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**Living with the Trees of Life: Towards the Transformation of Tropical Agriculture.**

*Roger Leakey*

CAB International. 2012. 224 pages. 9781780640983. £27.50 / $52.50 / €35.00

I am constantly looking for books for my students that are entertaining to read, inspirational but with plenty of well argued content. Such books are rare, but Roger Leakey has succeeded in writing one on Agroforestry. This is not a subject that lends itself to treatment in readable texts but “Living with the Trees of Life” manages to combine biography, passion for trees and a well argued account of the importance of trees in agricultural systems to meet needs of farmers and of the global environment. The book is largely based upon the author’s personal experiences in Africa and his attempts over several decades to enrich the systems of smallholder farmers. It ranges from the domestication of trees in West and Central African forests – *Prunus africana*  in particular – through to the agroforestry systems of farmers in the highlands of East Africa. This is all enriched with interesting digressions into trees on farms in South America and the Pacific. The whole is set in a context

of the author’s involvement in global environmental debates and his moderately successful attempts to make agroforestry more prominent in the various international environment agreements. This is woven into a story of hand’s on experience of finding valuable trees, propagating them vegetatively and finding markets for their products.

The book also gives a nice historical account of the emergence of the World Agroforestry Center (previously the

International Center for Research on Agroforestry) as a global force promoting trees on farms. It describes the evolution of the priorities of that center since its incorporation into the Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research in the early 1990s. A lot of WAC’s work has focussed on the soil fertility enhancing role of trees – notably nitrogen fixing trees – in the sub-humid tropics. Trees have mainly been seen as playing a supporting role to agriculture. Less attention has been given to tree crops as such oil palm, coffee, cacao and

rubber that can be grown profitably by smallholder farmers. Recently WAC has taken more interest in such tree crops and the author recognises the potential importance of these. The author also notes the need for more attention to be given to the role of trees in land rehabilitation and restoration.

There is now great international interest in “Forest Landscape Restoration” and this has to be more than just covering the landscape with industrial plantations. The author provides food for thought on the key questions of what to plant, where and for whose benefit. The theme running through the book is that of multifunctional

agriculture. The case for mixed farming systems which include trees is argued persuasively – only time will

tell if this ecologically attractive approach to agriculture can prevail in the face of the overwhelming power of globalised markets and their impetus towards simple monocultures and economies of scale. I personally hope that the “Trees of life” will win.

So I would recommend this volume as having much of interest to everyone from the seasoned professional agricultural or forestry practitioner to the aspiring student of natural resources management in the tropics.

**Prof Jeff Sayer**

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