

Portugal – a tree snapshot

Portugal has wonderful wood pastures or dehesas – especially open grown cork oak, evergreen oak and sweet chestnut. These dehesas go on for mile upon mile and have been sustainable since time immemorial.



Most of the trees have smallish girths but there are many veteran trees. We heard lots of lesser spotted woodpeckers– a good sign of the quality of the habitat.



The trees can grow really big even in these hot dry conditions – a champion, a corker!





These stunningly beautiful trees work for *our* living – providing cork for the wine industry, wood fuel and acorns for the stock. The cork bark is removed every 9 years. And wood is also cut from the tree regularly to make the distinctive shape to maximise productivity.



These trees can be really great for decaying wood eaters – something big has been eating this tree.



The reason that Ted and I were in Portugal was to speak at a seminar in Sabugal, Portugal in June 2009. The seminar was called Arvores Monumentales- importancia e conservacao. It included speakers from the organisation Associacao Arvores de Portugal and a speaker from Spain from Proyecto Arboles Leyendas Vivas.

The first night we arrived our host Seraphim took us out tree hunting in the dark! A first for us.



Then during the excursion with the group (there were 40 participants) we did the usual Ancient Tree Hunt things.....

....We stood in front of trees and spoke in English and Portuguese

Left to right Joao Riem (our translator), his father Seraphim Riem of Planeta das Arvores, one of the main sponsors for the event and Ted.



....We measured some trees – this one is one of 52 Sweet Chestnuts over 5m girth recorded in the area. The surveyors estimate that there could be another 50 at least to find. We counted the rings of a felled sweet chestnut which had 130 rings and a girth of just over 4m.



.....Some of us hugged it! It took four and a half people.



...We climbed inside a hollow sweet chestnut – we were astounded that 9 people could squeeze in.



...And we took a group picture under the largest girthed sweet chestnut that we visited



The town of Sabugal is famous for its mediaeval castle and it is close to a Natural Park which still has Iberian lynx and black storks.

There was a really fascinating school exhibition in the town square – a sort of dehesa (wood pasture) on your doorstep. The children had painted tree models with different environmental messages.



The town is very go ahead – it has arranged for a small park to be created around this translocated, dead standing sweet chestnut – Humphry Repton would be impressed!



Nearby in the main square of the town of Pontelegre we were also pleased to see this innovative way of securing the scale and atmosphere of a great plane tree and while making it safe for people to sit beneath it in the shade



We had a really great time.

Thank you and good luck Portugal in securing a future for your wonderful treescapes

