

written by Ester Dobiášová – illustrated by Radka Martincová

TREE CELEBRITIES



TREE CELEBRITIES

Ester Dobiášová & Radka Martincová



WYNDHAM PRISON TREE

Baobab

As a group of prisoners was being escorted along the dusty road to Wyndham for trial, police guards noticed a hollow baobab tree. They had a grim idea: what if they stored the prisoners inside the tree during the journey to prevent escapes? They cut an opening into the trunk and shoved the men inside. “What a nerve—this tree’s not the only hollow thing around here!” the Aboriginal prisoners might have muttered as they were packed into the tree’s belly. One night, the tree was so full that one prisoner had to be chained up outside. By morning, he was gone—all that remained was a bent iron bolt.

Baobabs grow leafless for up to nine months each year.

Unlike many trees, baobabs don’t have prominent annual growth rings.

This tree has a circumference of about 40 feet.

The Wyndham Prison Tree, also known as Hillgrove Lockup, stands near the Mooloolah Reservoir in Victoria, south-eastern Australia. A similar use was recorded in the 1890s for a baobab known as Kunumudj in Derby, Western Australia. But baobabs were not only dreaded. Aboriginal people had long used their spacious hollows as temporary shelters.



Flowers are pollinated by bats and nocturnal insects such as the convolvulus hawk-moth. They carry pollen on their tiny bodies and spread it far and wide.



The flowers open at night and the blooming is so rapid you can actually see it unfold before your eyes!

Seeds are used to produce a nutritious edible oil. Roasted seeds are used as a coffee substitute.



Ants, termites, parrots, bats, and bees hide in the tree’s bark crevices and make their nests there.



Fruits are edible with a citrus tang. Locals use the pulp to make refreshing drinks, porridges, marmalades, and jams.



The leaves are eaten by both livestock and people. In traditional medicine, they are used to make remedies.

The baobab’s soft, fibrous wood is full of tough strands. These fibres are used to make ropes, fishing nets, mats, hats, and baskets.



WHICH OTHER TREE IN THIS BOOK HAS SEEDS THAT CAN BE USED TO MAKE COFFEE SUBSTITUTES?

SUNLAND BAOBAB

African baobab

The spacious hollows of baobabs are irresistible to people. The Sunland Baobab, in Limpopo, South Africa, is a great example. A door had been installed in its trunk, and behind it? A pub! It once served beer, wine, and lemonade and even hosted a party for sixty people. Sadly, a few years ago, the tree split apart—and that marked the end of the festivities.

Baobabs can hold up to 1,000 gallons of water in their trunks.



Dried and ground to be used as pipe tobacco.

Recognisable by their white, waxy, drooping petals. These flowers are strongly scented and rich in nectar.



The tree's girth was once recorded at 154 feet..

CAN YOU FIND ANOTHER TREE IN THIS BOOK WITH A HOLLOW LARGE ENOUGH FOR MANY PEOPLE TO FIT INSIDE?

Consist of five to seven finger-like leaflets—hence the species' name "digitata".



AVENUE OF THE BAOBAB

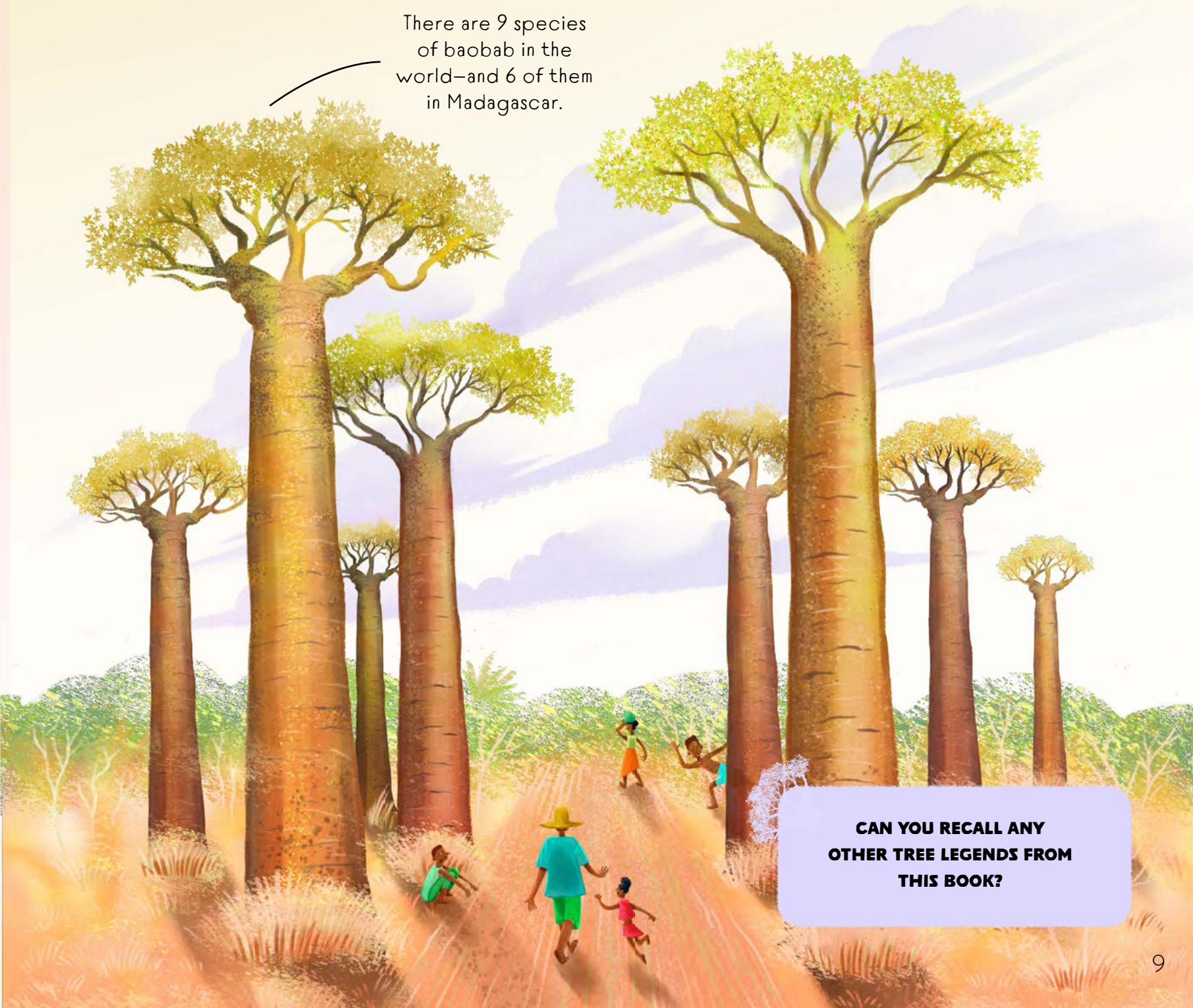
Grandidier's baobab

The world's tallest baobab is Grandidier's baobab. With towering trunks reaching up to 82 feet and stubby branches up top, they look like they've been planted upside down! A whole avenue of these magnificent trees has lined the dirt track between the settlements of Belon'i Tsiribihina and Morondava on Madagascar for centuries. These baobabs are surrounded by legends. One tale says that a baobab envied the palm tree's slimness, the fig's fruit, and the bottletree's flowers. It complained so much that the gods lost patience, pulled it from the ground, and planted it back upside down.

There are 9 species of baobab in the world—and 6 of them in Madagascar.



A Verreaux's sifaka enjoys feasting on the fruit, which is why the baobab's fruit is called "monkey bread".



CAN YOU RECALL ANY OTHER TREE LEGENDS FROM THIS BOOK?

GUARDIAN OF THE FLOODED VALLEY

Scots pine

The Chudobín Pine is a living monument to a Czech village that was submerged in 1956 during the construction of the Vír Reservoir. For centuries, the pine overlooked Chudobín from a cliff above the river and was the last to bid farewell to the villagers when they had to abandon their homes. Today, during rainy seasons, it stands on a tiny island in the middle of the reservoir. In dry periods, the island becomes a narrow tongue of land jutting out from the forested shore.

It has a strong central root and many lateral roots that anchor it firmly in the soil.

It is 350 years old.

Scots pines grow in a range of conditions—from lowlands to mountains, on sandy soils and in swamps. Scots pine is one of the most widespread species. It grows from western Europe to eastern Siberia, and is also found in North America and other parts of the globe. Its softwood is especially valued for building boats.

CAN YOU NAME ANOTHER TREE WHOSE WOOD IS ALSO USED TO BUILD BOATS?



Pine needles contain special oils known for their anti-inflammatory and antibacterial properties.



Pinecones contain light seeds easily carried by the wind.

The red crossbill feeds on the seeds of pinecones.



The black woodpecker creates hollows in pine trunks that later become homes for other animals.

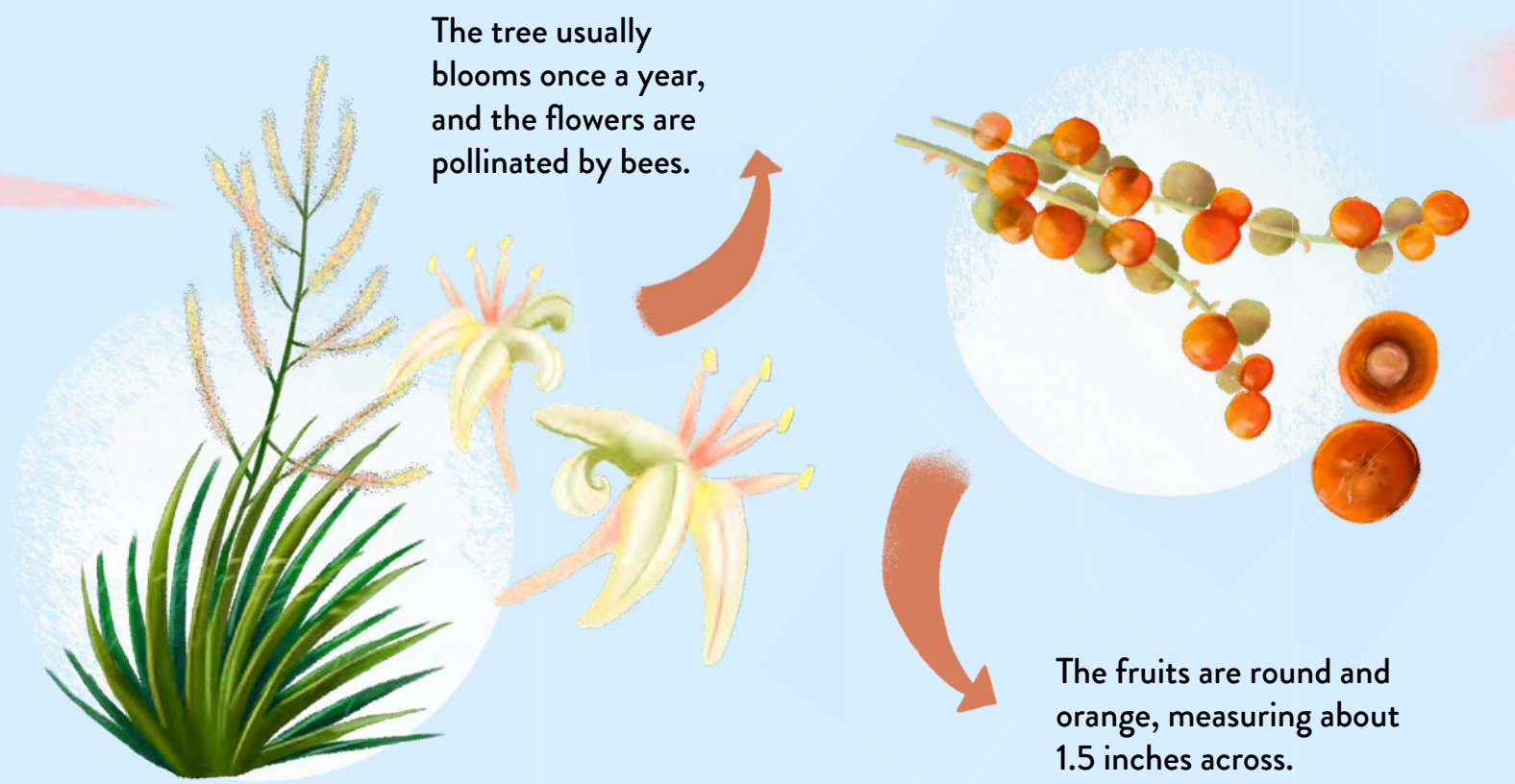
DRAGON TWINS

Canary Islands dragon tree

Legend has it that long ago, twin brothers Urunte and Timizara fell in love with the same girl, Urbina, which proved to be their misfortune. Determined to win her hand, they chose to duel, but neither survived. Heartbroken, Urbina, who had loved them both, planted two dragon trees on the site of their tragic fight. People say the twins' blood still flows through these trees and that their spirits are locked forever in a struggle for her love. You'll find the trees on the island of Tenerife, in the town of Breña Alta. Their umbrella-shaped crowns, turned by the wind, help them survive in shallow, arid soil. They grow incredibly slowly—only about three feet every ten years.



Their branches look like the many necks of dragon's heads. Each branch grows for ten to fifteen years before it forks again.



The tree usually blooms once a year, and the flowers are pollinated by bees.

The fruits are round and orange, measuring about 1.5 inches across.

The oldest known dragon tree is El Drago Milenario—the Thousand-Year-Old Dragon. It is a symbol of the Canary Islands and once appeared on the 1,000 peseta banknote.



When cut, the tree oozes translucent, blood-red drops of resin known as “dragon’s blood.” Islanders collect it for its healing properties and even make intentional cuts to extract it. It’s also used as a dye and in varnishes for musical instruments.

DO YOU KNOW ANOTHER TREE IN THIS BOOK THAT GROWS VERY SLOWLY?

MAJOR OAK

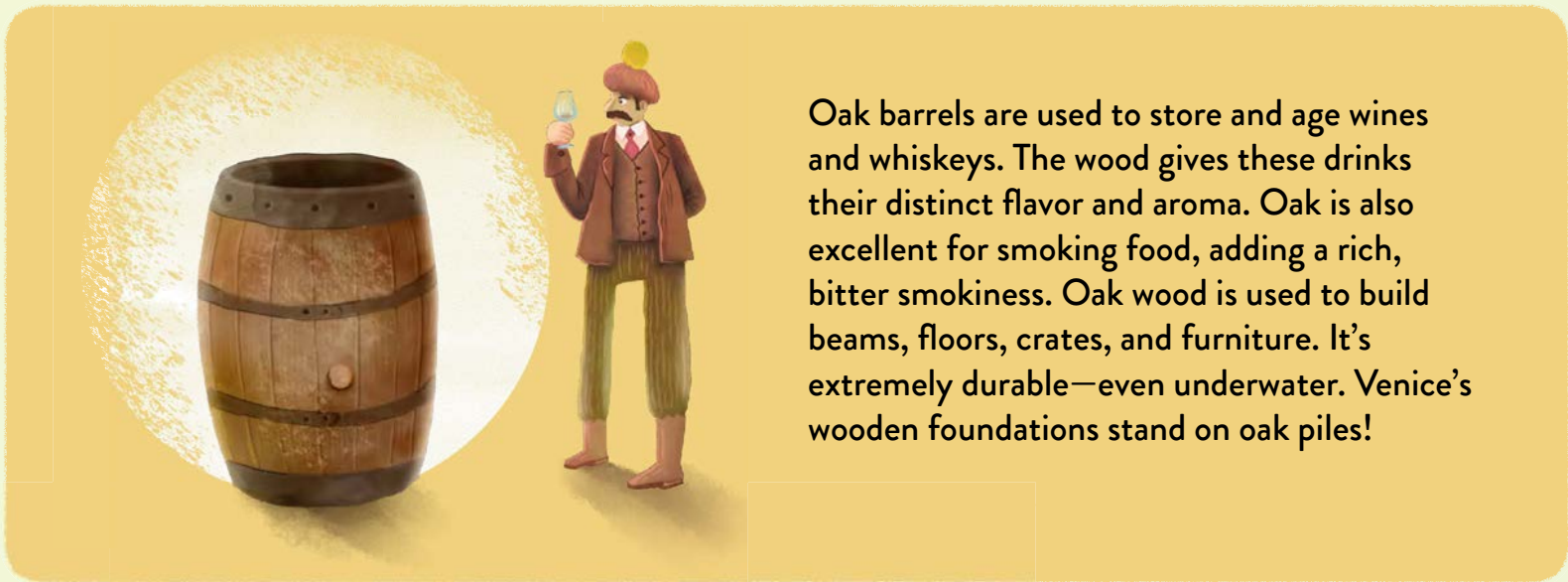
English oak

In the heart of Sherwood Forest, Nottinghamshire, England, stands a mighty oak with a history that stretches back through the centuries. Local legend says the famous outlaw Robin Hood once sat beneath its expansive boughs with his companions. In the 13th century, Sherwood was a royal forest governed by strict laws—hunting and gathering firewood were forbidden, and the Sheriff of Nottingham enforced those laws harshly. Robin and his band had other ideas. “Take from the rich and give to the poor,” he’d say as they plotted their raids. Today, people from around the world come to embrace the massive trunk of the Major Oak and listen to the rustling leaves as they whisper stories of knights and outlaws.



The oak eggar moth lays its eggs on oak leaves, while the purple hairstreak butterfly searches for food in the canopy.

The tree is named after Major Hayman Rooke, a tree lover and historian.



Oak barrels are used to store and age wines and whiskeys. The wood gives these drinks their distinct flavor and aroma. Oak is also excellent for smoking food, adding a rich, bitter smokiness. Oak wood is used to build beams, floors, crates, and furniture. It’s extremely durable—even underwater. Venice’s wooden foundations stand on oak piles!

Oaks withstand storms and fierce winds. Their deep roots give them stability, which is why they’re planted along dams and riverbanks to reinforce the soil.



Small round lumps called oak galls form on leaves—home to the larvae of gall wasps. People once used galls to make ink.

Roasted acorns can be ground into flour or used to brew acorn coffee.



Struggling to light a fire? Crushed oak wood catches easily and burns well.



Larvae of the stag beetle—Europe’s largest beetle—develop inside rotting oak wood.

Acorns are an important food source for animals like the red squirrel and the wild boar. The barn owl nests safely inside tree hollows.

WHAT DO HUMANS AND ANIMALS USE TREE HOLLOW FOR?

THIMMAMMA'S BANYAN TREE

Banyan fig

According to legend, there once lived a woman long ago whose name was Thimmamma. When her husband died, she was so overcome with grief that she threw herself onto the funeral pyre beside his body. From one of the pyre's support stakes, an enormous banyan tree grew, which is said to house the soul of the grieving woman. This famous banyan has become sacred for Hindus, Buddhists, Jains, and Sikhs. It is believed that childless couples who pray beneath the tree will have a child within the year. Each year during the Shivaratri festival, thousands of people gather there to worship and make wishes under its huge branches.

It has over 1,600 roots and covers an area of two hectares, which makes it the tree with the largest crown in the world.



The young banyan starts life in the crown of another tree. It only needs an animal to drop its seed into a crevice between branches. The fig then sends down aerial roots like curtains, which eventually reach the ground and take hold.

The tree is 650 years old.



The leaves are about 8 inches long, glossy, and shift in color as they grow, transitioning from a reddish hue to light green.



The tree gives the impression of movement, a sense created by its aerial roots. These help support the tree's weight and spread over a large area.

An illustration of a winged chalcid wasp, *Eupristina masoni*, shown in profile. It has a dark, bulbous body and transparent wings.

The flowers, unusually hidden inside a bulbous, fleshy structure called a syconium, are pollinated by only a single species of winged chalcid wasp, *Eupristina masoni*. The females lay their eggs directly inside the syconium.



Banyan trees can form extensive forests.

WHICH OTHER TROPICAL TREES PROVIDE SHELTER FOR PEOPLE AND ANIMALS?

GRANDFATHER FIR

Silver fir

In Germany's Black Forest lives a giant: a silver fir standing 150 feet tall. When Louis XIV marched into southern Germany, this tree barely reached his knees. Luckily, the tree was spared from war. At first, it was alone, but over the centuries, trees grew around it, and now, hidden in a thick forest, it's hard to spot from afar. You must come closer . . . and closer . . . until it finally takes your breath away. Its grey, ridged bark bears witness to storms, droughts, harsh winters, and the many people from nearby Freudenstadt who visit it regularly. The silver fir grows in the mountain forests of Central Europe. Alongside beech, it forms rare fir-beech forests. Mushrooms like saffron milk caps, russulas, and fly agarics thrive nearby.



The female cones grow upright at the top of the tree. They ripen in August and begin to break apart while still on the fir.

The pollen is carried from the male cone to the flowering female cone.



In the past, people used fir wood to make masts, boats, roof shingles, and barrels. Today, the silver fir is often used as a Christmas tree.



CAN YOU THINK OF OTHER TREE SPECIES PEOPLE DECORATE AT CHRISTMAS?

It is 330 years old.

Each cone scale hides two seeds.

Its roots work in partnership with fungi. The fungi help the tree absorb nutrients from the soil and receive sugars in return.

HUNDRED-HORSE CHESTNUT

Sweet chestnut

Through the hilly terrain of Sicily gallops the Queen of Aragon with her loyal knights by her side. One, two, three . . . at least a hundred horses are in the entourage. A storm is approaching. They must find shelter quickly! Luckily, on the eastern slope of Mount Etna, they come across a giant chestnut tree and manage to wait out in safety. Or so the legend goes. Over the years, the chestnut has split into several large trunks, all sharing the same underground root system. It is considered the largest and oldest known chestnut tree in the world.



The prickly husk protects the seeds—chestnuts—from squirrels. Chestnuts are a delicacy throughout Europe. Chestnut mash, purée with whipped cream, pudding, chocolate-coated chestnuts, candied chestnuts . . . They're eaten roasted or boiled, and the dried ones are ground into flour.

Can you see those spines on the leaves? Be careful not to prick yourself.



The tree is believed to be between 2,000 and 4,000 years old.



HAVE YOU EVER TASTED CHESTNUTS?