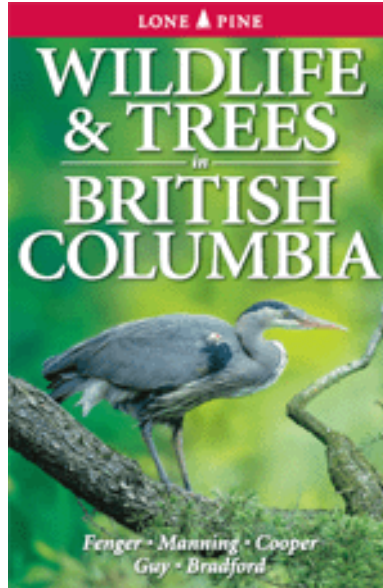


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Forward by Jim Walker

It was the American poet, Joyce Kilmer, who penned the lines that almost every school child associates with trees:

"I think that I shall never see a poem lovely as a tree".

Kilmer's poem leaves no doubt that his "lovely" tree was verdant, symmetrical and healthy - the best that Nature had to offer. Like many things, as we grow older we realize not everything measures up to our childhood image. Kilmer probably would not have had the same glowing words for trees that were old, damaged, deformed, diseased and decayed. Ironically, these types of trees are often among the "loveliest" from an ecological point of view. Had Kilmer the information in this book available to him, I like to think he would be the first to agree.

In a society that values youth, beauty and physical perfection above all else, Nature frequently reminds us that this judgment is mostly superficial and that the old, ugly and deformed can be equally desirable and perhaps more valuable. Wildlife trees are a case in point.

Our perception of what is valuable changes with increased research, knowledge and experience. When I began my career in government, we routinely took to court those logging companies who felled or dragged large logs into fish-bearing streams. Research later showed that "large organic debris" was one of the essential contributors to fish habitat and stream stability and a moderate amount of it was beneficial, if not critical. Similarly, for years the principal focus in wildlife management was almost exclusively the protection of living old growth stands to provide winter range for ungulates. Dead or

dying trees were simply felled as they posed a safety hazard to forest workers. Since then, we have learned that other components of a forest are equally valuable if we want to retain the full range of biodiversity. Wildlife trees are near the top of that list. The fight to generate a more enlightened approach to the protection of wildlife trees in British Columbia was a long and often adversarial one. For years, any such tree was regarded as simply a safety threat and was summarily removed. After much argument, based on research, saner heads prevailed and the Workers Compensation Board regulations now permit certain trees to be retained. We make progress in tiny steps. Traditionally in this province, foresters managed trees for the mill and biologists managed the wildlife habitat that was left. We are hopefully moving toward the time when all forest managers realize that they must work together collaboratively and consider all the values of the forest if they are to retain the "social license" to log. This is especially true when government has abrogated much of its role in forest management and relies on the professionalism of foresters and biologists. Recognition of this new obligation is happening, but not fast enough, nor universally enough and often with unfortunate retrogressive steps prompted by changes in policy by both government and industry. This book will hopefully accelerate the pace of positive change by providing more tools for the responsible manager and needed information for those who lobby and pressure the not-so-responsible ones. The fact that this book is a collaboration by several biologists and foresters is itself a good sign.

One of the authors remarked to me that there is nothing in this book that is new. That may be true for the practicing biologist or forester, but the interested public is often unaware of even old information, since it may not be easily accessible to non-professionals or available in understandable language. This book contains a wealth of information in a readable and usable format - for example, the tables regarding the stages and classification of wildlife trees. And the text moves logically from what constitutes a wildlife tree to their role in ecosystem management, and then focuses down to considerable detail on individual trees and animals. For those who want a quick course on the ecology of the forest and how harvesting can affect it, "Part Two: Wildlife Trees and Ecosystem Management" is a good current summary.

The information on wildlife trees in the urban landscape is understandably not as well developed as that for forest stands. Only recently have local governments begun to realize that for more and more people, a truly livable subdivision means the retention of natural elements. It is still a challenge to convince homebuyers, developers or local governments that an old, decayed and damaged tree can be a more interesting addition to their subdivision than the "nice" trees usually pictured in real estate ads. However, British Columbians are among the most environmentally aware people on the continent and increasingly, news stories tell of public efforts to protect such trees. This book will provide even more material for letters to the editor or arguments before the local council. At the end of his poem Kilmer says; "Poems are made by fools like me, But only God can make a tree."

Fortunately, with respect to wildlife trees, Kilmer is again only half right. Once a tree has become established, "Creating Wildlife Tree Features" in Part Two outlines practical

suggestions that can be implemented to help convert an old tree into a wildlife tree and speed up its ecological usefulness. It will probably never be as good as Mother Nature would have done, but there is much here for local stewardship groups.

Parts Four and Five on the classification and attributes of wildlife trees and on the 66 species that are currently known to use them are admittedly a work in progress, but they contain a surprising amount of detailed information. As our knowledge increases, new animal species and new trees will undoubtedly be added to the list, as will more knowledge of their contribution to biodiversity.

The authors (Fenger, Manning, Cooper, Guy, and Bradford) stress repeatedly throughout this book that it takes years to create a wildlife tree. Unfortunately, we do not have the same luxury of time to protect many of them. As population increases, forestry and resource extraction accelerates and urban growth occupies more and more land, wildlife trees are fast disappearing. Equally distressing, so are many of the younger trees that would be candidates to become wildlife trees in future.

In a country and a province that lauds itself on its enlightened approach to diversity, we need to remind ourselves as Canadians that if we are to be a truly sustainable and unselfish example for the world, our concern for protecting diversity must extend to other species than just humans.

This book is a small but positive and practical step in that direction and will prompt us to do more than just talk about it.

Jim Walker
April 2006

Jim Walker offers a unique inside-of-government view on the evolution on scientific understanding and integration of environmental protection measures into government policy, legislation and standard practice. A former career civil servant, Jim knows wildlife management and habitat protection as he progressed from field biologist to Assistant Deputy Minister in charge of Fish and Wildlife for the BC Ministry of Environment