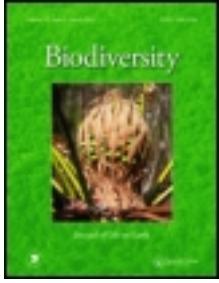


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The global forest - 40 ways trees can save us

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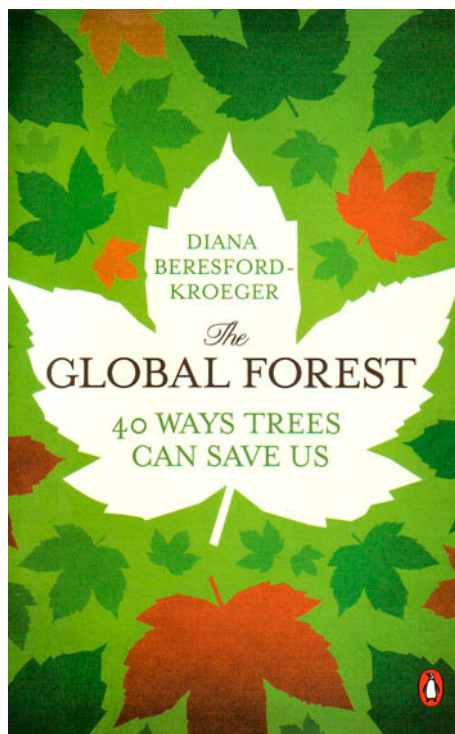
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BOOK REVIEW



The global forest – 40 ways trees can save us, by Diana Beresford-Kroeger, Penguin Books, 2011, 175 pp., US\$15.00 (paperback), ISBN 978-0-14-312016-2.

Those of us who cherish the rich experience of walking through an old growth forest will inhale this poetic tribute to the global forest with the same life-enhancing vigour. Through 40 delightful arboreal essays, Beresford-Kroeger entices the reader with a rare pot-pourri of lyrical writing that blends ancient and modern wisdom with broad scientific knowledge, creating a mind-altering experience for those who partake. This collection will empower a belief in the life-supporting power of forests to truly nurture our troubled planet.

Beresford-Kroeger is a botanist and a medical biochemist from Ontario, Canada. With a poetic Irish style she displays her expertise on the medicinal, environmental and nutritional properties of trees, feeding the reader one leaf at a time, verse-by-verse, refrain by refrain. The result is a renewed respect in the reader for each creature in the global forest, from the virus to the earthworm, from the fern to the

mammal, all inextricably connected to the trees looming overhead. It is rare to read a writer with such a wide range of scientific knowledge that is also able to capture the magical interconnectedness of life: *'This forest is the environment that drives and fulfills the dream of each leaf in a vast rhythmic cycle called life. Nothing is outside. We are all of it in a unity that transcends the whole...'*

But don't make the mistake of thinking that this is an airy-fairy collection. There is much to be learned through reading these essays, from the powerful silence of the forest 'infrasounds' to the molecular similarities between chlorophyll, the magnesium-based engine of trees and plants, and haemoglobin, the iron-based lifeblood of higher animals.

The chapter supra-titles (in italics) provide more details on what the chapters (in caps) contain: *The Global Forest Has Within Itself a Master Plan for Sustainability (A SUIT FOR SUSTAINABILITY)*; *The Secret Life of a Forest Slips Health into the Foraging Fauna (HOME, SWEET HOME)*; *The Nut Trees of North America Were Called Antifamine Trees (A HANDFUL OF NUTS)*; *The Great Forests of the*

Global Garden and the Invisible Forests of the Oceans Are Interconnected (THE INVISIBLE FOREST).

The author's background in medical biochemistry is a great asset to this collection, allowing her to delve into the contribution of forests to medicine. For instance, Curtacrat derived from the Hawthorn tree (*Crataegus*), has important cardiogenic benefits. She also speculates on the medical benefits of forests to the native animals, a discipline largely unexplored, yet vital to the maintenance of biodiversity richness. An essay on sustainability advocates bioplans for small farmers, encouraging them to include native trees along with their 'crops'. Such plans could be important in protecting the biodiversity of native plants and animals as well as providing a long list of other benefits; prevention of surface soil erosion, groundwater purification, reduction of nitrate pollution, mineral recycling and wind buffering. The author's arguments

are convincing, that trees, now the last consideration in farm planning, should be the first.

Like the fire-keepers of our native tribes, but in a new literary/scientific tradition, Beresford-Kroeger manages to inspire hope for the future. Despite humanity's unending greed and blind inability to see the forest for the trees, a new generation may have inadvertently absorbed lessons in planetary management. '*The consumerism in their lives bores holes of unbearable solitude. They are already reaching for something else, something elusive, something that is colour-blind to race. It is called dignity, the dignity of life, all life.*'

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