

Courier  
Environment  
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## **Dendro-Psychoses: The Love of Trees**

More than a century ago, in 1897, J.O. Quartz, a psychologist, was the first to use an evolutionary approach to understand why people have bonds with trees. Trees to people were more than just decorative features in a landscape; there was something deeper and more spiritual about people's reverence for trees. He believed there was a biological origin of the bond between humans and trees.

Ancient beliefs are still part of our modern behavior. For example a fear of being in the woods in the dark is associated with danger. Rocking children to sleep is a reflection of an earlier evolutionary stage when we were tree dwellers as expressed in the rhyme, "*Rockabye baby in the tree tops*". The climbing instinct of children is a residual of former habits; and games such as hide and seek make play out the formerly serious business of finding shelter in the trees. People's first religions made their temples in the trees.

Today though, many of our trees face environmental problems caused by the stresses of population and construction. Natural cycles of growth and decline are being affected greatly by man's intrusions into the forests. Perhaps the most prevalent impact is the loss of the Ponderosa pine due to the cycle of the mountain pine beetle.

One of the most foremost authorities in the problems of trees and man is David Leatherman, state entomologist for the forest service. In the last 25 years, he has observed two cycles of the Mountain pine beetle plight. Recently he did two aerial surveys of the state forests and in his preliminary examination he feels that the tree deaths due to beetle infestation may not be doubling as they did over the last five years. In 1995, the tree deaths due to beetle were 1,500 trees statewide. Last year it was 275,000, doubling each year from the year before. This year the aerial surveys indicate that the 275,000 figure may hold.

Though the beetle cycle typically lasts 10 years, Leatherman says some factors may be slowing it down. The best and biggest trees have already succumbed to the beetle. And in some areas, people are taking care of their trees by doing control work. He cited areas near Larkspur, Nederland, Red Feather lakes and in Boulder County as evidence of successful control programs. The weather too, has helped this year. We had a normal cold winter and more moisture this year.

One other factor he's observed is the presence of woodborers in the infected trees. With the woodborers in the trees eating the larva of the pine beetles and competing for the food, the pine beetles are not able to lay their eggs and many of them do not survive to the next season. In the last cycle of beetle influx in the 70's this was an indication of the cycle coming to an end.

Leatherman cautions people not to let down their guard, as in many areas the beetles are rampant. Forty per cent of the state wide totals of beetle killed trees are in the Buena Vista area. Locally, aerial fly - overs indicate that the 285 corridor, especially from Bailey to Grant, Parmalee Gulch and Marshdale are infested. Bill Mc Garva of McGarva tree service, a local company, confirmed this. His crews are currently cutting down many infested trees in the Highway 285 area. He too feels that the trees affected are about the same as last year. Tammy Winchell of Evergreen Nursery agreed but added two factors, which have determined the number of trees sprayed. She said people have told her that economics has dictated whether trees will be sprayed. This year many people have lost their jobs and as a result have cut back on expenses. Another factor is the new people moving into the community who are not aware of the May to July 15 cycle for spraying before the beetle flies.

While the cutting down of a tree is far more expensive, some people have opted to let nature take its course. Remembering ancient beliefs, we can liken our sadness at seeing the trees die with the belief that an entire species will die if something happens to a favored person. In psychologist's J.O. Quades work, Quoting Shakespeare's lines, 'Tis thought the king is dead, we will not stay. The bay trees in our country all are withered.' Or in understanding our local tree the aspen, the legend reveals, "having supplied the wood of the cross it has never ceased to tremble".

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