

James Aronson, João S. Pereira and Juli G. Pausas (eds): Cork oak woodlands on the edge: ecology, adaptive management, and restoration

Island press, Washington, D.C. USA, 2009, 315 pp illust., color plates and site profiles; 24 cm. Cloth, ISBN 13: 978-1-59726-478-5, US \$80.00; Paper, ISBN 13: 978-1-59726-479-2, US \$40.00

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In a particular moment of life on Earth when the search for ecologically friendly solutions, in response to a new paradigm based on sustainability, are becoming obligatory, the book *Cork Oak Woodlands* appears as to remind us of the importance of this ecosystem to our own protection. This book, edited by Aronson, Pereira and Pausas, is unique in the synthesis that it provides about the Cork Oak Woodlands, bringing together an array of well supported scientific evidences concerning management and restoration as well as historical and economic perspectives. It emphasises the contribution of cork oak woodlands to keep the traditional landscapes that evolved from this particular ecosystem, designated as *Dehesa* in Spain and *Montado* in Portugal, which lodges a diversity of plants and animals, some of which are well prized for their products, such as the black pig and the cork among the most known.

The structure adopted in the book is particularly clear due to an introductory page starting each chapter and a couple of informative lines that announce the following theme. The recalls to other chapters of the book along the text allow for an easy consultation of a particular topic for details. In addition, the site profiles

and the profuse colour plates are an attractive illustration of the topics presented in the previous chapters.

After introducing the cork oak and its genetics, the book tackles the constraints constituted by the biotic and abiotic factors that affect the good health of the cork oak woodlands, quoting a large number of titles dealing with oak ecology and original data, some of them unpublished, which largely contribute to grow the knowledge base in the field.

Landscape ecologists often need complete information on a particular ecosystem, in order to deepen their knowledge. This book offers them a holistic approach embedded in an historic frame. Furthermore, the reader will find important information about restoration, management and improvement of cork oak woodlands, followed by an economic evaluation of the various systems presented, based on a “total economic value” approach, i.e., nonmonetary and monetary values. Thus, it is possible to understand the real role that cork oaks represent to the environment, economy and society.

In countries like Portugal, from where the cork used in the American space shuttle originates, cork oak woodlands assume a particular importance not only because they prevent the spread of desertification and offer beautiful landscapes and rewarding jobs, but also due to its relevance in terms of GDP. The authors present a cost-benefit analysis of cork oak woodlands and deal with the constraints caused by other materials that have been trying to compete with cork. Perhaps the

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recent exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York (MoMA) of designer objects made of cork will raise the awareness to this ecological material and open new trends for the future.

Finally some global drives of change, such as climate change and alternative models for the future are discussed with particular emphasis on the challenges, opportunities, and constraints that oak woodlands face in a changing world.

The authors point out the need for continuing efforts to ensure a sustainable and desirable future for cork oak woodlands under a climatic, economic, and social changing pattern and offer advice on modelling techniques useful to avoid disastrous planning practices as those that have been partially responsible for the disappearance of cork oaks.

Cork Oak Woodlands on the Edge is certainly a reference for further studies dealing with this topic. In geographical terms, the book provides a broad overview of the cork oak illustrated in the several examples shown in the site profiles.

Taking into consideration the importance of cork oak for the livelihood of millions of people in the western Mediterranean, the book is of interest for a larger group of readers than only landscape ecologists. The book helps raise the awareness on the value of cork products and their associated job opportunities and thus the welfare of the local population and dynamics of the rural areas, since people are also fundamental for the survival of the cork oak woodlands.