



Book Review

Take to the Trees: A Story of Hope, Science, and Self-discovery in America's Imperiled Forests, M. Holloway (Ed.). W.W. Norton & Company, Inc, New York, NY (2025). p. 292 pp (ISBN 9781324036449)

Of interest to those in the broader urban forestry/arboriculture sector (urban foresters, arborists, foresters, botanists, environmentalists), *Take to the trees: A story of hope, science, and self-discovery in America's imperiled forests* will also have widespread appeal to a more popular, broad-based audience. Written by Columbia University Professor, Author and New York Times Journalist Marguerite Holloway, *Take to the trees...* is comprised of 4 parts, each with descriptive titles that include "Groundie" (Part I), "Understories" (Part II), "Woundwood" (Part III) and finally "Aerial Roots" (Part IV). The 292-page hardcover book is a work that personalizes both the author's experiences with – and love of – nature that aren't limited to the natural world alone, but that also include deep and personal interactions with trees from others.

In Part I ("Groundie") the author takes the reader to her first tree climbing training – the *Women's Tree Climbing Workshop*. It is here that she meets climbing instructors of renown, fellow attendees, and details her experiences that range from learning how to make knots (and having faith that they will hold!), to the inaugural ascent of a hemlock tree. In addition to including her own experiences as a first-time climber, the background and stories from other workshop attendees are also detailed. One individual attended the workshop

"...because she wanted to be in the trees she loves, not only in the office or on ground crew." (p.11) And because "she wanted to show her two young daughters that when you have something that is like an all-consuming passion, which plants and trees have been...for such a long time..." (p.12)

Woven throughout the personal stories are important details related to the challenges and ecological stress factors that trees face amidst a changing climate:

"A great dying is underway in forests the world over. There are, by one recent reckoning, 3 trillion trees, half as many as there were at the end of the last ice age. Some 15 billion are lost every year. More than 17, 500 of the estimated 58,000 tree species are threatened and heading toward extinction. In North America, between 97 and 141 of the 881 native trees are threatened and at risk of disappearing; 6 may be extinct...the scale of death and disease is unimaginable in extent and speed." (p.13)

In Part II ("Understories") the author takes the reader in-depth into the lives of the female arborists that are the purveyors of the *Women's Tree Climbing Workshop*; she also begins to detail the ecology and challenges of specific tree species – and their affiliated ecosystems – as evidenced by the titles of the various sections: 'Aspen', 'Wollemi', 'Atlantic White Cedar', 'Ash', 'Whitebark Pine'.

Further into the heart of the book, in Part III ("Woundwood"), we

read about the author's follow-up effort regarding tree climbing. After successfully getting off the ground and into a tree, Holloway details:

"...I am in the air. I swing over and down into the trillium. I am sitting between the three hemlocks...Fear is gone – no dizziness, no buzzing in my shins. I feel the wind cooling my sweat. I feel the slight rocking pull of the hemlocks holding the trillium. I am clipped in, but I feel unclipped, free in the trees. I feel amazed, strong, grateful to be so high in these hemlocks. I feel a surge of deep happiness and power." (p.143)

It is also in this section of the book that the author details an outcome of climate change related to the shifting of flowering or leaf-out times by trees and other plants, referred to as "phenological mismatch" (p.146). Holloway describes how this disruption to food webs and reproductive cycles may have a cascading effect as organisms arrive to find less of a food source or bloom times that no longer coincide with pollinator emergence. This part of the book concludes by detailing pest-related challenges – Beech Leaf Disease, caused by a nematode (*Litylenchus crenatae* ssp. *mccannii*), Sudden Oak Death (*Phytophthora ramorum*) and Oak Wilt (*Bretziella fagacearum*) – in the following sections aptly titled 'Beech' and 'Oak'.

The book's final Part IV ("Aerial Roots"), we read about the author's third effort regarding tree climbing. After several successful ascents, towards the end of the book she describes

"I am no longer scared of heights in the way I was, no longer immobilized by fear. I can tie several knots – I see them when I close my eyes, feel them in my fingers – and can set up a pulley and feel confident. I can ascend a line and free climb once aloft I can feel grounded above and regrounded when my rope returns me to the earth." (p.223)

The book concludes with three final segments – an 'Epilogue', an 'Acknowledgements' and 'Notes on Sources'; following these is a 'Selected Bibliography' should a reader wish to pursue a topic of further interest.

The inside jackets describes the book as a "Lyrical work of memoir and reportage, *Take to the trees...* sounds the alarm about rapid arboreal decline while also offering hope about how we might care for our forests and ourselves". Readers should know that in this effort, author Marguerite Holloway has unequivocally succeeded. Whether new to the world of trees and climbing them, or a seasoned expert, *Take to the trees...* is an assuredly worthwhile read that will foster one's own imagination about their personal interactions with trees, while simultaneously expanding the reader's knowledge about these woody plants and the state of the environment that they occupy.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Richard W. Harper: Conceptualization, Writing – original draft, Investigation.

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Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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