

***“ESPECIALLY FOR THOSE THAT NEED NATURE”***

***A summary of the Event in the Regional Park, Ballincollig with a talk by Ted Cook, in respect of National Tree Week Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> March, 2013, -***

The talk began adjacent to the carpark in the Regional Park, Western End, with a discussion on Lichens which are epiphytic (anything that grows on another plant) and there are approximately 700 to 800 species of Lichens in this part of the County. It was also noted that ivy is the greatest epiphyte in Ireland and represents our only native evergreen climbing shrub of which we have 2 forms – common ivy and its’ rare sub-species Irish Ivy (*Hedera helix Hibernia*). Other examples of Epiphyte include Honeysuckle; Woody Nightshade; Liverworts; Mosses and Polypody Tree Ferns.

Following this brief introduction Ted Cook posed a very interesting question – What is a Tree? However, he noted that there is no satisfactory answer in this regard and with thought, he conveyed, by far the more appropriate question is – what is the significance of a tree? Ted noted that quite often a question of this magnitude is best answered through one’s feelings and not necessarily through the mind.

Ted commended the Council staff on their approach to the Park, by not spraying the walls to remove lichens, ivy, mosses, etc. It is interesting to note that lichens are neither a plant nor fungus – but both. It has yet to be placed in the evolutionary Tree of Earth’s Plant Kingdom. Many of the recently discovered 600 chemicals/compounds in Lichens are new to Chemistry.

Ted’s talk covered many fascinating areas of our natural heritage as the walk proceeded down along Beech Walk within the Park. He explained the significance of the Irish Elm which is seed fertile unlike our suckering European Elm which is seed sterile. Elm as well as Yew are important food sources for our Wood Mice – which are threatened by the introduced Bank Vole which competes with Wood Mice – as does the introduced White-toothed Shrew compete with our indigenous Pigmy Shrew.

Ted informed that Beech Walk was most probably an avenue that grew out of control, and contains some very old beech and lime trees. Ted also discussed the health status of trees, and to look out for the 3 “D’s” – disease, dieback and deadwood. If the 3 “D’s” are not present then the tree in question is in a good condition generally. The presence of Decomposer Bracket Fungi on the trunk or limbs are the definitive indicators of decay in our higher woody plants.

Ted also volunteered information on some of the bird species in the area which led to the group discussing the Crow Family. The magpie, it was noted by Ted Cook is an exotic species introduced by man and other species within the Crow Genus include the Jay and Chuff.

Ted conveyed the importance of trees throughout the walk as it continued in an easterly direction and aptly noted that tree’s are nature’s highest achievement. He even alluded to the importance of deadwood to a tree, which retains the minerals within the area and he advised that deadwood should as such never be removed from the vicinity of a tree. Die-back/deadwood in the crown of mature Oak is a common feature and ought not be confused with disease.

Another tree Ted Cook commented on along the walk was the Elder which he described as the “Granny” of the Forest. He noted that rats cannot go near elder as it releases a cyanide gas and that due to such poisonous properties it should never be burned. It is interesting to note

however that Elder flowers and fruits have been used as a Tonic since antiquity by humankind without toxic affects! Ted also commented on the Alder which is a pioneer of the forest and a fantastic nitrogen fixer. He noted that no deciduous broadleaved trees have cones except for alder. In sharing his knowledge of Ireland's native trees Ted pointed out that these native trees have even lent themselves to a historical language - Ogham, which is the language of the forest.

The purpose of the day's event, as part of a celebration of National Tree Week, was to plant a Yew Tree within the Park. Ted noted that the Yew Tree, which is shade tolerant, appeared 140 million years ago and impressed that it was possibly the tree of the Garden of Eden in biblical times, given that it is the only poisonous tree with little red fruit that would resemble apples. Ted pointed out that all trees evolved from Ferns and that Yew and Ginkgo are very primitive - appearing at the same time as songbirds as we know them. Ted noted that they, like other species, have a genetic memory of nature, i.e. with reference to Ferns, in that they need damp, shady places, akin to the conditions that they would have first encountered in Swamp Forests.

In addition to the planting of a Yew tree, the group also collectively assisted in the planting of almost 50 other trees, consisting of both alder and birch. The area designated for this planting was decided upon when looking at the early OS maps which indicated a wildlife corridor between the Sally and the Oak at this location almost 200 years ago and it was deemed appropriate to concentrate efforts on recreating that ecological corridor. Ted noted the importance of such corridors in that bats and several of their prey insects commute along hedgerows and treed corridors - Ireland's largest man-made naturalised feature.

Ted shared his expertise in respect of the day's planting. He noted that birch and alder live between a Ph of 5.2 to 6.8 and that the soil present would be most suitable to encourage their growth, noting that birch does however need a lot more light than alder and in addition that the birch should be set upon dryer ground than would be acceptable for alder. In respect of the Yew tree however, it was necessary to add some seaweed which Ted Cook provided in order to alter the Ph, making it suitable for the initial stages of Yew growth. Ted advised not to allow bare-rooted stock to dry out and to have the planting pits ready before removing the plants from the bags. Touch neither roots nor stems with metal planting tools - with the exception of a secateurs where damaged roots are severed cleanly. Ted used an analogy in this regard by referring to worms which are cold blooded and by touching them it affects the worms in a negative manner.

When the trees were being planted Ted advised that the sod should be upturned over the surface roots of the sapling because the grass will rot and turn into nitrogen and inhibit competition from grass growth, both of which objects will benefit the tree's growth in it's first growing season. Water during May - and during easterly winds which thief moisture from leaf and stem. The trees were placed in pure stands and each specimen was set, approximately 2 metres from one another.

Ted also volunteered information for those interested in planting within their urban gardens. He noted that some nice species to this effect were spindle, holly, hawthorne, wild cherry, crab apple and blackthorne.

Overall the event proved most successful and was attended by approximately 20 people who thoroughly enjoyed the day. Thanks as always to Ted Cook for presenting a most insightful, fascinating event.