

**Ancient Pathways, Ancestral Knowledge: Ethnobotany and Ecological Wisdom of Indigenous Peoples of Northwestern North America. V.1: The History and Practice of Indigenous Plant Knowledge; V.2: The Place and Meaning of Plants in Indigenous Cultures and Worldviews. By Nancy Turner. 2014. McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal. 1056 pp.**

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Received December 11, 2015

Accepted February 24, 2016

OPEN ACCESS

DOI 10.14237/ebl.7.1.2016.551

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Presently retiring from her tenure as Distinguished Professor of Ethnoecology at the University of Victoria, eminent Canadian ethnobotanist Professor Nancy Turner is actively involved with the Global Diversity Foundation and the Hakai Institute. In addition to numerous accolades she has earned for her life's work, including the Distinguished Economic Botanist of the Year in 2011 and the William L. Brown Award for Excellence in Genetic Resource Conservation in 2008, her recent book, *Ancient Pathways, Ancestral Knowledge*, was the recipient of the 2014 James A. Duke Excellence in Botanical Literature Award. The two volume set distills over 40 years of ethnobotanical research in Western Canada, and will be an indispensable resource for students and scholars of ethnobotany and ethnoecology, land management and policy makers, and herbalists and wild food enthusiasts. Perhaps most importantly, the volumes stand as an invaluable treasury and record of the unique biocultural heritage of and for the people and communities who shared their traditional knowledge with her over the years.

With this book, Turner aims to “contribute to the advancement of knowledge and understandings both about cultural adaptations to specific places and environmental situations and about influences of people on these places and ecosystems” (p. 411, v.2). While the scope of these two volumes is vast, addressing complex scales of interactions across time between people, plants, cultures, and the natural

world, the material is presented in a genuinely approachable and engaging manner. The content is grounded in observations and examples accrued from nearly 50 years of collaboration with indigenous botanical experts of Northwestern North America.

The overarching theme guiding the discourse is, “How can the lessons of ethnobotanical and ethnoecological knowledge and its modes of dissemination, transmission, and adaptation be applied as components of ongoing cultural revitalization and maintenance of biocultural richness?” (p. 402, v.2). Illustrating the benefits of collaborative, multidisciplinary approaches to research, Turner discusses the investigation of *Kwädäy Dän Ts'inchi* (Long Ago Person Found), with protocols developed through collaboration between scientists, government, and First Nations, leading to positive research outcomes. Turner examines transmission of knowledge, technologies, and resources, drawing insightful parallels between analyses of linguistic and botanical knowledge transmission, and specifically how the linguistics of plant naming can shed light on the cultural and economic processes of transmission of both botanical knowledge and plant material. Utilizing soapberry (*Shepherdia canadensis*) as one case example, a high degree of congruence in its naming is shown to be a factor of its cultural salience, which led to a host of innovations in production and processing technology, as well as cultural developments such as stories, songs, and narratives that further added to soapber-



ry's perceived value and prevalence as a food source.

By illustrating the adaptive and dynamic processes of building knowledge, Turner shows the importance of conceptualizing and strengthening social and environmental interconnections in support of positive change in biocultural systems, "to reformulate our behaviors in ways that will allow us to live more sustainably in the world we have inherited and to bequeath it to the future in a fully functioning, healthy, vibrant, and diverse state" (p. 411, v.2). Among the Indigenous peoples she worked with, Professor Turner found a pervasive perspective that "humans are only strands in the immense fabric of the universe" (p. 351, v. 2). Humans are seen as an interdependent part of their local environments, engaged in reciprocal relationships with natural resources, mediated by cultural traditions. These observations bear meaningful implications for land

management and policy, and are made accessible to the reader through tables that detail techniques and approaches for maintaining and enhancing plant resources.

A fascinating exploration of the interrelationships between the environmental and social contexts and their combined influence upon the dynamics of cultural and technological innovations, this book brilliantly portrays "a story of increasing diversification and complexity—in the species used, in the implements devised, and the social and cultural contexts of their application" (p. 411, v.1). The book includes a range of useful and informative reference tables that detail plant names, uses, and management. This is a synthesis of sophisticated complexity that is both engaging and immersive, due to the wealth of practical and theoretical insights derived from decades of collaboration with traditional knowledge holders.