

# Treehuggers United = Invincible

**Invincible:** Too powerful to be defeated or overcome.

**Think about it:** What are you doing to and for our future?

Volume 7: June 23, 2023



Photo: Lewis Davies

*We have mapped caves, we have mapped bamboo areas, we have mapped beehives, where women fetch water, where we forage for forest produce, where the elephants go and where they give birth so we don't disturb them when they're calving. Group mapping: When it comes to the areas we were evicted from and had our rights violated, mapping has been really helpful. We have been able to claim back some of our land and mapping has proved that this is our land, and we have the right to protect it.*

## We Are Our Land: Caring for Community Lands: the Case of the Mt. Elgon Ogiek in Kenya

Cambridge University Press: May 22, 2023

### Abstract

We outline how securing the community tenure rights of forest peoples can create a rapid, rights-based route to the effective and sustainable conservation of their forests. We draw on the different skillsets and experiences of the authors (long-term fieldwork, mapping and monitoring, and a lifetime of experience) to identify the conditions that enable the Ogiek of Chepkitale, Mount Elgon, Kenya, to

sustain and be sustained by their lands. We also identify the conditions that drive the disruption of this sustainable relationship through an appropriation of Ogiek resources by external interests that threaten to degrade, alienate, and destroy their ecosystem. It is increasingly recognized that securing sustainable conservation outcomes can be best achieved through the deep knowledge, connection, and commitment that ancestral communities have regarding their lands.

Evidence from Mount Elgon and more broadly shows that Indigenous Peoples are better guardians of their forests than international or state protection agencies. This challenges the idea that evicting forest peoples is the best way to protect forests.

Other studies, including those conducted by the Kenyan governmental Taskforce on Illegal Logging, highlight the way Kenyan state agencies such as the Kenya Forest Service have been responsible for the severe deple-

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# The Go-Back Club: A Simple-Living Brigade

**Our Motto:** Use it up, wear it out, make it do or do without.

## Save Trees: Boycott Paper Towels and the Plastic They Are Wrapped In

How many trees are killed to make paper towels? There are so many easy, free alternatives. We just need some determination and love for our planet.

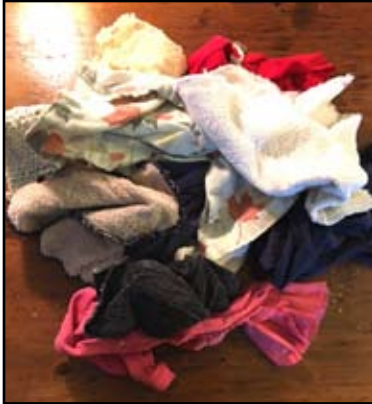
I took these photos to illustrate what I

mean. I've been doing this for decades and if I've managed to save one tree, I'm satisfied. Please join me.

CONSUMER LIBERATION is my theme. Let us not be slaves to things. I repeat this motto: Use it up, wear it out, make it do, or do without. Maybe you

can memorize it like I have done, and then share it with everyone you know.

Please join my simple living brigade, a group of people who have something in common, who work together to put out fires, and in our case, to seriously fight global warming/climate change.



Rags made from old washcloths and dishcloths or cut from old T-shirts, sheets – anything cotton. Synthetic fabrics don't soak up moisture the way cotton does. This also saves landfill space. I wash them separately from my clothes.



Mini-rags made from scraps that are too small to do much serious wiping or cleaning with. When I'm done with these, I throw them away. They are too small to save. I keep them in a crocheted bag a friend made for me long ago.



Slavaged napkins. OK, sometimes I commit the eco crime of stopping at Burger King or McDonalds. The bags my burgers come in have napkins or I bring them home from restaurants. I use only cotton napkins at home.



This is my collection of special, lint-free, old towels that I use for washing windows. I actually like washing windows but most people here use tons of paper towels. Good bye trees! Be creative. Together we can save trees. Thank you.

## How to Subscribe

Dear Sister/Fellow Treehuggers,

If you'd like to receive future issues of my newspaper, please email me at [grassrootscoalition@pa.net](mailto:grassrootscoalition@pa.net). Also, email me if you have good stories and photos you'd like me to consider publishing in future issues. In the past, I have published a Messages page similar to Letters to the Editor so if you'd like to share your thoughts, please do so.

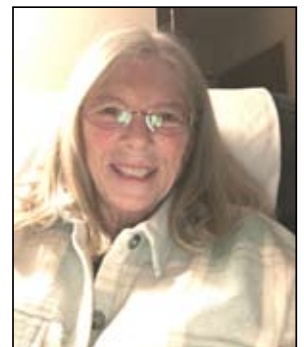
I'd like to see this become a team effort as it has

been in the past but we need time to develop this project and figure out ways to work together.

This is a labor of love but I always appreciate donations, which you can send to: Iona Conner, 157 Chambersbridge Road 4A, Brick, NJ 08723. If you use Zelle or PayPal, please reach my bank account directly via [dosomething@pa.net](mailto:dosomething@pa.net). Cash is OK, too. Thank you!

For the Earth and the Trees,

*Iona*



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Section 107 of the Copyright Act pro-

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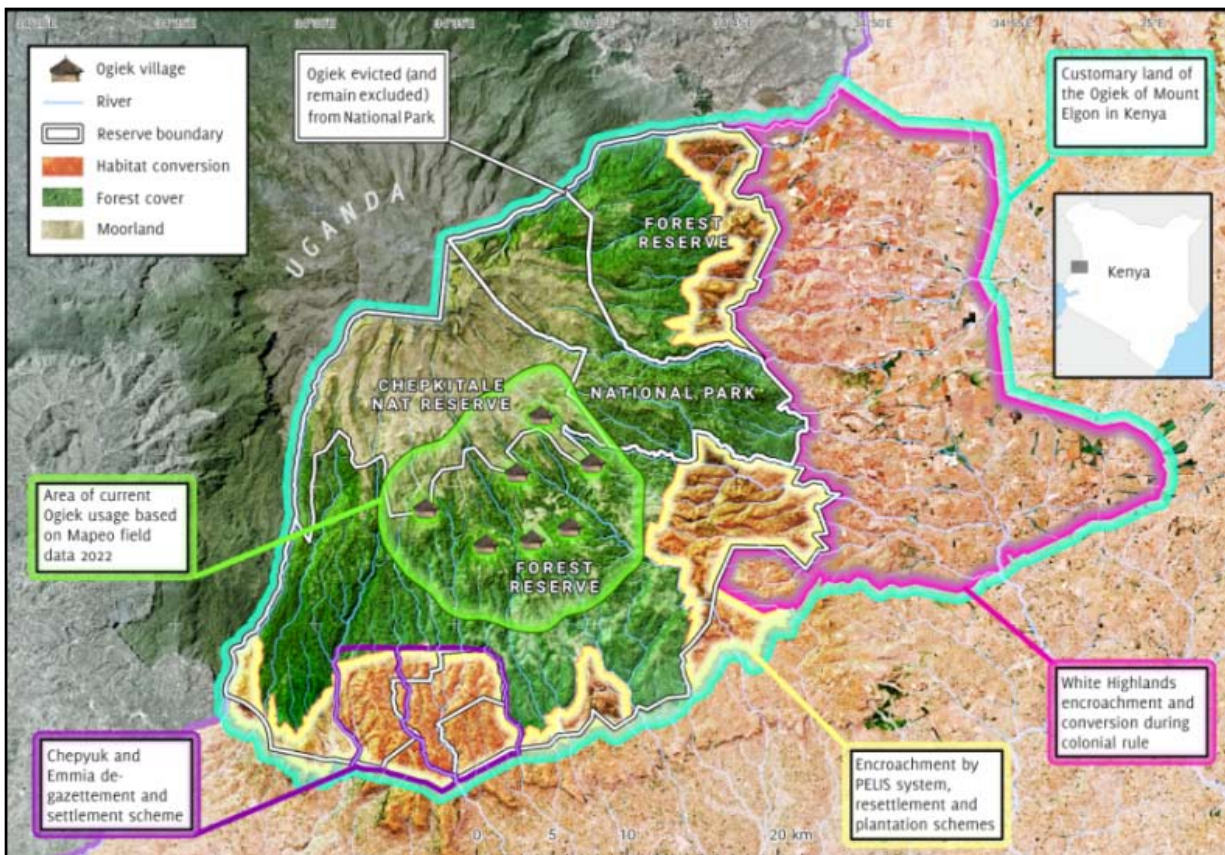
(top left) Screenshot of video taken by Iona; it is a GREAT video, 6.25 minutes! (top right) Ogiek cattle and elephant graze together beside an Ogiek habitation area. Photo: Torio Tenderosi, Toomoi



tion of Indigenous forests. We examine how de facto collective community control can enable decisions to be made in line with taking care of community lands over the long term, but also highlight how this ability is under constant threat until and unless national law and practice recognizes the collective tenure rights of such communities.

**Wonderful video:** <https://www.forestpeoples.org/en/news/oryx-journal-community-lands-ogiek-mt-elgon>

**Source:** <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/oryx/article/we-are-our-landogiek-of-mount-elgon-kenya-securing-community-tenure-as-the-key-enabling-condition-for-sustaining-community-lands/B178D813D33DDA9667B6A2E5FB059E95>



Overview of historical and ongoing encroachment and habitat conversion impacts on Ogiek customary land on Mount Elgon, showing the area of remaining Ogiek access and activity, derived from community field data. (light green). Purple = settlement scheme. Yellow = encroachment by PELIS, resettlement and plantation schemes. Pink = encroachment and conversion during colonial rule. Teal = customary land of the Ogiek of Mt. Elgon in Kenya.

## Strangely Like War: The Global Assault on Forests

By Derrick Jensen and George Draffan, *excerpt from pages 18-19.*

[*In this book, 'I' refers to the primary author, Derrick Jensen, and 'we' refers to both authors.*]

Healthy forests are crucial not only to the creatures who live there. Forests purify water and air. They mitigate global warming by storing carbon. Forests increase local precipitation (half of the rain in rainforests comes from local water evapo-transpired from the forest itself). They prevent flooding and erosion.

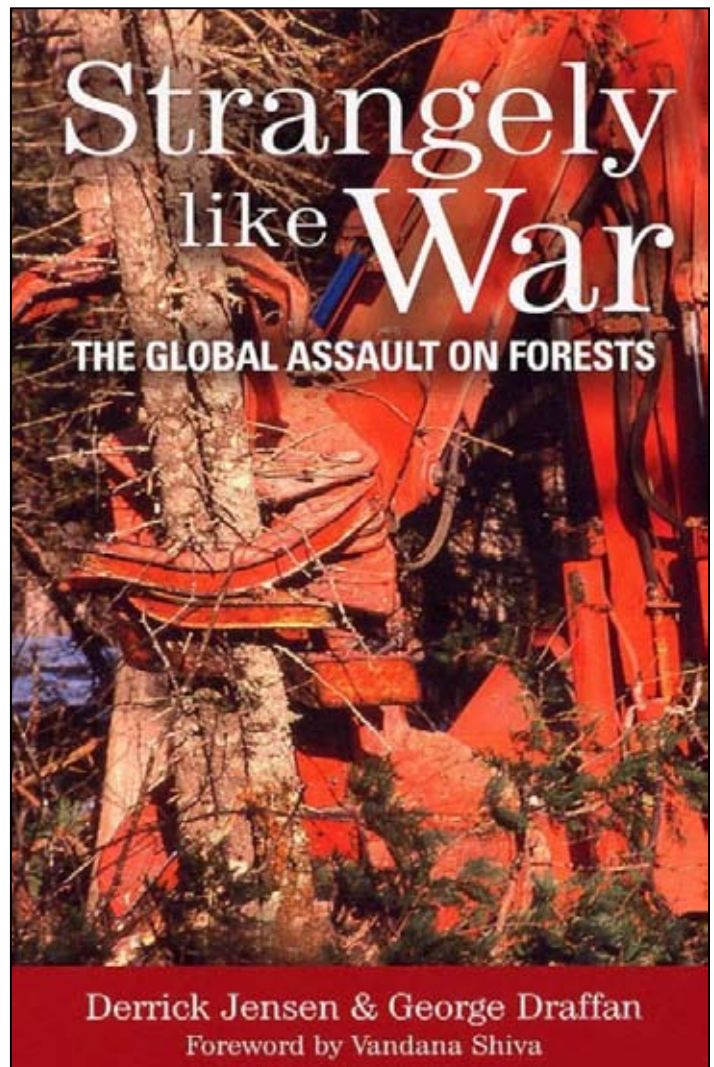
It is common when making a plea to halt deforestation to talk about the ways the loss of these forests hurt us, using, for example, the fact that rainforests can be considered great medicine chests, if only we will use the medicines instead of destroying the chests. Just tonight I read on a website deploring tropical deforestation, "The rainforest is the Earth's natural laboratory, from where one quarter of today's pharmaceuticals are derived. One seemingly insignificant plant, the rosy periwinkle, gave us medicines which revolutionized the treatment of leukemia in children. According to the National Cancer Institute, 70 percent of the plants used in fighting cancer can only be found in the rainforest. But less than one percent of tropical forest species have been thoroughly examined for their medicinal properties."

While it's certainly true that there are many selfish reasons to stop cutting down forests, we don't want to emphasize them, because ultimately – and even in the short run – we don't think that particularly helps. It doesn't challenge the grotesquely narcissistic and inhuman utilitarian perspective that *is* our worldview and underlies our attempts to dominate the world.

A few years ago I was one of the few environmental representatives at a conference of children's health advocates. That in itself was strange, I thought: how can you possibly discuss the health of children without emphasizing the fact that industrial civilization is rendering the planet uninhabitable for them?

One of the advocates there – a high-level federal bureaucrat at the Centers for Disease Control – expressed the need to halt tropical deforestation (it often seems to me that more people in the United States want to halt tropical deforestation than want to stop it here at home) by saying, "We need to save those plants because they're our medicines for the future."

"That's precisely the problem," I responded. "The belief that the forests belong to us. They're not *our* medicines, and they're not *our* forests. First, the plants belong to themselves, and they belong to the forest. Second, if they belong to any



humans at all, they belong to the indigenous people who live on that land. We have no more right to take their plants for medicines than we do for timber."

Several people looked at me as though I had suddenly stopped speaking English and begun quacking like a duck.

This is what often happens when you cease to speak the language of unbridled exploitation – untethered selfishness – and begin to suggest that forests, and the creatures who live in them (including indigenous humans), have the right to live on their own, regardless of how useful or not they may be to us.

What was happening in that room was in many ways what happens moment-by-moment in the forests: a clash of incompatible world-views and value-systems.

*To be continued next time but until then, if you would like a copy of this book, please contact Derrick directly at [derrick@derrickjensen.com](mailto:derrick@derrickjensen.com).*

### Deforestation

It was strangely like war. They attacked the forest as if it were an enemy to be pushed back from the beachheads, driven into the hills, broken into patches, and wiped out. Many operators thought they were not only making lumber but liberating the land from the trees. . . . Murray Morgan, 1955



Photos Courtesy Fundación Llançalil

*Fundación Llançalil is a Chilean grassroots nonprofit based along the pre-Andes of the South of Chile working to save old-growth forests.*

## A Project with Deep Roots in Environmental Protection

Llançalil is a little place in the south of Chile taking big breaths for the whole world.

Although the foundation was officially founded in 2018, the seed for this project was planted as far back as the 1970's and '80's when Jasper Stephens and Cristina Delano began fighting alongside a small group of environmental activists to protect and save the old-growth forests of the Clayoquot Sound around Tofino, British Columbia. When they moved to the south of Chile where old-growth native forests remained under threat, they committed to doing what they could to contribute to the protection of the lungs of the planet. This project is the legacy of their commitment.

The Mission of Fundación Llançalil  
Fundación Llançalil is rooted in the belief that the wellbeing of all species

is dependent on the wellbeing of our planet. It is our mission to create restoration sanctuaries where ecosystems are able to regenerate and thrive, and where the human spirit and imagination are ignited and inspired with possibility.

### **Protecting These Unique Valleys**

There are a number of unique aspects of the valleys of Llançalil that inspire and require multi-generational protection.

#### **Orientation**

Llançalil holds the birthplace of two valleys – Pobre Diablo and Llançalil – and within these valleys resides the headwaters of two key rivers. Steep, old-growth, forest-covered mountains encase both valleys, offering natural protection on three sides. Because the headwaters of two rivers

begin in these valleys, we have the profound responsibility and privilege to ensure these watersheds remain pure, healthy, and free-flowing. These waters remain free of any agro-chemicals, pesticides, trash, and industrial waste because there is no external cultivation taking place.

### **A Story of Resilience and Regeneration:**

This land offers a unique journey through our human relationship with land – one story based on extraction, and another based on relationship, protection, and regeneration.

### **• Destructive Human Influence: Exploit and Extract: Cut and Burn for Industrial Lumber and Agriculture**

When traveling along the length of the valley, there is sweeping evidence  
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of the decades spent clearing old-growth forests for lumber and cattle grazing. When settlers (colonos) originally arrived in this valley, they focused their efforts on clearing trees from the valley through clear cuts and burning in order to create pasture for agriculture, primarily meant for grazing cattle and sheep. The larger of the two valleys was also exploited for the harvest and milling of lumber; however, the logging operation was very poorly managed, and as a result many ancient trees were cut, but never processed and cleared.

#### • Restorative Human Influence: Protect and Re-wild

When all seven lots were purchased and the full 500-hectare (1,236 acre-) lot was combined, it was agreed by Jasper and Cristina that they would not develop the land further or participate in any extractive industrial work in the area. Instead, they would begin the long and arduous process of cleaning up the disaster left behind the failed logging operations and allow the land to re-wild in its own natural process.

Over the course of 20+ years the land has been maintained in a protected state, where native species have been able to return, roam, and grow without human intervention. A small herd of cattle has maintained the pasture in the summer to help mitigate risks of wildfires and support ongoing relationships with neighbors who are historically connected with this land and valley.

#### Observing and Participating in Transition

Our climate is changing rapidly and now, more than ever, it is essential that we take time to appreciate the value of transition and resiliency. This valley represents a place that is continuously in transition as it heals from the generations of extractive practices and maintains a thriving old-growth native forest that has endured for centuries.

As one moves across the land, it is possible to experience multiple-stages



of recovery. The profound and moving experience of observing the resilience of this place provides opportunity and inspiration for people to cultivate grounded optimism and hope in our own resilience and possibility to thrive in the midst of climate change.

Just as the Earth is in transition, so is the collective human race, and it is our hope that the experience of opening a space that is in transition can support our conscious transition away from being an extractive species and toward being a restorer species.

#### Protection of Native and Keystone Species

This valley offers protection to a wide variety of species that are rapidly

losing habitat throughout Chile as the country continues to develop in an industrialized manner. The protection of this valley ensures the protection of a wide variety of flora and fauna.


We are proud to have documented evidence that Llançalil is home to a wide variety of threatened species that have limited freedom to roam as Chile continues to develop. Also within the boundaries of the reserve are Bosque Nativo Coigüe and the endangered Araucaria, which are currently under threat of extinction due to over-logging, loss of habitat, and the uptick of forest fires and disease as the climate rapidly changes.

Source: <https://fundacionllançalil.org/>

# New Trees **No Substitute** for Old Trees

Submitted by Allen Hengst  
Washington DC, USA

By Norm Christenson & Jerry Franklin,  
*excerpt*

Politico: June 11, 2023 (*emphasis added*) 

Nearly everyone living in the eastern U.S. has been served a powerful reminder of the complex effects of climate change this week. Just looking out of windows in Washington, D.C. or North Carolina, we could see that wildfires raging across Canada could produce hazardous air quality and apocalyptically orange skies **thousands of miles** away. The impacts of the smoke on human health are clear, but the smoky skies also call attention to something more – the importance of forests in maintaining our planet’s health.

Most people understand that trees and forests play an important role in reducing climate change – that’s one reason there are so many popular efforts aimed at planting trees. But what many people don’t understand is that not all forests are alike, and that using our forests to mitigate climate change is **a lot more complicated** than just planting more trees.

It turns out the age and composition of forests makes a big difference in what role they play in preventing wildfires and storing carbon. Old-growth forest is the best at both, but there is very little old growth left in either the western or eastern United States.

But a large amount of the forests on public lands is what foresters call “mature” forest, which is nearly as good as old growth and in fact is **on the brink** of becoming old growth. It is these older forests that will help us prevent future forest fires and will do the most to reduce climate change, and it’s these forests that we need to protect at all costs.

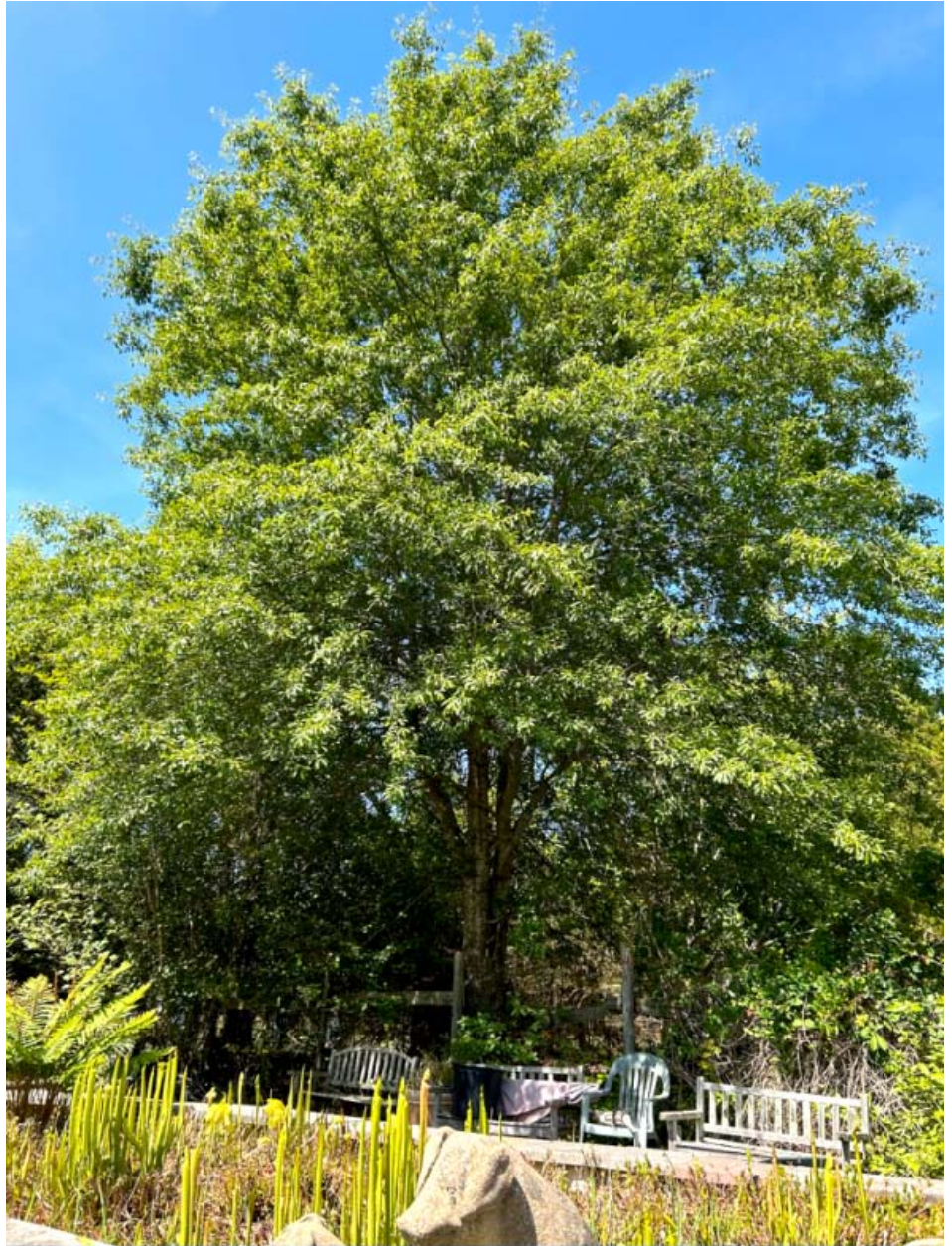


Photo: Bill Smith

“Here’s an unusual tree you could have seen on my property – a so-called Bartram Oak or *Quercus x heterophyllus* a hybrid of *Q. phellos* (willow oak) and *Q. rubra* (red oak). Characterized by varying leaf shapes – some lobed some not – originally found in John Bartram’s garden on the Schuylkill in Philadelphia in the 18th century and proposed as a new species but ultimately, via DNA research designated hybrid status,” wrote Bill Smith of Warren Grove, Barnegat, New Jersey.

## Here’s why.

**Forested landscapes are important reservoirs** of stored organic carbon, but scientists are concerned that we are entering a vicious cycle of wildfires and climate change that could lead to a permanent decrease in the amount of carbon stored in forests overall. When

a forest burns, carbon storage is diminished, and carbon dioxide is released adding to the concentration of greenhouse gases that are warming Earth’s atmosphere. When forests regrow, they can again absorb carbon from the atmosphere, but it takes a long time

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– **many decades**. In the meantime, such a cycle would almost certainly produce more wildfires and could be exacerbated by increased deforestation and inappropriate forest management.

Forest ecosystems are constantly changing, affecting carbon absorption and storage, and the risk of wildfires. The way we perceive and manage this change has significant global implications. While the change process varies across different forest types and locations, there is a general pattern that applies to most forests.

After major forest disturbances like a timber harvest or catastrophic wildfire, tree **seeds germinate**, and seedlings become established. The speed of this regeneration depends on the amount of seed dispersed and the suitability of the post-disturbance environment. Therefore, it's no surprise that the earliest tree species in an area (called "pioneer trees") disperse their seeds via wind and can grow rapidly in an open environment.

Within a few years, tree seedlings grow quickly, and their canopies expand to form a **continuous green** "solar panel." The time it takes for this growth depends on the site's fertility and the number of pioneer trees in the environment. The result is an immature forest composed of trees of small stature and similar age. These immature forests pose a **high risk of wildfire** due to the abundance of fine fuel, small branches, and leaves, near the ground.

The next phase involves a process of growth and death, where smaller trees are shaded out and killed by larger, faster-growing trees – a process known as thinning. However, the leafy canopy remains intact and gradually rises above the forest floor as the trees grow. These forests **efficiently absorb** carbon dioxide and store it in the tree trunks and roots. By separating the fine, leafy fuels from the forest floor, the likelihood of wildfire diminishes. Immature forests often include a unique assemblage of herbs, shrubs,

and animals. Still, the diversity of that assemblage is small in comparison with what is to come.

The forest continues to thin as it **approaches maturity**. The surviving trees will get bigger, accumulating additional carbon and storing some of it within the debris of the forest floor. In a mature stage, the shady understory of the forest keeps things **moist**, and much of the debris consists of larger logs that are not easily ignited, so the "dead stuff" is less likely to serve as fuel for a fire. This mature forest has many fewer but much larger trees and its ecosystem becomes **more complex** – translating into an increasing number of plant and animal species.

In addition to the age and maturity of a forest, geographic location matters. In drier western regions like the Four Corners and eastern Cascades, for example, ongoing thinning can create open, savanna-like forests. In these landscapes, small surface fires (which occur every four to eight years) are a **natural part** of a healthy ecosystem – without them, woody shrubs and trees invade, increasing the risk of more severe wildfires.

But in moister regions, canopy openings allow shade-tolerant trees to flourish, creating a complex system with **large amounts of carbon stored** in standing dead trees and fallen logs, contributing to a high amount of biological diversity. The oldest and largest trees in these forests can be several hundred to several thousand years old, and they play a vital role in carbon absorption and storage. These old and diverse forests are **resistant to wildfires** due to the size and moisture content of the dead wood. However, warmer and drier conditions – like those caused by rising global temperatures – will weaken this resistance and make even these mature forests more prone to wildfire. This is very likely an important factor with the fires **currently burning in Canada**.

Unlike humans, who show their signs of aging with wrinkles or wors-

ening eyesight, forests may get old, but they don't get weaker. However, like humans, different forest types age differently. Some forests, like those in our western savannas, age in ways that increase the likelihood of severe wildfires. In these ecosystems, light surface fires can **mitigate that risk**. Other forests, like those in the moist Pacific Northwest and eastern Appalachian range, age in ways that diminish the risk of catastrophic fire.

In all cases, nature knows what it is doing, and **human intervention** tends to make matters worse, not better. If we can let our forests be, we will reap many benefits including increased biological diversity, water conservation, and recreation. And fewer wildfires.

**There is ample forest on private land to meet our needs for timber and wood fiber.** It is our public lands in both the U.S. and Canada that represent our best opportunity to manage forests to both **mitigate and adapt** to climate change.

While most remaining old-growth forests in national forests are protected, they represent less than 13 percent of the overall forest landscape. However, nearly 50 percent of public lands now support mature forests that are on their way to becoming old growth.

So, we need to both protect as much of our remaining forests as we can, but – importantly – we also **must let them get old**. New trees are no substitute for old trees and the ecosystems they nurture. Letting our current mature forests age further is our best opportunity to diminish carbon emissions and mitigate catastrophic wildfires that threaten the health of humans and of our planet.

*Norm Christenson is professor emeritus and founding dean of the Duke University Nicholas School of the Environment. Jerry Franklin is professor emeritus of forest ecosystems at the University of Washington.*

**Source:** <https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2023/06/11/to-fight-wildfire-our-forests-need-to-grow-old-00101360>





Photo Courtesy Afforestt

A Miyawaki forest in Hyderabad, India, planted by Afforestt, whose founder has said Miyawaki forests grow 10 times faster, 30 times denser, and are 100 times more biodiverse than a “conventional plantation.”

## Miyawaki Forests are Global Sensation, But Not Everyone’s Sold on Them

Submitted by **Bill Boteler,**  
Maryland USA

By Annelise Giseburt  
Mongabay: June 21, 2023

- *The Miyawaki method is an afforestation technique for cultivating fast-growing groves of native plants, with the dense, mixed planting intended to simulate the layers of a natural forest.*

- *Originally developed by Japanese ecologist Akira Miyawaki in the early 1970s for Nippon Steel, the method has been adopted by various Japanese corporations, which planted Miyawaki forests both domestically and overseas.*

- *Although the popularity of Miyawaki forests has skyrocketed in India, some ecological restoration practitioners question the method’s applicability to the country’s diverse ecological environments.*

KANAGAWA PREFECTURE – The Miyawaki method for cultivating fast-growing groves of native vegetation has found eager practitioners all over the world. But some say the method promises more than it can deliver, and that, in some cases, restorers are planting Miyawaki groves where they don’t belong.

Developed in the early 1970s by the late Japanese forest ecologist Akira Miyawaki, the method involves the following steps: determine the plant species native to a given area; improve the soil by mixing in organic material; plant seedlings of native trees and understory plants in a dense, mixed manner (about three seedlings per square meter or square yard) meant to simulate a natural forest; remove weeds from the site for up to three years after planting, if necessary.

After that, the grove is left to its own devices. Due to the dense planting, the seedlings grow quickly as they compete for sunlight.

Although originally implemented in Japan, Miyawaki collaborated with Japanese multinational companies to apply his method overseas as well. This led Miyawaki in 1999 to claim that “quasi-natural forests can be built in 15-20 years in Japan and 40-50 years in Southeast Asia.”

Over the past decade, the Miyawaki method’s popularity has reached new heights, including projects in Jordan and Brazil, among other locations.

However, two ecological restoration

practitioners in India recently criticized the Miyawaki method, saying it doesn’t deliver on the promise of “native, natural forests.”

### Born from Japan’s Era of Industrial Pollution

Born in 1928 in Okayama prefecture, Miyawaki’s early work on weeds caught the attention of German botanist Reinhold Tüxen, who invited Miyawaki to study in Germany from 1958.

Tüxen introduced Miyawaki to his theory of “potential natural vegetation,” the native vegetation a given area has the ability to support – in other words, the vegetation that existed before human intervention. The theory would become a cornerstone of the Miyawaki method.

Due to centuries of human activity, “potential natural vegetation” is nearly impossible to find in today’s Japan. Still, inspired by Tüxen, Miyawaki devoted himself to cataloging his country’s native plants when he returned in 1960, using the protected forests around Shinto shrines as key reference points.

It was these surveys that first connected Miyawaki to the Japanese  
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business world, as companies would request his team to survey specific sites, according to a lecture Miyawaki gave upon being awarded the Asahi Glass Foundation's Blue Planet Prize in 2006.

Japan was rapidly developing in the 1950s and '60s, with, at first, little thought for the environment.

"Forests and *satoyama*" – woods used for small-scale agriculture and forestry – "were rapidly cleared to make way for residential areas, and air and water pollution was so severe that there was strong momentum to do something," said Fumito Koike, a professor of ecology at Yokohama National University, where Miyawaki spent most of his career.

In the '50s and '60s, industrial pollution in Japan was causing serious illness such as Minamata disease and Yokkaichi asthma. Japan established its environmental agency, now the Ministry of the Environment, in 1971.

Miyawaki's lab suddenly had many industry visitors.

"I thought their only real interest in coming was probably just to ask us to plant some greenery to atone for the pollution they had caused," Miyawaki remembered in the same lecture, saying he refused to plant greenery as a temporary cover-up. "I would, though, be very happy to cooperate in creating a real, native forest based on the potential natural vegetation of the area."

In 1971, Japanese steelmaking giant Nippon Steel's newly formed environmental division hired Miyawaki to create forests at the company's production sites. This was Miyawaki's chance.

"[In Japan], department heads are usually transferred after three years, so Dr. Miyawaki devised a method for establishing a forest in three years," Kazue Fujiwara, a former Yokohama National University professor who worked closely with Miyawaki, wrote in an email to Mongabay.

A representative from Nippon Steel, whose 840 hectares (2,076 acres) of Miyawaki forests now boast trees up

to 30 meters (98 feet) tall, said the company "aimed for coexistence between humans and nature."

A few years later, Miyawaki planted groves at the new campus of Yokohama National University, built on a former golf course.

Koike, who guided Mongabay around the campus in May, noted differences between the groves planted in 1967 and one in 2006. "The first groves consisted mainly of tall, [broadleaf] evergreen trees, and there wasn't as much variety of species as there is now," he summarized later over email.

"In the 1970s, ecologists believed that if a forest 'skeleton' was created by tall evergreen trees, other organisms would naturally expand their distribution," Koike continued, explaining that unexpectedly low seed dispersal distance measurements in the 2000s may have prompted Miyawaki to include more shrubs and deciduous trees.

In 1973, Japan enacted a new Factory Location Law, which stipulated that factories of a certain size must make 20% of their total land into green areas. With the beginnings of a proven track record at Nippon Steel, Miyawaki went on to work with Tokyo Electric Power Company and other major utilities, as well as companies such as textile and chemical manufacturer Toray, Honda Motor Company, and real estate developer Mitsui Fudosan.

Japanese retailer AEON had just launched its own tree-planting program in 1991 when its current honorary chairman, Takuya Okada, connected with Miyawaki, according to AEON's public relations department. Okada, who had seen the effects of serious industrial pollution in Yokkaichi decades earlier, "was deeply impressed by Dr. Miyawaki's ideas," and the company adopted his method.

To date, AEON has planted more than 12 million trees in 11 countries, with the majority – 9.9 million – in Japan, according to its website.

### Restoring Tropical Forests?

Thanks to Japanese companies with a global reach, the Miyawaki method quickly went international.

In the late 1980s, Miyawaki received a proposal from Mitsubishi Corporation to try regenerating a tropical forest in Malaysia, the first such project in Southeast Asia, according to his 2006 Blue Planet Prize lecture. He had been surveying Southeast Asian vegetation over the previous decade.

Nik Muhamad Majid, a retired professor at Putra Malaysia University (UPM), recalled meeting Miyawaki in Kuala Lumpur. The Japanese ecologist briefed Nik on the proposal and told him, "Mitsubishi is going to fund everything."

In 1991, UPM planted 300,000 seedlings under Miyawaki's direction across 50 hectares (124 acres) of land at its campus in Bintulu, Sarawak state – then just a "logging town," according to Nik. With further planting festivals held annually, the site now contains 126 species of native vegetation.

According to Mitsubishi's website, the Miyawaki project aims "to demonstrate the feasibility of restoring degraded forest land to conditions that closely resemble a natural forested ecosystem within 40 to 50 years."

However, a 1993 paper from Friends of the Earth didn't look so kindly on the Miyawaki project in Bintulu, arguing that "Malaysia's natural forests are being depleted by Mitsubishi's subcontractors at rates faster than any reforestation can take place."

The article noted that Japan imported 6.7 million cubic meters (237 million cubic feet) of logs from Sarawak in 1989 and cited Sarawak Forest Department statistics that roughly 3 million hectares (7.4 million acres) of primary forest had been logged (including by other actors) by that year.

### 'There is no bullet train'

"I'm an industrial engineer," began Shubhendu Sharma in a TED Talk that  
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helped make the Miyawaki method famous to the English-speaking world. “The goal in my life has always been to make more and more products in the least amount of time and resources.”

After meeting Miyawaki in 2009 at the Toyota plant in India where Sharma then worked, Sharma was inspired to found Afforestt – an Indian “service provider for creating natural, wild, maintenance-free, native forests” using the Miyawaki method. In his talk, Sharma said Miyawaki forests grow 10 times faster, 30 times denser, and are 100 times more biodiverse than a “conventional plantation,” and that his company had “standardized the process of forest-making.”

“The first and the most important thing about the method that I found extremely important is the philosophy of Dr. Miyawaki himself,” Sharma told Mongabay, highlighting Miyawaki’s “optimistic” message of how “human creativity can be aligned with nature” and his emphasis on native species.

To date, Afforestt has planted 450,026 trees in 44 cities across 10 countries, according to the company’s website.

Although urban Miyawaki groves are common, there have been fewer large-scale rural rewilding projects. Sharma recommended that, due to the method’s relatively high cost, 10-20% of a larger rural site could be planted Miyawaki-style via “tiny pockets of forest ... so your effective coverage is 100%,” with other areas including native shrubs, grasses, and bodies of water.

Sharma also mirrors Miyawaki’s stance on working with industry. Although companies such as oil and gas giant Shell are among Afforestt’s clients, Sharma said his company’s role planting Miyawaki forests is to give the land back to nature, “through a process that we call business.”

However, the Miyawaki method’s popularity in India isn’t universal.

In April 2023, ecological gardeners Fazal Rashid and Somil Daga published an op-ed in Indian media outlet



Photo: Annelise Giseburt for Mongabay

Now a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the forest of Mount Kasuga has been protected by nearby Kasuga Taisha shrine for more than 1,000 years.

*Science: The Wire*, arguing that Indian iterations of the Miyawaki method often ignore ecological niches, incur unnecessarily high costs, and are an “easy way to make money” via corporate CSR budgets.

Their article touched on the method’s almost mythological status, thanks in part to Japanese cultural capital: “Apparently these ‘forests’ grow at a breakneck pace, no less than a bullet train slicing its way into the future. All of this sounded nice and marketable: grow a forest with Japanese speed and Japanese efficiency,” Rashid and Daga wrote.

Lacking formal education in ecology, the authors became interested in ecological restoration while working at an urban farming startup. They started a native plant nursery in Delhi, which was able to break even due to the Miyawaki boom in the city. (The relative scarcity of native plant nurseries is one factor contributing to the Miyawaki method’s high cost.)

The pair even tried selling a Miyawaki grove to a major *gutka* chewing tobacco company, but the experience made them doubt the method. Visiting varied restoration projects

across India cemented their views.

“You can make a generalized native tree list of a region, but while planting, you ideally shouldn’t just plant anything anywhere. Each tree has its own specific needs,” Rashid said in an interview with Mongabay, highlighting soil type, drainage, salinity, proximity to water, and other factors. In addition, some climax ecosystems – which the Miyawaki method claims to create – may be grasslands, or have a limited number of tree species. “I mean, all of these questions are completely glossed over by any kind of Miyawaki-type thinking.”

Acknowledging that most Miyawaki groves in India are small-scale urban greening projects, Rashid added, “But then don’t call it a native forest, you know?”

Rashid and Daga recommend a much slower approach to ecological restoration: a thorough examination of site-specific ecological niches and how the surrounding community depends on them.

Before planting, “First try to understand the context and put yourself in the shoes of everybody and everything around you, and then draw up plans to work with the community to restore ecological integrity,” Daga said. In

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# Messages from Our Friends

(For many, English is not their native language.)

Another great read Iona!

Good on you.

Love,

**Robert Burrowes & Anita McKone,**  
Australia

I look forward to reading about Jan & Rocky Larson. Great photos!

Thank you.

**Allen Hengst,** Washington DC, USA

We appreciate your thoughtfulness and look forward to receiving a hard copy of the newsletter. On-line, it looks marvelous. Also thank you for bringing Juneteenth to our attention. We both had forgotten federal facilities will be closed tomorrow. We are in a remote location and do not have a lot of interaction with the Refuge professional staff, and being retired, a three-day weekend isn't as significant any longer. Of course, the cause is

important to remember.

Stay safe and well,

**Jan & Rocky Larson,** New Jersey

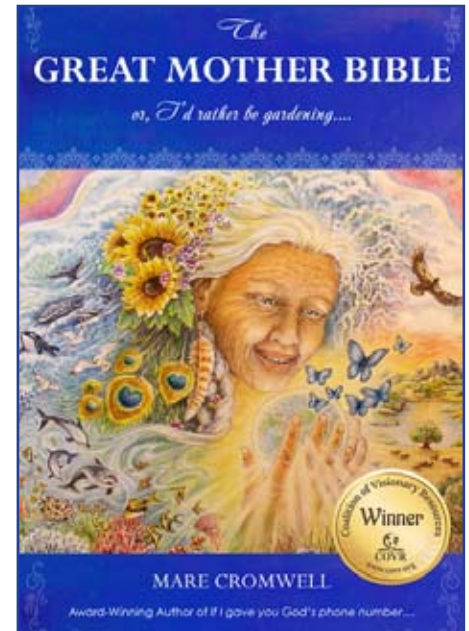
I just saw (on the electronic version of the Washington Post) that there was a terrible attack yesterday on a secondary school in Western Uganda. Many abducted or killed.

Not that anyone likes forwarding bad news. I'm just imagining you might want to know. You would think Uganda has enough problems without this.

**Dan Adams,** Pennsylvania USA

This is true on what is happening here. It's the district next to mine as it's in Kasese and we are in Kanungu just a few kilometers from here. We are terrified about this. Lot's of lives were killed and buildings put down with over 6 students taken.

**Amos Mugarura,** Uganda



**Note from Iona:** I'm starting Mare Cromwell's year-long course, The Great Mother Love Way, and am reading her interesting, wonderful book. More next time.....

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his view, even with human assistance, ecological restoration is a process that can take up to hundreds of years: "There is no shortcut method for this. There is no bullet train."

In Malaysia, UPM professor Zamri Rosli said he uses the Miyawaki method, albeit with some modifications, for projects outside the campus and to test which species will thrive at "difficult" sites. The UPM team's research, some of which was funded by Mitsubishi, found that the Miyawaki method accelerated growth and carbon storage compared to forests regenerating without any human intervention.

Although Nik acknowledged the method's expense, he maintained that the seedlings' high survival rate and "zero maintenance after planting," as well as forests' benefits for a clean environment, make the high initial costs worthwhile.

For him, though, method is secondary to objective: "Miyawaki method or whatever method – go ahead. Plant

that forest. Don't destroy our forest, because the forest takes care of the air, the water, the animals, everything. Our security depends on the forest."

## Symbolic capital or practical collaboration?

"In modern Japan, [tree planting] is one of the most significant examples of a nature-making practice that serves to provide powerful actors with symbolic capital and, hence, legitimacy," culture studies scholar Aike P. Rots wrote in a 2019 paper. Such "symbolic capital" may be one lens through which to view the Miyawaki method and its entanglement with corporate interests.

Stories of environmentally-minded corporate actors, such as the AEON chairman who saw the harm caused by industrial pollution with his own eyes, may offer a less cynical view.

Yokohama National University's Miyawaki groves, planted 47 years ago, offer a view of what the world's

young mini-forests may grow into. The strips of trees, which don't cover a particularly large area and probably shouldn't be called "forests," nevertheless provide shade for students and screen parking lots and aging buildings. They've helped make the campus a home for *tanuki* racoon dogs (*Nyctereutes viverrinus*) and other wildlife. Recently, according to a member of the university's general affairs department, some branches were trimmed to keep the peace between crows' digestive systems and the humans below.

Still, whatever its charms, the Miyawaki method shouldn't prevent us from thinking critically about ecosystems and their endless variety, nor about the pressing need to protect Earth's remaining "native, natural forests" before we need to engineer copies.

**Source:** <https://news.mongabay.com/2023/06/miyawaki-forests-are-a-global-sensation-but-not-everyones-sold-on-them/>