

Preface

This book could hardly be more timely. In 2009 the world's politicians, negotiators and administrators prepared for the Copenhagen Conference in December of that year to develop an international agreement replacing the Kyoto Protocol and seeking ways of reducing the threats of climate change.

At the same time the politicians, the non-governmental organizations, the media and the public at large have come to recognize the significant role that forests, woodlands and trees play in the processes of macro- and micro-climatic stabilization. In addition these forests, both natural and planted, contribute to the supply and quality of water for humans, livestock and wildlife; the maintenance and improvement of soils, and the conservation of the biological diversity of countless plant and animal species. These ecological benefits are additional to the commonly recognized socio-economic values of employment and income generation from the production of wood, fuels, food and pharmaceuticals.

The increasing awareness of forest-related issues in the last decade has prompted the publication of many books, scientific papers and official reports that deal with individual or collective aspects of these roles of forests and trees. However, Mikael Grut's contribution is not simply another one of these publications. It is a collection of descriptions and definitions of more than a thousand terms and subjects selected by the author as interesting to himself but clearly of global interest. It covers truly a miscellany of facts and for most of them it includes historically fascinating facts and relationships.

To take just two subjects from the first letter of the alphabetical arrangement, did you know, for example, that the alder tree provided the red-paint used by Lapp people or that the former capital of Kazakhstan was named Almaty or "Father of apples" after the many apple trees there? These and the hundreds of other facts in this book make fascinating reading for a wide audience; it is the sort of book that can be dipped into at random for simple enjoyment or searched systematically for hard information on specific topics.

I have known the author of this book, Mikael Grut, for many years as a professional colleague working with national and international agencies in many developing countries. He has always brought his wide knowledge, experience and interest to the task of forest management in a wide range of forest types and socio-political conditions. His gentle approach to politicians, managers and local communities alike has been a fundamental asset in the preparation and conduct of projects different types. His writing is always immaculate as demonstrated in this book; overall it shows his total dedication to the management of our natural resources and to his desire to share historical facts and traditions in a highly readable manner.

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