

INTRODUCTION TO THE ENGLISH EDITION

WHEN I WROTE this book, I wanted to describe my experiences in the forest I manage in the Eifel mountains in Germany and record what the trees had taught me. As soon as the German edition of the book was published, it was clear that the story I had to tell struck a chord with many, many people. My message, though grounded in a forest I interact with almost every day, is a message that applies to forests and woodlands around the world.

I am most familiar with the struggles and strategies of beeches and oaks, and with the contrast between deciduous forests that plan their own futures and coniferous forests planted for commercial gain. However, the struggles and strategies in forests left to their own devices, and the tension created when forests are planted instead of evolving at their own pace, are issues that resonate far beyond my experiences in Hümmele.

I encourage you to look around where you live. What dramas are being played out in wooded areas you can explore? How are commerce and survival balanced in the forests and woodlands you know? This book is a lens to help you take a closer look at what you might have taken for granted. Slow down, breathe deep, and look around. What can you hear? What do you see? How do you feel?

My story also explains why forests matter on a global scale. Trees are important, but when trees unite to create a fully functioning forest, you really can say that the whole is greater than its parts. Your trees may not function exactly as my trees do, and your forest might look a little different, but the underlying narrative is the same: forests matter at a more fundamental level than most of us realize.

Before you plunge into this book to find out what I have discovered just by stepping outside my back door, I want to tell you a story about Yellowstone National Park in the United States to show just how vital undisturbed forests and woodlands are to the future of our planet and how our appreciation for trees affects the way we interact with the world around us.

It all starts with the wolves. Wolves disappeared from Yellowstone, the world's first national park, in the 1920s. When they left, the entire ecosystem changed. Elk herds in the park increased their numbers and began to make quite a meal of the aspens, willows, and cottonwoods that lined the streams. Vegetation declined and animals that depended on the trees left. The wolves

were absent for seventy years. When they returned, the elk's languorous browsing days were over. As the wolf packs kept the herds on the move, browsing diminished, and the trees sprang back. The roots of cottonwoods and willows once again stabilized stream banks and slowed the flow of water. This, in turn, created space for animals such as beavers to return. These industrious builders could now find the materials they needed to construct their lodges and raise their families. The animals that depended on the riparian meadows came back, as well. The wolves turned out to be better stewards of the land than people, creating conditions that allowed the trees to grow and exert their influence on the landscape.

My hope is that the wolves' stewardship of natural processes in Yellowstone will help people appreciate the complex ways that trees interact with their environment, how our interactions with forests affect their success, and the role forests play in making our world the kind of place where we want to live. Apart from that, forests hide wonders that we are only just beginning to explore. I invite you to enter my world.