

Title: Around the World in 80 Trees

Author: Drori, J.

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Review by S. Suresh Ramanan

THIS book dramatically titled *Around the World in 80 Trees* recounts the tales of trees in a simple and elegant way in 236 pages. The title of the book reminds us of Jules Verne’s novel *Around the World in Eighty Days* and creates curiosity at first sight.

The entire book can be summed up in a quote of the author “For me, the most satisfying tree stories are the ones in which a piece of plant science has a surprising human ramification” (p.9). Overall it seems to be interesting stuff!

There are numerous trees in the world and it is not possible to comprehend all the species in a single book. Even the classical publication “The Silviculture of Indian Trees” by R.S. Troup which focuses on trees in the Indian subcontinent runs up for three volumes. So, how different is this book from other similar books.

Jonathan Drori has compiled stories about eighty trees from 55 countries. He has covered almost all parts of the globe. In the introduction chapter, he narrates about

his childhood and his association with trees. And in the concluding chapter, strangely titled as ‘Where to go next’, the author urges the readers to begin their journey with trees, starting from a visit to the nearest botanical garden. He even provides an exhaustive list of books for the readers, if they wish to know more about trees. The author has grouped his stories based on the geographical distribution of the trees and it begins from Europe, thereafter covering Africa, Mediterranean, Asia, Oceania and finally ending in America.

The precise description of the silvicultural characteristics and simultaneously engaging the socio-cultural backdrop of a particular tree is mind-blowing. The author’s vocabulary reveals his confidence and mastery over the content and subject. Even minute details pertaining to the trees have also been included. For instance, if the Neem and Peepal tree grows intertwining on a particular place, the people used to build a shrine there. This Indian custom of shrine building is beautifully portrayed here.

The other trees that are relevant to the Indian context are Kapok (*Ceiba pentandra*), Pomegranate (*Puccinia grantum*), Cashew (*Anacardium occidentale*), Nut Palm (*Areca catechu*) and Rubber (*Hevea brasiliensis*). The content and description of the Banyan tree of India is exquisite.

Even though the author has grouped the trees according to geographical landscape, the readers may find some of their neighbourhood trees listed in some other geographical grouping such as Blue Jacaranda (*Jacaranda mimosifolia*). The tree attracts the observer with its blue flowers by mid-October and is commonly planted as an avenue tree in India. Yet this species is placed under the South American group. Hence the readers are advised not to be judgmental and explore this book with an open mind.

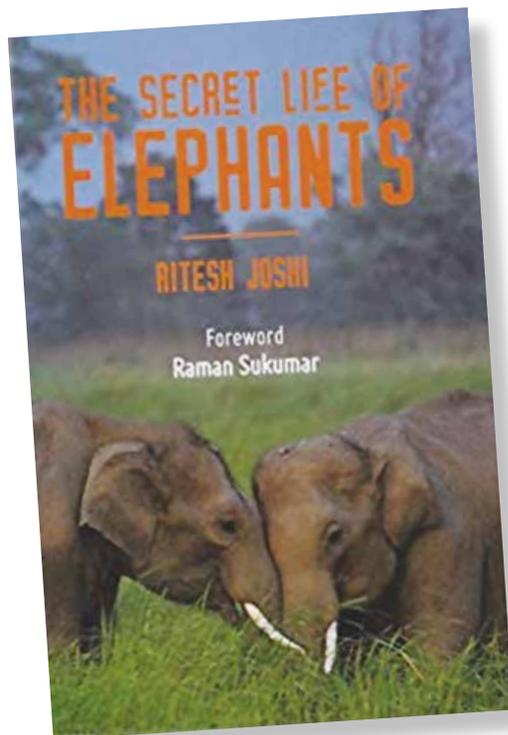
Some other species are also mentioned such as coco-de-mer (*Lodoicea maldivica*) – the largest seed-producing member of the plant kingdom; Chinese lacquer (*Toxicodendron vernicifluum*) – famous for handcraft production in Japan; Balsa (*Ochroma pyramidae*) – known for its lightest wood that were used in production of the world’s fastest operational aircraft, Balsa bomber; Sandbox tree (*Hura crepitans*) whose seeds get ejected at a rate of 70ms⁻¹.

Today’s search engines like Google and Bing can provide the readers with more information about the author, Jonathan Drori. Still, I would recommend the readers to see some of his TED talks (<https://youtu.be/lqwjivuJOQA>). This review will be incomplete without a special mention of the illustrator, Lucille Clerc for the beautiful illustrations in the book.

Just like Phileas Fogg the character in Jules Verne’s novel, Jonathan Drori has also traveled across the globe to explore his passion for trees. This book is recommended for nature seekers, dendrophiles and even as a reference book for forestry and natural history students.

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The Secret Life of Elephants



Author

Ritesh Joshi, with Foreword by Raman Sukumar

Publisher: Natraj

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Review by **Kanchan Puri**

HAVE you ever imagined a giant animal like an elephant performing acrobats in the forest or climbing to the top of the hills. Well, these and many more such secrets are revealed in this book *The Secret Life Of Elephants*.

Elephants are one of the most iconic and keystone species in our forests, playing a crucial role in maintaining forest ecosystems and biodiversity. As per the latest census 2017, the elephant population in the country is estimated at 29,964. They have a unique place in our culture and Indian mythology too.

The recent publication of Dr Ritesh Joshi (a Scientist with the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Government of India, with five books, more than 90 research papers and about 50 articles to his credit) reveals some unique behavioural aspects of elephants. It is a combination of typical unusual behaviours of Asian elephants and the author’s memoirs in the Rajaji National Park (NP) and its environs of Uttarakhand for over a decade. As the noted ecologist, Prof. Raman Sukumar writes in the foreword, “*The more you observe elephants, the more*

you realise how much more there is to learn about this wonderfully adaptive creature.”

The author has observed several rare behaviours such as elephants examining a dead companion’s remains, or adaptive behaviours such as thoughtfully navigating roads, bridges and other infrastructure.

The book runs into five chapters: Rajaji National Park; Social behaviour of the Asian elephant; Rare responses of Asian elephants to their environment; Some unforgettable incidents, and Future of the lord of the jungle.

Chapter one gives an insight into the biodiversity of Rajaji National Park – flora, fauna, birds, mammals, reptiles, etc. – and about the communities living in the National Park like Gujjar, Gothia and Tongia. The second chapter dwells on the social behaviour of the Asian elephants such as acrobatic behaviour in natural environment. Of course, domestic elephants tamed for circus are expected to behave in such a manner but one cannot imagine that without extensive training they would be doing acrobats on their own. The author makes an effort to record climbing and sliding behaviour which they used to get to their favourite climber and how the elephants used a narrow set of stairs of the Ganga canal to drink water. The swimming capability of elephants during flood alerts has also been depicted as is the mourning behaviour of elephants and their aggressiveness towards locals. There are photographic evidences complementing the author’s observations.

Chapter three is on rare responses shown by elephants to their environments. Their silent movement with such heavy legs inside the forest has been a reason for human casualties. One incidence reports about a woman killed by an elephant by crushing her head and chest. There are interesting descriptions on mating behaviour, musth phenomenon and charging strategy.

The next chapter is on unforgettable incidences where the author records how he was attacked by bees in the forest, his observations on the playful behaviour of baby elephants, and the close encounters with a leopard on a cold night.

The last chapter provides recommendations and broad management measures to mitigate the man-elephant conflict, which is very valuable from the point of view of elephant conservation.

This book is an important document for researchers, students, scientists, wildlife experts who are involved in studying elephant behaviour and addressing conservation challenges. The readers will find the book quite interesting and would like to visit the Rajaji National Park to experience the secrets of elephants, of course, with all the precautions. *The Secret life of Elephants* will delight and surprise the readers.

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