

Pro Silva Ireland AGM 2017, Kildalkey, Co Meath



Chairman's Report by Paddy Purser

The October 2016 field day was held in Raheen Woodlands, Tuamgreany, Co. Clare. The day was led by forester Jonathan Spazzi, on his first year on the Pro Silva Ireland committee. It was fabulous to see the recent transformation work being carried out there and also to observe some of the natural dynamics in old sessile oak woodland. Pro Silva Ireland would like to thank the McLysaght family for their generosity in hosting the event.

The new committee met in November to plan the year ahead and we welcomed GMIT Letterfrack's Sean Garvey and ex chairman Robert Scott as new members who replaced Jan Alexander and Jim Simpson whose contributions as committee members is greatly appreciated.

In January of this year Pro Silva Ireland submitted a proposal for European Innovation Partnership funding for the setting up of a network of demonstration CCF sites representative of different woodland types in Ireland. While the proposal was unsuccessful I'd like to thank Jonathan Spazzi in particular, and other committee members for the hard work that went in to putting it together.

We were busy again in February with a submission to the Forest Service as part of their mid term review of the 2014 – 2020 Forestry Programme. The submission we made has resulted in some interesting additions in the draft mid term review published by the Forest Service in the summer and at their request, we have made a follow up submission, with further engagement planned. The results of these engagements will be known at the end of this year and we are excited that there may be new measures introduced into the forestry programme next year that are supportive of CCF.

We had another first time leader for our April field day when Manus Crowley led us around Peter Rose's woods near Borris in Co. Carlow. We were also joined on the day by Huw Denman from Wales. This was a fantastic example of a typical farm forest situation, representative of the many new, first generation private forest owners in Ireland and discussions centred around how to initiate transformation in such woodlands. We were very generously hosted by Peter Rose and his family and we hope to be able to return there in the future to see how things develop over the years. The day was also marked by the launch of our latest publication, "Pro Silva Silviculture" by Christine Sanchez which is a translation of Wallonian Guidelines on CCF / Close to Nature Forestry Management Practices. This is a fantastically practical guide and has been very well received throughout

the forestry community. We owe a special debt of gratitude to Pdraig O'Tuama who project managed this initiative, to Christine Sanchez in Pro Silva Wallonia (the author) and to the Forest Service for the funding they provided for the translation and publishing.

The booklet was then officially launched at the Irish Forestry, Woodland and Bioenergy Show in Stradbally in May by Minister Andrew Doyle. Pro Silva Ireland held a stand at this show which was an excellent forum for us to engage with forest owners and other members of the wider forestry sector. Thanks to all the members who assisted in manning this stand.

On the same weekend, The Irish Times, who had attended our April Field Day, published a good article on Continuous Cover Forestry and Pro Silva Ireland in their Saturday supplement. In the same week, a question on CCF and why it was not more widely promoted in Ireland was raised in the Dail and answered positively by Minister Andrew Doyle.

I attended the Pro Silva Annual meeting in Romania in June along with Pdraig O'Tuama, secretary of Pro Silva. The meeting was attended by Pro Silva delegates from across Europe. There is a separate report from this meeting which has been posted on Facebook and our website. It was fascinating to see Virgin forests and to stand in woods where the full trophic cascade functions at a large scale. The Pro Silva network in Europe remains a hugely valuable support to Pro Silva Ireland and we should acknowledge this at every opportunity.

In September 2017 we were generously hosted on our foreign study tour by Phil Morgan and Huw Denman in Wales. We visited private forests in Pembrokeshire and in Carmarthenshire where pioneering forest owners are transforming Sitka spruce woodlands through selective irregular thinning and some underplanting. The familiarity of site, species and landscape made this a particularly insightful study tour and I know our members were greatly impressed and inspired by what they saw. We owe a special debt of gratitude to Huw and Phil for hosting us so generously and professionally.

So it has been a busy year for Pro Silva Ireland with what seems like a growing interest amongst forest owners in CCF. Our role is to provide information and a support network for those who are interested in managing their forests in this way. We are not here to criticise other forest management systems but solely to learn from each other in developing the skills needed to develop our forests as permanent forests which provide the many functions and products that well managed forests can.

Finally, on behalf of Pro Silva Ireland, I would like to mark the passing earlier this year of Prof. Hans Jurgen Otto in Germany who was a great friend to Pro Silva Ireland in its early days. He visited us here on a number of occasions to help lead field days, speak at a conference in Co. Clare and as author of one of our early publications "Approaches of Close to Nature Silviculture in Sitka Spruce Pioneer Plantations in Ireland". He also hosted an inspirational study tour for Pro Silva Ireland members to Lower Saxony. We extend our sympathies to his wife Christel. A dheis De go raibh a ainm.

Paddy Purser

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