

slowly becoming known, is someone who spends other people's money.

I reject the implication by Mr Fischer that "our consideration of the matter of discount rates has lacked a historical perspective." Mine hasn't. If anyone wants a fuller version of this reply let me know.

#### **The Effect of Ideas**

As for Mr Fischer's last paragraph, alas he does me too much honour, and far too little credit to my critics. I suggest he read recent obituaries for the economic/silvicultural effects in practice; and elsewhere the persistent ignorance over Douglas-fir economics.

#### **The Flat-earth Society and all that**

I had reserved this association for zero-interest doctrines and this is clear in my original letter (May 1994), so I do not follow the points about a 4% interest rate.

#### **The Nobel prize for finding an objective way of determining interest rates**

I am serious in my contention (see original letter) that a Nobel Prize awaits an objective solution to choosing a discount rate. (I tested this recently when I was fortunate enough to work in an International Research Centre. None of the economists I questioned, and they came from a cosmopolitan background, had much idea on the subject and seemed embarrassed by having to face the question at all.)

I grant that science has no full basis for what it does either. The philosopher David Hume's contention that there is no theoretical basis for accepting "induction as an independent logical principle" has not been refuted [I accept Bertrand Russell's version, I have no philosophical training], but in almost every pragmatic way science can develop without this.

Economics, in my view, has nothing like the range of achievement that most sciences have, and the cost of capital is an essential constituent of much of economics. This does not make me unduly popular with economists either.

**R. Fenton**

#### **Editor's Note**

I am getting a little confused. Are the rates being argued real or nominal? As for Hume's argument concerning induction, more recently than Russell, Popper and Strawson have made some counter arguments. Ed.

## **Tour to Siberia**

Sir,

For the past three years Ministry of Forestry people have worked in close con-

tact with the Russian Federal Forest Service in monitoring the Asian gypsy moth build-up in and around the ports of the Russian Far East, and also with the Russian Quarantine Inspection Service in the inspection of ships for egg masses done under memorandum of understanding between Russia and New Zealand.

The contact with the Russians has provided the opportunity to arrange a forestry tour of the Russian Far East forests by interested New Zealand forestry personnel. This is tentatively proposed between August 17 and 31, 1996.

The forests of the Russian Far East contain some of the world's most extensive wood resources. They are varied and extensive. They contain a wide variety of forest types and species, and wildlife, including the Siberian tiger. The uniqueness of the forests, and the social and economic significance which the forests have for the Russian people make this tour one of particular interest to forestry people.

Full details have yet to be worked through with the Russians, but it is proposed to fly to Khabarovsk (on the Chinese border) to spend three days looking at the larch and mixed conifer/hardwood forests of the region, and also some time at a research faculty, and then to travel overnight by the Siberian express to Vladivostok and spend about eight days looking at the mountain, coastal and hardwood forests of the Primorskye region.

The tour is not for the faint-hearted, or those with weak stomachs. The Russian hospitality is lavish, and their liking for vodka and the toasting of their hosts can be demanding on the system; there really is an expectation to participate. Outside the main hotel in Vladivostok accommodation is not good, and security cannot be guaranteed. It may also be necessary to spend some nights in Russian forestry camps or in tents.

On the other hand the Russian forests are magnificent, the history of the place and the culture fascinating, and the people very friendly and hospitable.

A block booking flying to and from Russia has been made for 10 people. The estimated cost of this plus the train journey and accommodation and travel is about \$7000 per person but will depend on forthcoming negotiations with the Russians as far as internal accommodation and internal travel costs are concerned.

If you are interested in registering for this tour please write/ring me - (03) 379 1040.

**Alan Flux**

## **Biodiversity**

Sir,

Biodiversity is a keystone issue for the future of life in New Zealand and on planet Earth, so I am pleased that Wink Sutton made a focus of it in his comment (Nov. 1995). I would like to correct him on a few aspects and discuss further a few points he raises.

Firstly, "maximising biodiversity" is not an aim of any organisation I know. As I pointed out in my letter in the November '95 issue, "good" biodiversity has got nothing to do with the number of species but rather the degree of representation of indigenous biodiversity. Biodiversity, meaning here from genetic through to landscape diversity. Sutton cites hunter/gatherer cultures as requiring 100 hectares of natural forest to sustain one person. In Sarawak with the rainforest-dwelling Penan tribe, it takes only an average of 10 ha of forest.

Moves by society in recent decades to take on board biodiversity protection in its fullest sense, have come about through shifts in values, just as previously society chose to eliminate the smallpox (has it been eliminated entirely?), of which Sutton made a point. The term 'biodiversity' is very recent, but has achieved such popular appeal because it coalesced a description of earth's unique biological resources. Biodiversity protection is a value judgement made through a culmination of ecological knowledge (including elements of indigenous knowing), and committed through the signing of the Convention on Biological Diversity by more than 140 countries. This is no fringe movement by a handful of passionate nature lovers but a global consensus.

Article 8(d) of the CBD: "promote the protection of ecosystems, natural habits and the maintenance of viable populations of species in natural surroundings". When nearly 90% of our lowland forest ecosystems and over 95% of our wetland ecosystems have been converted to farming, forestry and urban areas, it is simply not sufficient to just not clear any more forest or wetlands. This is especially so with many of our remnant forest areas in a very sorry state, due largely to introduced animal. If we are to seriously protect biodiversity and meet our commitments laid down in the CBD, then restoration and renewal is inevitable, including in existing indigenous areas.

The continued clearance of native regenerating forest for plantations (mainly by non-NZ Forest Accord signatories), flies in the face of Sutton's claim that plantations save biodiversity. Furthermore, in Latin America, parts of Europe, Asia and the Pacific, plantations are dis-