

★ **Oaklore: Adventures in a World of Extraordinary Trees****Jules Acton**

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Jules Acton's comprehensive and delightful book *Oaklore* covers the science, history, and mythology of Great Britain's oak trees.

Noting that only 13 percent of the United Kingdom is covered by trees, this intriguing book focuses on the oak trees characteristic of the remaining woodland. An oak tree can live for hundreds of years, Acton writes, and is essential within thriving, diverse ecosystems at all stages in its life cycle, including its "lingering afterlife." And an astonishing 2,300 species of plants, animals, and fungi find food and shelter in Britain's oak trees, including 300 species that depend entirely on oak trees for their existence.

The book is loaded with fascinating insights and anecdotes. Dozens of species are described in detail, from the nuthatch and red squirrel to the spotted longhorn beetle and the elusive purple hairstreak butterfly. There are engaging descriptions of historic oaks across the country, too, including the Bowthorpe, with a girth of forty-two feet and an estimated age of over one thousand years. And an extended discussion of oak galls (small growths on oak buds and leaves that "house" beneficial wasps and their eggs) reveals that oak gall ink was used in writing the Magna Carta, Shakespeare's plays, and the US's Declaration of Independence.

The prose is nimble and witty, as when Acton describes the laughing "yaffle sound" of the green woodpecker ("If I'm going to feel mocked I'd like it done by wildlife") and the advantages of observing lichen ("They don't whizz about"). Attractive illustrations and practical tips, such as suggestions for identifying bird songs or baking with acorn flour, pair with the book's consideration of the challenges posed by development and climate change.

Clever and utterly charming, *Oaklore* is a creative study of one of Britain's most distinctive and important trees.

KRISTEN RABE (September / October 2024)

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