

Foreword

One day, and in the not too far distant future, 20%, perhaps more, of Britain will be covered with forest. At least 14% of it will be *new*, in the sense that it will have been planted since 1919.

This is, I believe, a fact of life and one which we all should welcome.

Forests are, or at least should be, renewable resources providing vital raw materials for a number of industries and worthwhile employment in what are often remote, job poor areas. And when planted and managed with care and foresight they should provide good habitat for an important cross section of our wildlife.

This book is a reasoned argument to that end. An end, or rather a new green beginning which could see much of our urban sprawl contained and interleaved with coppice woodland, and farmers sharing at least their grade 3 land with woodlots managed for wildlife, fieldsports and home grown fenceposts. Also our uplands could become part covered (those parts which have been so misused in the past that they are now biological deserts) with 'Rotational Coppice', landscaped mixtures of conifers of all ages complete with streamside corridors and broadleaf buffer zones. A new vibrant, living Britain held together as nature intended by a diversity of working woodland.

Although written with an undeniable bias on the side of forestry, this book in no way shirks the spectre of sterile black forests striding across our hillsides, nor the unforgivable destruction of key parts of the Flow Country, Europe's last great untouched wilderness. Indeed it poses a number of key questions which cry out to be answered. Why are there no National Parks in Scotland? Why did the Nature Conservancy not buy the wet heart of the Flow Country for the same ridiculously low price paid by Fountain Forestry? Why, in a country abundant with universities and field naturalists, haven't the surveys been done, the maps drawn and the information regarding our most important wildlife areas been published? Why do the foresters regard the conservationists as enemies and vice versa?

Well, now this excellent book has been published the answers can be found and there is no turning back. The directives for cooperation are there. No more threats to SSSIs, no more money wasted in the hot-headed acrimony of public enquiries. A rational landuse policy based on scientific fact and economic planning which has no need to hide behind subsidies and half truths. You cannot hide a forest, but hiding within a well managed forest there can be a wealth of wildlife and a wealth of opportunity for all our futures.

David Bellamy
The Conservation Foundation

Preface

This book is a processed tree, a tree which was once part of a habitat, and which has now provided paper for about 30 books of this size. Did these pages once form part of a British conifer plantation or part of a Scandinavian or American forest? Perhaps they were once branches supporting a Goshawk nest. Did a Three-toed Woodpecker pass through them or was there once a male Spruce Grouse displaying below them?

These flights of fancy signal our intention to discuss timber production both as an industry and as an influence on the environment. In Britain, forestry has become a major environmental issue due to the apparently unrelenting afforestation of open hills. Here we look critically at the impacts of British forestry on nature conservation. We have had to take a very narrow view of what constitutes nature conservation and have only considered birds. This is simply because most of the public arguments and published information have dealt with birds, and because our own interests are centred on birds.

This book has three main themes. The first is to describe the British forestry industry and how it arrived at its present state. We consider this to be a fascinating story in its own right, but also a prerequisite for informed comment on the relationship between forestry and nature conservation. The second theme is to describe the effects of forestry on birds. This involves not only describing the birds which live in commercial forests but also the birds of treeless areas which are affected by afforestation. These data are at the heart of any assessment of the net effect of forestry on birds. The third theme of the book is that of measuring conservation value. This theme grew during the writing of the book and plays an important part in it. Even if we knew, perfectly, what changes occurred in Britain due to forestry how would we decide whether or not they represented a net conservation gain or a net loss? We do not claim to know all the answers.

To anyone outside the acrimonious debate, or slanging match, between foresters and conservationists, this book may seem to cover fairly tame ground. However, we know that we risk stirring up a hornets' nest. We expect to be criticized from both sides of the current divide. So, for the record, we regard this book as being both pro-forestry and pro-conservation and it is a sad comment on the current situation that we know many conservationists and many foresters who regard such a position as impossible. We regard further afforestation in Britain as both desirable and inevitable, but what is also desirable, and on past performance far from inevitable, is that forestry should take full account of conservation value in both the planning stage and as part of routine forest management.

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This book is, therefore, a personal account of our own views. It does not necessarily coincide with the views or policies of either the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds or the Forestry Commission. We would like to thank our colleagues in both organizations for providing the stimulating jumble of different views that we have tried to assess here.

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Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the following for their help and advice: Chris Bowden, Charles Critchley, Ron Hoblyn, John Mather, Bob McIntosh, Barbara and Rick Mearns, Steve Petty, Bernard Pleasance, Dr Phil Ratcliffe and Dick Roxburgh.

The photographs on pages 3, 19, 20, 25, 27, 109, 119, 133, 137, 142, 163, 171 and 225 were kindly supplied by David Whitaker, and the photograph on page 106 was supplied by Edmund Fellowes.