

# WHAT'S UP?

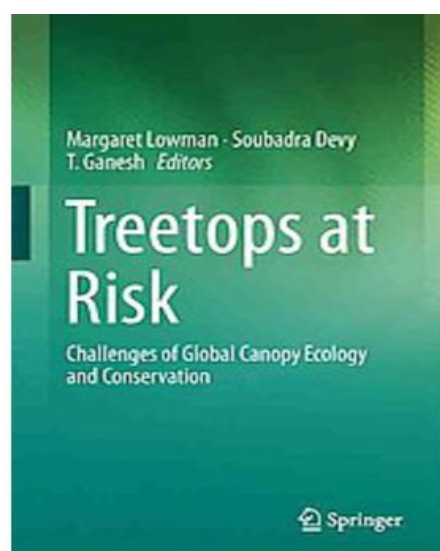
THE NEWSLETTER OF THE INTERNATIONAL CANOPY NETWORK

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## Global Canopy Science: Conferences, Publications, and Bottom-Up Action

An interview and discussion of the new anthology: *Treetops at Risk*



I spoke with Margaret (“Canopy Meg”) Lowman about *Treetops at Risk* an anthology about canopy global science, which she co-edited with Soubadra Devy and T. Ganesh.

Cody: Describe your involvement in canopy studies, canopy communications, and the international canopy conferences you have organized.

“*Treetops at Risk* is a volume that indirectly was a product of the International Canopy Conference that was held in Bangalore in 2009. What we wanted to do (in *Treetops at Risk*) was highlight as many countries as possible and have authors from those countries write about an issue that was critical to them. It might provide them an extra edge to get funding in their own country, and certainly with developing countries, we need to give collegial assistance to get them in a place where they can maximize their ability to serve their forests.”

Cody: What is the role of education in resource allocation regarding conservation and management?

“I think education is critical in the sciences. I’ve always tried to use education as a fairly big part of my time in other countries, not just collecting data for my own research, but giving back as much as I can through the education process. I think we should make a concerted effort for education; for creating education from the bottom up instead of from the top down.”

Cody: Do you have specific examples where that attitude has generated a significant impact?

“I’m working in Ethiopia now, and the last remaining forests in Ethiopia are found in churchyards, of the Coptic or Orthodox Christian Church.

They don’t have Google Earth images, they don’t have maps, they hardly ever go out of their little tiny grove of green. We pointed out that the pollinators of local crops are part of forest life, that fresh water springs are only found in these forests, and that all the medicines that the local villagers use come from these forests.”

So now we have this surprisingly strong bond, where we are working together to make a census, educate the kids, create opportunities for women in the environment. It’s all because the priests had the opportunity to learn about their own natural resources. It wasn’t possible for them to learn because they didn’t have any textbooks or radio stations or any kind of technology. To me, that’s life changing.”

Cody: Can you expand on other canopy education opportunities?

“Unfortunately there are very few education curricula that embrace canopy science. Before 1975, almost nobody studied the upper 95% of the forests, which is everything above about 10 feet high. I think the notion of how forests are increasingly important to climate change and carbon storage and serving as the interface between earth and atmosphere, gives a very high importance value to forests.

But I think one amazing thing that canopy biology can do is create a sense of awe and wonder. There is nothing more exciting than climbing a tree, or seeing life teeming in a treetop, even if you are in the middle of a church forest in Ethiopia. All of the kids in the village are so aware of that, and that’s very inspirational for education. With science literacy so low right now, we so desperately hope that young people and global audiences will respond to the importance of science as a solution creator that can leverage work to fix environmental problems. It’s important and exciting to use canopy science in that way.

We actually went to the moon before we researched the canopy science of the whole forest. So I think we still have a lot to learn by paying attention to canopy and I think we have a lot to gain by using education and outreach as a hook for kids. “



Meg and the local children during “Bug Class”



Meg and the High Priest.

Cody: What are you hopeful about?

“First, I have hope about the next generation; an incredible talent with both virtual technologies and real nature. I think that the synthesis of those is going to lead to a lot of environmental solutions. Second, I’m hopeful that in developing countries, women are becoming an important force for the environment. It’s long overdue, but in countries like Ethiopia, western Samoa, and other places where I’ve worked, that is an invisible strength because that means that forests will have 51 percent of the population as stewards of the resources.”

Cody: You emphasize the importance of education ‘going both ways’ when speaking of the prevalent attitudes and behaviors in the United States.

“We have a country that is a big consumer of products that are threatening to tropical forests, so we need education in our country more than anywhere else. Some companies are turning some of their stock returns into environmental stewardship.”

The next International Canopy Conference will be meeting in London in 2015. Dr. Lowman will continue to build her understanding of the state of conservation, research, and community involvement in forests around the globe.