

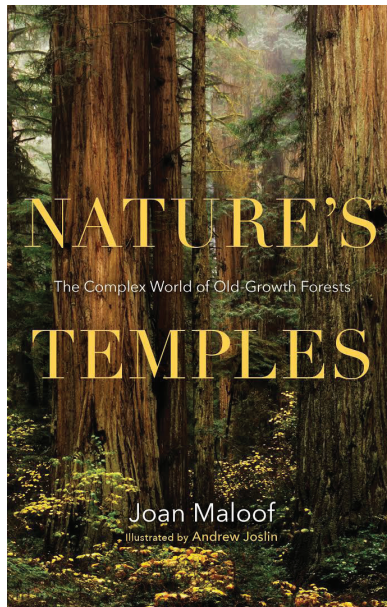
Nature's Temples – The Complex World of Old-Growth Forests

Joan Maloof

Timber Press. 2016

200 pages. Hardback. ISBN: 978-1-604-697285

€14.25



In this charmingly written and beautifully illustrated book, Maloof uses examples from the principal groups of organisms that occupy forests to illustrate the extent to which a vast range of species are dependent on old-growth forests.

The author defines an old-growth forest as one that has formed naturally over a long period of time with little or no disturbance from humankind. Such forests are increasingly rare and largely misunderstood. In *Nature's Temples*, Joan Maloof, Director of the Old-Growth Forest Network, makes a compelling and passionate case to underline their significance. An evocative and accessible narrative, it offers a rare insight into the many ways in which the life-forms (not just the majestic trees but also the insects, plant life, fungi, and mammals) in an ancient, undisturbed forest differ from the life-forms in a forest manipulated by humans. What emerges is a portrait of an intricate and fragile ecosystem that now exists only in scattered fragments. Black-and-white illustrations by Andrew Joslin help to clarify the scientific concepts and capture the beauty of ancient trees.

In this book the author eloquently urges us to cherish the wildness of what little old-growth woodlands we have left... not only are they home to the richest diversity of creatures, but they work hard on behalf of humans also.

Joan Maloof is a scientist, a writer, and the founder and Director of the Old-Growth Forest network, a not-for-profit organisation which aims to develop a network of forests across the U.S. that will remain forever unlogged and open to the public. Maloof studied plant science at the University of Delaware, environmental science at the University of Maryland Eastern Shore, and ecology at the University of Maryland College Park. She is the author of *Teaching the Trees* and *Among the Ancients*. Her conversational style will quickly dispel any lingering hesitation you might have about wading into the science of carbon sequestration or the life cycles of birds, amphibians, snails, insects, herbs, mosses, liverworts, trees, fungi, lichens, worms, or mammals. She puts each topic under the microscope and invites you to take a look and see the incredibly intricate world of old-growth forest ecology.

Maloof points out that “Forests are not just trees. Forests are complex communities. Trees anchor forests like corals anchor reef systems. You can’t plant a coral reef system, and you can’t plant an old-growth forest.” Old-growth forests can, however, be easily destroyed. Joan Maloof knows this all too well and she delivers her message with the reverence appropriate to these upright “cathedrals of time”. She combines an engaging writing style, scientific rigour and an advocate’s skills to document the complex interactions of organisms that have evolved together in forests which have never been felled and replanted, in the process making a powerful case for treating pristine forests as sacred for people and wildlife.

The author readily acknowledges that forest management and timber harvesting are important economically but contends that “most foresters agree that our remaining old growth forests should be preserved. They are living examples of how our forests behave when they are unmanaged”. They also give us a base-line against which to compare how biodiversity changes when we manage forests. Preservation does not mean that the forest will always remain standing or always maintain the same species composition. Forests are constantly, if slowly, changing. Preservation means that we simply allow the forest to change at its own pace. Just because a forest was once destroyed – whether by humans or natural events – does not mean that it’s unworthy of preservation.

Our nascent native woodland fraternity can learn much from this book. The author argues that old-growth remnants are now so rare that we should not be content with what little remains. We still have an opportunity to set aside second-growth forests (ones that were formerly logged and are now growing back) for recovery. These remnants – with our help – will become the seeds from which a renewed forest spreads. When we think of old growth we tend to think of western North America whereas we have our own

semi-natural woodlands here in Ireland which also are worthy of preservation. Recent initiatives undertaken here have been very encouraging. *Management Guidelines for Ireland's Native Woodlands*, a recent publication which is reviewed elsewhere in this journal, will help to further advance the cause.

John Mc Loughlin