

The Hidden Life of Trees: What They Feel and How They Communicate

by Peter Wohlleben

(Book Review by Lyn Chimera)

Recently I heard an interview on NPR with Peter Wohlleben, a German forest manager who wrote the best-selling book called *The Hidden Life of Trees*. He spent over 20 years working for the Forestry Commission in Germany then left to use his ecologically founded ideas to manage a mature forest. As he put it, he wanted to utilize what the trees had taught him over those 20 years. It was a fascinating interview so I decided to order the book. It didn't disappoint.

Originally the book was published in Germany where it quickly became a best-seller. This led to the publication of his book in 17 languages.

The Hidden Life of Trees has made as big an impact on my ecological thinking as did reading *Bringing Nature Home* by Doug Tallamy. Initially I thought Wohlleben's book was too anthropomorphic because of the descriptions of tree "mothers", their "skin" and "brains". However this was purposefully done so that the average person could understand his points. Each fact he brings out is well cited in the extensive *The Note* section cites the scientific research. The book almost reads like a story and after reading the entire book you begin to see a forest as an interactive community not just a group of trees sharing the same space.

This book confirmed much of my personal experience and learning over my lifetime including observations in woods and forests while hiking. This book gave an explanation for many of my observations. A few of these ideas include:

The difference between a mature (old growth) forest planted by nature and ones planted by man. The first is mixed. The second is often monoculture.

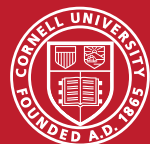
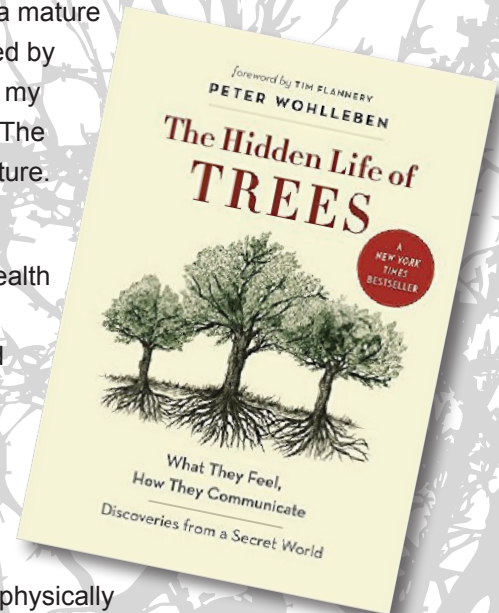
The importance of soil microorganisms in the health of a forest and how this differs from trees planted in isolation as part of a landscape.

How extensively trees communicate and support each other both physically and nutritionally within the forest community.

The role of trees in climate and air quality. (I really understand this for the first time) It's much more complex than taking in carbon dioxide and giving off oxygen.

I now have a totally different experience while in the woods. I always wondered why trees blew in all different directions during a wind storm...now I know! (You'll have to read the book to find out) A quote on the book jacket by author Hope Jahren says it all:

"Soon after we begin to recognize trees for what they are – gigantic beings thriving against incredible odds for hundreds of years – we naturally come to ask, 'How do they do it?' This charming book tells how.



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