News from ProSilva Europe

The most recent meeting of ProSilva Europe took place in La Ferté Bernard, France from 27th to 30th June, 2012.

Phil Morgan, from the United Kingdom, was elected as the new President of Pro Silva. He succeeds Professor Jean-Philippe Schütz, from Switzerland, who concludes a long tenure during which time ProSilva Europe has grown in numbers and influence within European forestry circles.

New chairpersons for the UK, Bill Mason, and Switzerland, Erwin Schmid, were announced.

Other UK representatives attending the meeting included Rik Pakenham, Mike Seville, Victoria Stokes, James Walmsley, Martin Price and Catriona Morgan.

There is a separate article by James Walmsley and Martin Price describing the 3 days of site visits to some exceptional oakwoods in the area.

Pro Silva delegates at Mondragon, Département de la Sarthe, France. Date: 29th June 2012.

AFI International Days

Speech by Phil Morgan at the first AFI international meeting held in Macon, Burgundy, 7-9 November 2012

AFI (Association Futaie Irrégulières) is a forestry association founded in 1991 by a group of private forestry consultants in order to promote the management of irregular stands in France. It aims to share technical information and promotes the principles advanced by ProSilva France. Although these two associations share many common objectives they both operate within their own separate spheres. In recent years the activities of AFI have become more
international, with many members and partner organisations in other regions of Europe and also in North America.

In order to assist with the promotion irregular silvicultural techniques and to better define the outputs from continuous cover, the AFI decided to set up a network of Research stands. Each one of the Research stands is monitored according to the patented AFI protocol providing detailed economic and ecological increment data. The first AFI Research stand outside of France was established in England at Stourhead in March 2006 and the first established in Ireland in March 2007 at Curraghchase, County Limerick. There are now three Research stands in England and seven in Ireland.

This Newsletter includes an article by Phil Roe on the recent AFI conference and workshop which was held in Macon, Burgundy in November.

At the conference, Phil Morgan, the incoming President of Pro Silva Europe and Vice President International for AFI, gave a speech that touched on many of the issues the forestry world faces. He emphasized the key role that irregular forestry now plays in the evolution and development of more ecologically-resilient woodlands, in the face of climate change and uncertainty about forest health conditions.

Phil Morgan’s Address to AFI International Days Delegates:

Mesdames et Messieurs, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a privilege to welcome you .

Never before in modern times have we had to face issues that are having such massive repercussions on our environment, be they climatic, pests and diseases or species loss.

Climate change has been taking place continually over the millennia but we now know that it is humans that have largely contributed to the events we are experiencing at the moment. It is in part due to our behaviour, we are still like the hunter gatherers who first walked out of the forest and who became farmers, except that we have harnessed quantities of stored energy and have vastly increased and accelerated the pace at which we can destroy habitats and life forms. We have made the world a smaller and a more delicate place in which there are no more buffers to contain local environmental disasters because we have pushed the environment’s capacity to absorb shocks to its limits and because we now have the ability to reach every last corner of our planet. Globalisation is upon us, it is very much of our own doing. Extreme events are now becoming common; as you know Americans are only just starting to clear up the damage after the latest hurricane to sweep across the continent. These can no longer be relied on to be rare events with 100 year return periods, but are now common and can be expected more frequently. Apart from the obvious disruption to human existence these events are likely to be the most important drivers for ecosystem change.

A new tree disease that has emerged over the past ten years in Europe is making headline news in the UK. *Chalara fraxinea* or ash-dieback disease has been identified in nursery
material and in a number of stands of ash in England. It has the potential to cause serious damage to a very important component of the British native tree flora. There is now a debate or rather a vitriolic blame-game, between the Forestry Commission, the press and various NGO and lobbying groups as to how we have allowed this disease to cross the Channel. The European and Mediterranean Plant Protection Organisation (EPPO) reports that the disease has been recorded in many parts of Europe for ten years. It is an anamorph of an endemic non-pathogenic fungus that is widespread in Europe. In its new form it has the potential to kill 90% of ash trees. Another plant pathogen, *Phytophthora ramorum*, is affecting plantation trees, this time Japanese and European larches, both exotic to Britain. It is a disease well known to Californian and Oregon foresters as sudden oak death. The diseases infects *Rhododendron* and *Viburnum* species and may have been introduced to Europe by the horticultural nursery trade and has since made the transition from one species to another, raising serious questions about the virulence of these new plant diseases.

The small country where I come from is called Wales, it is part of the United Kingdom, part of the European Community, and it has its own Government of Wales that is making policies to suit its own unique circumstances. It has right from the start embraced sustainability as a guiding principle on which to base policy. The Government of Wales is now making changes to how it regulates the environment in Wales. A new government body that will come into being in April 2013 called the Natural Resources Body for Wales will be responsible for the health of the environment. The new body is made up by the Environment Agency, the Forestry Commission and the Countryside Council for Wales. Forestry will now be part of a single environmental body. In one word this means only one thing: water.

I have tried to give you only a few examples of how disruptive and changeable the world appears to be as seen from a British perspective and how some organisations are making an attempt to respond. Some of the problems have been in Continental Europe for more than ten years and some have their origins on the other side of North America, on the other side of the Atlantic. The causes are deeply complex and interrelated and the precise mechanisms defy complete elucidation.

ProSilva has, sought to promote and to lobby for better understanding of irregular high forest management and for greater use of Close to Nature forestry in many countries in Europe and now in the USA.

There is a perception within regular forestry that irregular forest systems are all complex and very precisely controlled. There are historical reasons for this when German, French and Swiss foresters devised systems exemplified by Gurnaud and Biolley to regulated yield by very carefully controlling numbers and stem size distributions. Since then management has been more adaptive concentrating on an individual tree approach and relying on Close to Nature principles, balancing commercial, environmental and nature values both against one another and against any concerns felt to be relevant by various stakeholders. Linking environmental and economic benefit is a key driver in the management of forests. We are now increasingly realising that managed woodlands are those that provide the ecosystem services society requires as a cost-effective co-product of management.
Close to Nature forestry facilitates fast local adaptation by using natural regeneration however slow this may be in relation to the rate of climate change and to the spread of disease. Some tree provenances which show high levels of stability across different environmental conditions are probably able to cope with the speed of climate change. The occurrence of frequent natural regeneration is fundamental for continuous natural selection in forest ecosystems and for maintaining of the evolutionary process of forest trees. Artificial regeneration is sometimes needed to complement natural regeneration to initiate transformations or to enhance species diversity. If the forest is clear-felled the accumulated forest capital is lost for a generation.

The case for more natural, more resilient forests is now stronger than ever while at the same time forests have to deliver multiple outputs. Better forests can produce clean water, timber and be resilient to changing conditions. Irregular stands are the best placed to deliver a wide range of benefits and to be responsive to change and to risk. They have good diversity-productivity relationships, there is increased resource use and nutrient retention, respect for long term dynamics encourages greater biodiversity and species complementarities increase optimal use of the site. ProSilva have always understood this and have promoted the idea.

Close to Nature forestry is found in different forms across the world. In America fire is an essential tool in managing risk and in ensuring sustainability. Blocking natural process that limited the accumulation of dry matter has resulted in the loss of vast areas of forest without any hope of recovery. On the southern continent black soil, terra preta, has provided evidence that pristine jungle may be secondary forest and may have previously been managed. In South East Asia the plundered Dipterocarp forests have to compete with intensive palm oil and eucalyptus plantations. African forests are being preserved and maintained because local people now have ownership of the forests and understand how sustainable management ensures their wellbeing and the strength of their local economies.

“Irregular Forestry works!”

Phil Morgan
President of Pro Silva Europe
and Vice President International for AFI

About the CCFG
The Continuous Cover Forestry Group was founded in 1991. Our primary objectives are to promote the transformation of even-aged plantations to structurally, visually and biologically diverse woodlands, and to promote the sustainable management of high quality timber. We play a key role in training and education, and are influential in the formulation of new forest policies in England, Wales and Scotland. We have over 200 individual and corporate members, and membership is open to all with an interest in forestry, forest conservation and woodland environments. For more information about the Group see: www.ccfg.org.uk

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