

What Makes Us Climb Trees for a Living?

Written by Tiago Miranda

Good question for those who don't understand what it takes to be a tree climber. Is it about the rush? Adrenaline? Have you ever noticed we have the best *"office view"* ever?



Source: T.Miranda 2019

A normal person would ask you: *"what is up there?"*, then you reply with a smile: *"A different perception and a spectacular view every day"*.

There is a possibility in telling stories about civilizations and their dominance over territories by simply looking at an old tree standing by itself, firm on the ground, quiet, staring to all and nothing at the same time.

Great feeling working with these *"natural scaffolds"*, knowing that every branch took at least ten years to grow with a complex infrastructure that no engineer or architect could explain how it was done.

As visionary Dr Shigo (author of the book “*Modern Arboriculture*”) was, he dedicated his career to reveal a few mysteries about trees, showing not just appreciation but passion.

Though, we still do not comprehend some basic aspects like how they were formed, what are their purposes and whether not just physical representation in this planet exists or not. Species evolution dictates a lot of our understanding about living organisms but does not explain why they appeared on Earth in the first place.

Some of us don't realise that for every plant or tree is something unique about it. Some inexplicable way to grow in different shapes coordinated by light and water. If you look at a tree from the ground up, you will notice it grew that size in a matter of years. A lot of food production is necessary until the tree reaches the sky and create an amazing structure, and provide plenty of shelter and food to other animals. They spend great part over a few decades to have a major root system considering as long as the canopy drip line. it could for a minute makes you feel like an ant suppressed by a macro world that reveals your insignificance.



Source: T.Miranda 2020

The idea of walking in the park is not just to breath clean air but also in fact to breath oxygen. Trees release it from the breakdown of carbon dioxide due to the consumption of water and light.

Luckily, parks contain several trees which may provide a great amount of breathable air and temperature stability. It is always pleasant to observe and stand next to a big tree. Notice their high powerfulness

and historical presence which once was part of a flourishing native forest surrounded by other giants.

From a climber's perspective, branches are structures to ascend in a certain way making our physical contact one of a kind. Although, it doesn't dismiss basic knowledge of how tree's function - rather increases our comprehension by touching, observing, smelling, cutting and treating which sometimes can differ from arboriculture books.



Source: T.Miranda 2018

The final aspects you might consider looking at a tree is its morphology, which several species characteristics can differ their leaves, bark texture, flowers, fruits and seeds. They may appear the same but there is always a slight difference sometimes unnoticeable by untrained eyes concerning natural selection and genetic mutation. To avoid confusion, plant specialists had to develop a plant classification scheme to discern species which we called taxonomy.

All of these are so interesting that make us consider about the first plants that evolved on Earth. Most of us think that Gymnosperms – more exactly conifers - were prominent since primordial times. However, ferns started much earlier with specialised spores that propagated differently than common seed sowing.

Palms are so interesting as well, especially *Phoenix canarienses*. When it first appeared during the Cretaceous period, it had to protect itself against those big herbivores by producing large sharp spikes at the frond's growth point. If that would've been the case, *isn't that amazing?*



ARB DEBATE

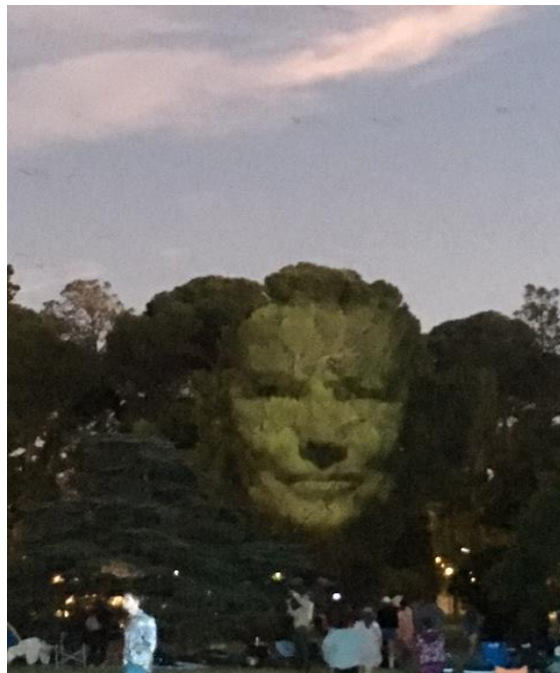
One way or another, any animal that tries to eat these fronds would eventually get spiked and be contaminated by a specific bacterium located at the tip of the spike. Until today, we still have trouble working around them.

Trees survived and evolved for millions of years, providing food and ecosystem's equilibrium to the majority of biological populations, including our own. You might ask then; *where do human beings take the right to interfere and manage trees for their purpose? Since when do we start considering ourselves superior to any others? Is this related to money and power?*

Because, if it is, unfortunately, I might say that nature has nothing to obey. Urban forestry is an exemption where once humans adapted to a system of tree management, it felt in need of this practical approach. It is also satisfying as a professional arborist to be in contact with plants and contribute to the environment somehow whilst respecting the adequate care principles.

Views from a climber can always be a step forward in science. Maybe you as one should stop and think how much daily contact you have with trees and reconsider the power of observation.

I guarantee that you may have even more contact with trees than any other high-scholar-doctor working at a paper in the lab - without disregarding their hard work though. Or perhaps you should observe more where actually "*real education*" could be right in front of your nose.



Womadelaide 2020 / T.Miranda 2020