

THE WORLD OF OAKS—DIVERSITY, CULTURAL HISTORY, AND CONSERVATION

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The number of species of oaks worldwide currently stands at 430. Recent advancements in genome sequencing have helped elucidate the evolutionary history of oaks, their diversification, and dispersal. Throughout the world, oaks hold great importance as a human food source and for several byproducts. Oaks have tremendous value to humanity, yet they remain undervalued and understudied. The last decade has witnessed a greater societal awareness of the role oaks play in supporting biodiversity within every habitat in which they are found. The ecological connectivity of the natural world is on display in the genus *Quercus* with its numerous codependent fauna. Despite our best efforts to value oak trees, they are threatened by various challenges, including exploitation, poor land management, habitat fragmentation, increasing incidence of pests and diseases, and the uncertainties posed by a rapidly warming planet. How will oaks respond? Through the efforts of multiple conservation organizations and nongovernmental organizations, the development of The Red List of U.S. Oaks (2017) and The Red List of Oaks (2020) provides the most updated information on the conservation status of oaks worldwide. In 2019, the Global Conservation Consortium for Oak, led by The Morton Arboretum in partnership with Botanic Gardens Conservation International, was established to create a network of collaborators to work on pragmatic solutions for oaks under imminent threat of extinction. The International Oak Society (IOS) is a key partner in this effort. In 2020, the IOS created the Oak Conservation and Research Fund. The fund has supported 11 projects, many involving rare oaks worldwide.

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