



# Forests and Trees

## ***Ways of Observing***

### ***Wonder***

In a forest or treed place, or your favourite natural place, with your attention on what is around you, say to yourself, "I wonder . . .". "I wonder why lichen is growing on that side of the tree, only?" "I wonder why the fallen leaves are piling up in this particular pattern?" "I wonder what attracts that bird to that tree?" Don't worry about answering your questions; just notice what questions you can generate. As much as possible, keep your questions focused on physical reality. Not "I wonder how that tree likes all those mangoes on its branches," but "I wonder why those branches don't break under the weight of all that fruit." You could follow up at home with an encyclopedia or the internet, trying to answer some of the questions, but the focus here is less on answers than on learning to generate intelligent questions.

### ***Observing Energy***

Ask yourself, "How is energy coming into this system? How is it being exchanged?" There are many different sorts of energy you might observe: sunlight, heat, energy generated by motion of air or water, food. You might try sketching your favourite place, or one tree in it, purely as a pattern of light and shadow. Don't worry about producing a "good" drawing; just let it become a meditation on how light energy is intercepted by form.

### ***Observing Communities***

What is growing together with what in this area? Which trees with which bushes, which groundcovers? Are there patterns you can discern? Are there native ferns under the gums, and bracken near the clearings? What insects, birds and animals seem to be connected with what plants? Are some plants serving as "nurses" for the young of others? Do some plants seem to stay distant from each other? Are some plants always found together? (Note: such questions can generally be answered only by many observations over time.)

### ***Observing Patterns***

What patterns can you see in this place? Textures, patterns of growth, distribution patterns, stress marks, all are examples of patterns. What patterns are repeated, on what scales? Can you find spirals? Pentacles? Branching patterns? Patterns based in fours or sixes? How many times does a tree branch from twig to trunk? What functions might these patterns serve? Why are certain patterns repeated over and over again in nature? Again, you might wish to take a session to draw patterns or forms. Put your thoughts on paper without worrying about producing a work of art, but simply as a meditation to sharpen your ability to see and focus.

### ***Observing Edges***

Where does one system meet another in this place? Edges - places where the forest meets the field, or the trees meet the stream - are often the most diverse and fertile parts of an ecosystem. Is that true here? How does the edge differ from the center?

### ***Observing Limits***

What limits growth here? Shade? Lack of water? Soil fertility? Other factors? How do these limiting factors make themselves evident? What is succeeding in spite of these factors? What seems held back? How have the trees, birds and animals adapted to these limitations? What characteristics do the successful adapters have in common?

### ***Observing from Stillness***

Just sit still in this place for at least fifteen minutes, although longer is better. Notice what you can see, and how that changes over time.

### ***Observing Past and Future***

What can you observe in this place that can tell you about its past history, and how it might have changed over time? What can you observe that tells you something about the future of this place?