

## TREES IN ST. JOHN'S VALLEY: A REPLY TO PARSONS

By

PETER DE GROOT

1, Witherington Road, London, N5

Tony Parsons has expressed the view that the planting of trees in St. John's Valley was a mistake (34th Annual Report of the Lundy Field Society 1983, p.46). He may be right — I have the greatest respect for Mr. Parsons' opinions. However, I feel I should put the record straight, as I see it, and try to explain the thinking behind the plantings for which I was responsible.

To begin with, only a relatively small proportion of the "very large number of trees along the valley" were actually planted recently. Between 1981 and 1983 I was responsible for the *Pinus muricata* planted along the roadway (with a few also on the north side of the valley), along with the aspen and alder. All the other young trees were, I believe, planted around 15-20 years ago, and many were 'dug out' from under clumps of grass.

I was anxious not to plant the pines, which were provided by the Landmark Trust, in a 'plantation' as can be found at the top of the southern slope of Millcombe Valley. As they reportedly have a reputation for being hardy, they seemed ideal for providing shelter for the trees already planted in St. John's Valley, which is exceptionally windswept. As I had tentative plans to create a living fence along the roadway, I planted them along the rather unsightly wire fence in the hope that they would also provide shelter for the young hedgerow plants in the future. Unfortunately, many of these pines died during an exceptionally dry spell in the first summer after planting, as it was not possible to water them.

Apart from their intrinsic value, one of the main reasons for planting the aspen and alder in the positions chosen was to provide cover for birds. This was seen as an extension of an earlier project undertaken several years ago, when the red barked willow, very attractive to birds, was planted at the lower end of the valley near to Brambles.

It seemed to me at the time that, with someone living on the island actually responsible for trees, it was an ideal opportunity to experiment; to try new species in new locations, as well as extending old planting schemes. However, the trees were only planted after reading all the relevant letters and documents that I could lay my hands on, and talking to anyone and everyone who had any interest. In addition, I did not regard any decision as final: trees could always be replanted the next year if for any reason they did not suit a particular location. In retrospect I would probably not have placed some of the trees where I did if I had known that I would not be around to watch their progress (and take heed of any suggestions that might be made). However, anyone who wishes to undertake the task of replanting could still do so if it is thought desirable.

It seems clear though, that more detailed information is needed on "areas of particular interest" (not only ecological, but also historical and archaeological) so that damage is not caused inadvertently. Such information could perhaps be put in some kind of information folder for the benefit of islander and holidaymaker alike.

With respect to the two tree guards, one at Pondesbury and the other above Quarry Pond; apparently a couple of decades or so ago there were willows growing at Pondesbury. Several people suggested it might be worth replacing them, at the extreme south western edge of Pondesbury itself, or maybe at the top of Punchbowl Valley. Willows in the area at the top of Quarry Pond might go some way to preventing the invasion of rhododendrons. This may or may not have been a good idea, but the guards were only put up to see if they could withstand being used as rubbing posts by the cattle. There were never any trees planted at these spots.

In matters of conservation it seems that there are almost as many opinions as people giving them, and must always result in some form of compromise. However, Tony Parsons' comments carry a great deal of weight and require careful attention. Even though I do not think there is any danger of St. John's Valley becoming "another arm of Millcombe" as it is not sheltered enough to allow the initial tree growth, if it is agreed that the trees planted could cause damage to the unique habitat in this valley, the options are still open.