

Trees worth talking about – a Book Review of *Tree Day* by Meg Lowman

When was the last time you had a conversation about trees?

Occasionally, we do talk about them: about the need to plant more trees to reduce the effects of heatwaves in cities; about their importance for carbon storage and carbon-removal solutions; or about their potential to provide wood for more sustainable construction. Yet in these conversations, trees are often discussed primarily in terms of the human needs they can fulfil. Some of these arguments are severely greenwashed; others are simply narrow-minded.

But can we still comprehend the fascination of trees—the worlds they constitute in themselves and together with all the species that live on, in, and with them?

This perspective largely goes unnoticed. In her book *Tree Day*, Meg Lowman opens our eyes to the miracles represented by individual trees and by the immense variety of tree species. Each chapter introduces a different tree during a different hour of the day, presenting twenty-four species from around the world.

Based on having read the recently published German edition and spoken with Meg Lowman in an interview, this article offers a few glimpses into the world of trees and the conversations surrounding them as provided by the book *Tree Day*. Perhaps this will spark your curiosity to read the book—and renew your fascination with trees, if it has ever been lost, or nourish it, if it is still alive.

Twenty-four trees, twenty-four worlds

Originally published in English in 2025 under the title *Tree Day: A Story of 24 Hours and 24 Arboreal Lives*, the book has recently been released for the German market as *Zeit für Bäume: 24 Stunden in der Welt der grünen Riesen*. In it, Margaret—“Meg”—D. Lowman takes readers through twenty-four stories organised around the twenty-four hours of a day, offering insights into the lives of different tree species from across the world.

All of these trees are closely linked to Lowman’s own experiences as a researcher, tree enthusiast, and arbonaut. The stories draw on knowledge accumulated through years of research and on her personal experiences with the trees she describes. Readers who would like to learn more about Meg’s life and work can also turn to one of her other books, *The Arbonaut: A Life Discovering the Eighth Continent in the Trees Above Us*.

As Meg recalls, choosing the species for *Tree Day* was difficult because there are so many fascinating trees to choose from. Having worked in forty-five countries, she decided to feature trees from diverse geographical regions in the book, giving readers the opportunity to travel around the world through these stories.

There are approximately 73,000 tree species worldwide (Gatti et al. 2022): 73,000 worlds, each with its own facets to discover. Every tree is intertwined with an abundance of life and

has its particular characteristics, life history, uses, and importance for humans and other species. There is so much to discover, learn, and admire.

Glimpses into the tree stories

Take *Rhizophora mangle*, the red mangrove, one of the tree species able to tolerate the salty waters of tropical coastal environments. The tree has its own filtration mechanisms for dealing with salt. It stands on stilt roots in tidal waters, with young fish, snails, and other organisms living among them. It is also viviparous: its seeds germinate while they are still attached to the mother tree, producing propagules that can grow to approximately thirty centimetres in length before falling into the mud, where they may take root under favourable conditions.

Or have you ever heard of *Dracaena cinnabari*, the dragon blood tree? It is listed as vulnerable on the IUCN Red List, and its pollen is dispersed by three nocturnal gecko species. At least twelve reptile species and thirty-two plant species live beneath its crown and occur there exclusively and primarily in association with this tree species. The tree therefore plays an important role in its ecosystem as a so-called umbrella species.

Or what about *Ceiba pentandra*, the white kapok tree, which occurs in Central and South America and in West Africa? This rainforest giant often rises above the surrounding trees and can reach a height of up to ninety metres. Its crown provides habitat as well as an extraordinary view, for numerous species. The tree is also highly important to local communities and is used in many ways, including as a medicinal plant and as a source of materials.

You may already be familiar with *Betula pubescens*, the downy birch. But did you know that it was among the first tree species to migrate back into Europe after the end of the last Ice Age? Or that birch sap can be consumed as a revitalising drink? The species also has to navigate the difficult conditions of cold, windy, and rainy environments, timing leaf production according to temperature and day length while trying to resist leaf aphids and other challenges.

These examples offer only a small glimpse of the stories presented in the book. Each tree opens a door to a much larger world.

A starting point for curiosity

Are you curious to learn more about these fascinating tree species and their stories? Then *Tree Day* may be the book for you.

Of course, the book can present only a small selection of trees. You may have wished to learn about other species, or about many more than the twenty-four presented ones. While each story presents a range of facts and perspectives, there are inevitably many other ways of looking at every tree—different points of view that may resonate with different readers.

You can therefore treat the book as a starting point for diving, or diving back, into the world of trees. Learn more about the twenty-four species presented in the book, and then continue by getting to know other trees that attract your interest.

Lowman's great strength is her ability to combine accessible scientific information with personal stories and a sense of wonder. The book does not aim to provide a comprehensive account of tree biology; instead, it invites readers to look more closely and to continue exploring. Readers looking for a systematic scientific reference work may therefore find it too selective, but those seeking an engaging introduction to the diversity and significance of trees will likely appreciate it.

It is unfortunate that many people experience what is sometimes called "plant awareness disparity", formerly known as "plant blindness": the tendency to overlook plants, underestimate their significance, remain unaware of plant diversity, or perceive plants merely as something green in the background.

Perhaps Meg Lowman's book can help open people's eyes and sharpen their awareness and appreciation of plants.

Why trees need our attention

The book is not only an invitation to discover trees; it is also an argument for taking their protection seriously.

As Meg herself explains, she hopes readers will come to think of trees as friends and neighbours, as living beings worthy of love and appreciation. She hopes that readers will recognise their individual character and, as a consequence, care more deeply about protecting large trees and the homes they provide for myriads of other species.

In particular, large old trees and old forests cannot simply be replaced by planting a few seedlings somewhere else. When we recognise the diversity of life associated with old trees, their fascination, and their influence on human life, health, and well-being, we may also be more likely to understand their importance and act accordingly.

This is more important than ever. As Meg puts it, we have placed trees in a very "tough position". After millions of years on Earth, they are now confronted with heatwaves, droughts, and other consequences of climate change, as well as excessive clearing and forest fragmentation. Protecting trees while reducing the pressures to which they are exposed is therefore more urgent than ever.

So let us open up the conversation about trees again. Let us invite them back into our minds and conversations, share our fascination with them, recognise them as incredible beings with whom we share this planet, and protect them so that they can remain here for much longer.

Meg Lowman's book offers a first step towards discovering the many miracles surrounding trees. If you have become curious, here are the publication details.

Publication details

English edition

Tree Day: A Story of 24 Hours and 24 Arboreal Lives

Meg Lowman, illustrated by Thibaud Hérem

The University of Chicago Press

ISBN: 978-0-226-83396-5

German edition

Zeit für Bäume: 24 Stunden in der Welt der grünen Riesen

Meg Lowman, translated by Bettina Eschenhagen, illustrated by Thibaud Hérem

Goldegg Verlag

ISBN: 978-3-99060-604-9

And remember: books are not made to be left alone on a shelf. They are made to be read, circulated, and shared. Get a copy, read it, and pass it on to someone else who should read it. Read one of the stories—or the entire book—to children or to anyone with whom you would like to share these stories.

If you can, encourage politicians, corporate leaders, policymakers or anyone really, to read it and gain a better understanding of the importance and fascination of trees, as well as the need to protect them.

P.S. You may want to lie beneath a tree or climb into its canopy to read the book 😊