Inis Mór and Korina Duffy from Eco Fitness. In addition, Crann's school co-ordinator, qualified teacher James Lowry, played a stormer with Korina.

Korina coined a special song "Friend In Me" for the occasion and James put it to music.

“

From start to finish the Inis Mór project was a major success. Fortunately, the weather also played its part

James's fluency in Irish and natural blás was also greatly appreciated. He invariably commanded the attention of the pupils from the two schools that participated in the project. As they'd say locally: "rinne sé sár job".

From start to finish the Inis Mór project was a major success. Fortunately, the weather also played its part.

The excavator provided by Moycullen Plant and Tool on the mainland was loaded and sailed in on time, with a special auger provided by Leonard Walsh. The trees, which were loaded on special box pallets, were ready and waiting when we arrived on Aran. They had been shipped four days in advance from Galway's docks, to be well ahead of project start date.

For the people of the Aran Islands, this project was significant and greatly appreciated. It was and remains primarily a nature restoration project. However, that the plantation is located on a field traditionally known as Garraí na gCrann (the garden of the trees) illustrates the historical and cultural





Clockwise from left: some family support was provided during Project Inis Mór; James Lowry ag deanamh sár job on the guitar on the Aran Islands; Peadar Collins and Korina Duffy during Project Inis Mór; Brendan Rushe and team at Project Galway; Peadar Collins instore at Brown Thomas Arnotts (BTA); the project coordination and distribution centre in Kildorrery, Co Cork; and the professional planting team working on Project Tipperary



dimensions to this initiative. Over 300 people were involved with this project.

Project Tuam is credited to a Dublin man whose heart is in his maternal Galway countryside. Brendan Rushe's goal is to adapt his land to help city people who need a break to nature. This will be an ongoing nature restoration project; but one with great potential. Brendan's property has a mixture of features. He has high rocky hill tops with commanding views over Co Galway, and low

rich fertile lands where milk and honey flow.

The four southern projects were very different from one another.

The projects included one from Munster's finest cafe companies, Priory Coffee. In addition, we had one involving industrial dairy business Orchard Fields, as well as one where we partnered with Mitchelstown Community Leisure Centre and a very ambitious grand-scale nature restoration and observation project with OC Power.

It's been an amazing year. I didn't expect last July the wave of generosity and heartfelt love for nature, which I experienced from the kind hosts involved. Their depth of knowledge, their awareness of nature and its fragility was inspiring.

We are very lucky to meet and be able to deal with such level-headed individuals who were serious about not just doing the right thing, but doing it right too.

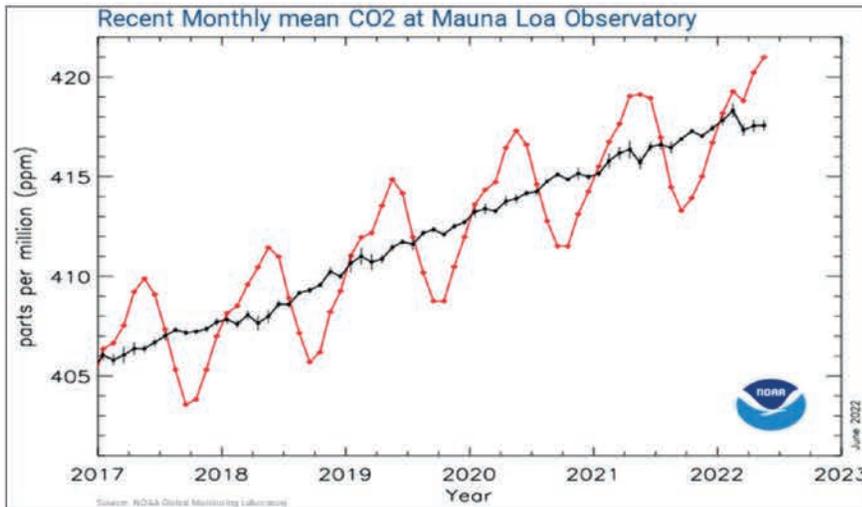
Our target was to establish 10,000 trees and to involve as many people as possible across Ireland. We also had to stay on time and stay on budget.

We have achieved this. I wish to sincerely thank all involved. I look forward to working with our sponsors and current and future hosts for year two. We have raised the standards on this and I look forward to making the next year even better.

Peadar Collins is the CRANN-BTA project leader and is also chairman of Crann



Crann-BTA project participants at Mitchelstown Community Leisure Centre



Trends in atmospheric carbon dioxide (CO₂). From The Global Monitoring Laboratory (GML) of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration in Mauna Loa, Hawaii (2025). The rising trend is largely due to the increased burning of fossil fuels, and emissions associated with land use change.

Planting a seed of culpability

Emily Lavery on the way in which modern society can impact trees

While studying at Trinity College Dublin, one of the nicest experiences is walking through the university on a sunny day and admiring the flock of students sitting around the lovely trees we have on campus.

Aside from their aesthetic value, trees filter pollutants from the air, provide habitats for small animals, and store carbon that would otherwise be contributing to the greenhouse effect in the atmosphere.

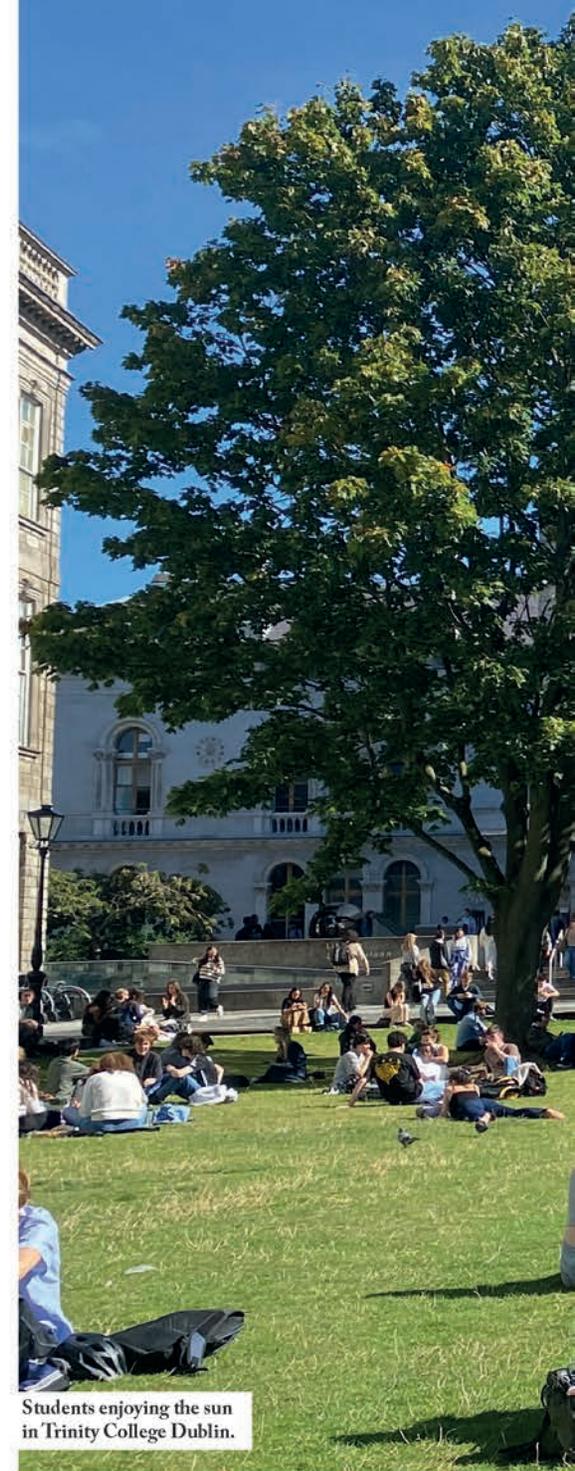
Since we are aware of the importance of trees, it is valuable to understand the effects our activities are having on them. The world is responding to human activities in unexpected ways, and complicated indirect effects of fossil fuel emissions and changing climates

have greater effects than simply warming the air. Sometimes we need to focus on specific examples to understand the complex nature of our activities' impact on the environment.

Some activities have obvious impacts on trees, such as clearing land for crop production. Other activities have more subtle influences, which may be having large implications on the global scale.

Human induced changes in temperature are impacting the timings of the growing season of trees. If you take a look at global records of CO₂ levels (above), you will notice that every spring the levels decrease, and every autumn the levels increase.

This fluctuation is driven by vegetation entering and exiting the growing season. When plants start to grow, they take up carbon from the atmosphere, and this carbon is used as a building block for leaves, flowers, bark and



Students enjoying the sun in Trinity College Dublin.

other plant components.

When the growing season ends, the plant stops taking up carbon, and some carbon is even returned to the atmosphere through the decomposition of leaves.

Temperature is a key determinant of when the growing season begins and ends, with warmer temperatures related to earlier bud bursts in the spring and later leaf falling in the autumn. This phenomenon is known as vegetation 'greening', as there is a longer growing season where the trees are green. This is expected to increase carbon draw down, which would slow the rate of global warming.

Changes in temperature have different effects on different species, and in different places in the world, yet the general trend was for temperature to increase the length of the growing season.

Another unexpected impact humans have





on trees is increasing the amount of nitrogen available for growth. Combustion at high temperatures such as in engines or in industrial processes causes nitrogen and oxygen from our atmosphere to combine, forming nitrogen dioxide (NO_2). In addition, fossil fuels contain nitrogen, and when burned also form NO_2 .

Nitrogen makes up 80% of Earth's atmosphere, although this is in the unreactive form N_2 , which is unavailable for plants. NO_2 on the other hand can be used by plants. When produced, NO_2 exists in the atmosphere, where it can be deposited onto vegetation. Without human activity, almost no nitrogen deposition would be occurring.

Trees are taking up this nitrogen directly from the canopy, where in pre-industrial times trees would only take up nitrogen from the soil. A study led by renowned ecologist Sophia Etzold found that low levels of nitrogen

deposition are correlated with a fertilizing effect on forests, increasing growth.

While this nitrogen deposition may be positively affecting forests at low levels, high levels were found to have the opposite effect. Since cars produce a large amount of NO_2 , there is increased nitrogen deposition alongside roads, and this excess deposition is likely hindering growth. A further study found that nitrogen deposition is as important as climate in determining rates of tree growth.

This illustrates the complex natures of the interactions between trees and the environment.

While carbon dioxide is often framed as the key driver of change, it is important to remember that human activities alter other important components of ecosystems such as the nitrogen cycle. Furthermore, increasing temperatures don't always have straightforward

impacts on ecosystems. Predicting future temperatures requires knowledge on how various ecosystem components will respond to changes in human activity.

In conclusion, burning fossil fuels may have a fertilizing effect on some forests through nitrogen deposition, and increase carbon uptake through lengthening the growing season in some instances. These examples illustrate the complex ways in which trees respond to human activities. However, I emphasise that this is not a pro-fossil fuel article, and that transitioning away from dependence on fossil fuels is imperative to limit environmental degradation.

Emily Laverty is an Environmental Science student at Trinity College Dublin, and Crann director, who seeks to promote the importance of better managing our ecosystems.

Roots of Irish history



National tree cover has increased from 1pc to 12pc since the early 1900s, writes historian **Mícheál Ó Fathartaigh**

History is contested. This, in many ways, is the nature of it. History is contested because the memory of it is contested. What do we mean by contested, though?

What we mean is that there are, that there must always be, entrenched, polarised, positions on history: 'It was this way' – 'No, you're wrong, it was not, it was that way!'

Inevitably as well, the positions are neat and simple.

Ironically in this context, the history itself gets lost and it is instead the contest, in the contestation of history, that takes centre stage.

This is how it is with the history of trees in Ireland.

Furthermore, the contest over the history of trees in Ireland is effectively past, with the negative side of the argument having won out – we have not had forests of scale in the Irish landscape for a very long time.

It is as simple as that.

In the all-but-official national view, this negative perspective on the history of trees in Ireland is the popular orthodoxy. It goes like this: we did have lots of trees, and great forests, too, but then we were invaded and colonised and the English chopped them all down and, since then, we have not had any ... or at least many.

As with most simple, black and white, takes on history this is not entirely incorrect.

At the start of the second millennium, in 1000 (or in 1001 to be precise), and before the colonisation of Ireland began at the end of the 1100s, Ireland was heavily forested. During the second millennium, and during the long colonial era, trees were, by degrees, comprehensively removed from the Irish landscape.

Forests were havens for recalcitrant antagonists of the English Crown, and they needed to be reduced; they were valuable sources of good quality wood to make vessels for the Crown's navy and they needed to be harvested. These are facts.

So, too, is the stripping of trees from the demesnes of the Anglo-Irish landlords by the landlords from the late 1800s. As their estates were being transferred to their tenants, many decided that their best course was to trade in altogether their proverbial, literal, chips.

If this negative perspective on the history of trees in Ireland is too nationalist for some, then these facts can be dialled down, and others promoted. For example, the fact that the people themselves needed treeless land. Their numbers were multiplying as the second millennium progressed and the conversion of any, and all, wooded land for agricultural use was their necessity.

Whatever the reasons behind it, therefore, the popular orthodoxy on history of trees in Ireland is simple, and black and white.

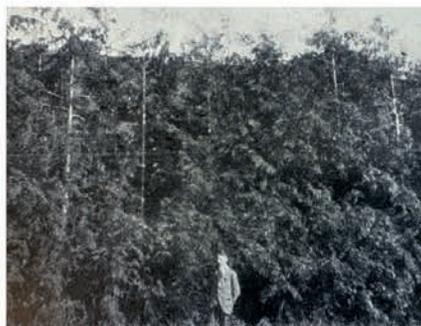
Except of course that it is not.

By the early 1900s trees covered about 1 per cent of Irish land but today they cover almost 12 per cent. Our cover is low by the European standard (an average of around 35 per cent) but it is nowhere near non-existent and,



Main photo: Apprentices at work at Avondale Forestry Station, from a photograph by R. Lees, Wicklow. Right, from top: Digging early potatoes on the farm of Sir Josslyn Gore-Booth, Lissadell, Sligo, 21st June 1905. The ground on the left had already been cleared and sown with turnips; heavy tractor and plough preparing ground for planting in Ballinahinch Forest, Co. Galway; and a shelter belt of *Thuja plicata*.

All pics courtesy of the Department of Agriculture



moreover, it has grown significantly over the last century, by approximately 1,100 per cent. This is remarkable.

What should be acknowledged as well is the coalition that has brought this about. In the first instance was the Irish state after independence in 1922. It followed through somewhat on an aspiration of the revolutionary generation to reverse deforestation and to create a forestry sector to provide rural employment and a domestic timber supply. By comparison, trees cover around 8 per cent of land in Northern Ireland today. In addition, for much of the 100 years since partition, agricultural production was not the mainstay of the Northern economy that it was in the Irish state (owing to the presence there of industry), meaning that trees were not seen to compete with farming for land to the same extent in the North.

In the next instance were private Irish landowners. It is generally well known that they have been planting trees with the help of forestry grants since the 1980s, chiefly from the Western Package Scheme in 1981.

Significantly, many of these landowners were farmers.

In the negative perspective on the history

of trees in Ireland, farmers are cast as the principal opponents of trees. If they are not primarily responsible for their removal, then they are the main bulwark to reforestation. As noted, this does not correspond with recent history. However, neither does it correspond with the longer historical record since trees have made their comeback in the Irish landscape.

From the early 1900s teams of agricultural advisors were established in all thirty-two counties of Ireland. One of their first programmes was to encourage farmers to plant trees. These trees were to protect their isolated homesteads from the elements and were called shelterbelts. With the assistance of the advisors, and modest financial incentivisation,

“

In ancient Ireland, in the first millennium, we know that trees were valued in the Irish landscape, that they were often indeed sacred

farmers in each county responded enthusiastically.

Taking a singular but representative case, in 1927 farmers in fifteen districts in County Laois planted 20,000 trees. By the 1930s, Irish farmers nationwide were planting seven times more trees in shelterbelts than they had in the 1920s.

Historically – either recently, or a century ago – Irish farmers have not been intrinsically against trees.

When history is looked at properly, it should not be contested in simple and exaggerated terms, rather it should be complicated, recognising that it is not, ever, simply black or white, wholly negative or wholly positive in any of its aspects.

In the history of trees in Ireland, especially the modern history, there is a broad negative dimension, characterised by a widely held ‘anti-tree’ agenda. This resulted in extensive deforestation. Yet there are also positive dimensions, characterised by widely held, if more intermittent, ‘pro-tree’ interventions. These resulted in substantial reforestation.

A fair-minded retrospective on history will always recognise both rupture and continuity, for good and for ill, and a close reading of the history of trees in Ireland conforms to this.

In ancient Ireland, in the first millennium, we know that trees were valued in the Irish landscape, that they were often indeed sacred. Irish placenames are replete with reference to this, with Coill (Wood), Doire (Oak) and Fidh (Wood) just three words that appear regularly in placenames. In my home area of west Conamara alone you will find An Choill Mhóir (Kylmore), Doire Iorrais (Derryrush) and Loch Fidh (Lough Fee). They all evoke an affirmation of the presence of trees in the Irish landscape. This is representative of the country at large.

In the second millennium there was a rupture in this regard but when forestry initiatives were pursued from the early 1900s, this also reflected a resumption, a sense of continuity. Saliiently, the planting of shelterbelts might have been a modest initiative, but farmers undertook it without conspicuous resistance and, moreover, with gusto.

This was perhaps because it was proportionate, introducing trees onto their land not in a wholesale manner, but proportionally. However, what is also clear from the record is that farmers saw the initiative not as the introduction of trees, but the reintroduction of trees; not afforestation (the establishment of trees on land that did not have them before), but reforestation (the re-establishment of trees on land that did have them before). They saw not rupture, but continuity.

How prickly pears helped form 2,000-mile Great Hedge of India

George Cunningham on how a 14ft tall/10ft thick thorny hedge was grown to prevent salt smuggling in 19th-century India

Hedge, a word that means different things to different people. Hedge funds are constantly in the news these days. And how many countries and industries are hedging their bets over Trump's disastrous tariffs and policies?

When I was in St Patrick's College, Drumcondra – the teacher training college – first-year students were known as hedgers. Why? No one knows.

Our rural and domestic hedges are full of new life and promise at the moment. Our own front hedge with its 12 different species of shrubs is a constant delight.

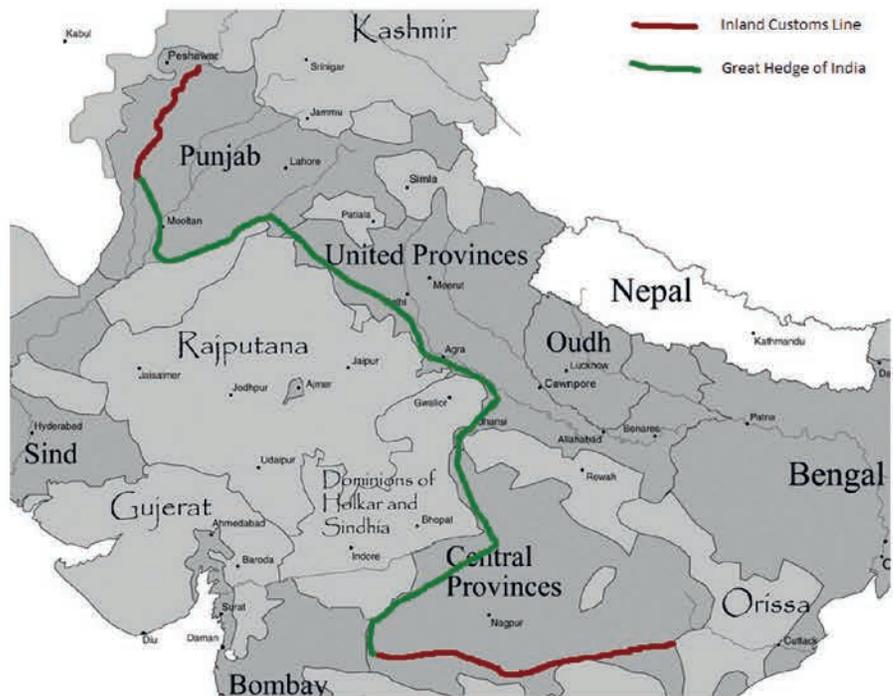
Not so the world's longest and greatest hedge created during the 19th century on the subcontinent of India. It stretched for over 2,000 miles from the Punjab in the north-west to near the Bay of Bengal, snaking across the subcontinent and forming an impenetrable barrier.

Its purpose was to prevent the smuggling of salt from coastal regions inland to British controlled states. From the late 18th century up to the eve of Indian independence in the mid-20th century, a British-imposed salt tax provided lucrative revenues for the colonial administration.

Its imposition was an almost impossible burden on an impoverished population and countless people died over many decades. The salt tax was not repealed until 1946, following Gandhi's salt marches.

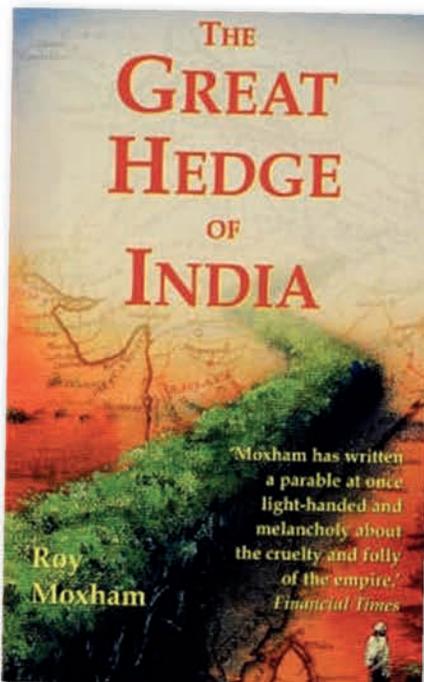
Initially the Customs Line evolved in the early decades of the 19th century by linking custom houses together. It was constructed at first by dry material which quickly eroded. Eventually, mainly through the influence of people like the civil servant, Hume, who had horticultural knowledge, a live hedge emerged with thorny plant species like Indian plum, prickly pear, acacia, thuer, karira and others with vicious thorns.

Its high initial costs – at times up to 12,000 impoverished people worked on the hedge and 12,000 more were employed as security – were later negated by little maintenance once it was established.



The Great Hedge of India snaked across the Indian subcontinent for over 2,000 miles from the Punjab in the north-west to near the Bay of Bengal. Below, the cover of Roy Moxham's book. *Main image: Wikimedia*

Ten to 14 feet high and six to 10 feet wide, growing long and tall and wide, it was compared to the Great Wall of China. Described as 'an ecological marvel', unfortunately, it was designed to oppress millions of the poorest of the poor with its violent intentions of retaining control.



The maintenance and use of the hedge ended in 1878 and what followed was truly remarkable. Almost overnight it was erased from living memory; it was as if it had never been there. The same happened with the official records, no detailed descriptions or account of work and money expended, no maps; its place was never referred to in Indian or British history; it was as if official Britain wanted to forget all about it.

The details of the decades of this monstrous living barrier across India seemed to have been written out of history.

Fortunately, one Roy Moxham, intrigued and inspired by the memoir of a civil servant, set out for India to discover what remained of the 2,000-mile long 'living hedge'. Most of the facts that we know today emerged from his book *The Great Hedge of India* (2001).

It is, as *The Observer* remarked, "a marvellous read".

"Moxham sets out to find the remnants of this quintessentially English folly, writing an affectionate and scholarly narrative," *The Observer* review noted.

Moxham followed its course, amazed at how it had been forgotten and with its course now overtaken by roads and farm land.

We are indebted to him for not allowing this cruelty of a natural source of joy to remain unknown.



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