



Returning champions win 2026 ETCC

ATLANTA, Ga. — Josephine Hedger, of The Arboricultural Association (UK/Ireland), and James Kilpatrick, of ISA Germany Chapter, won the 2026 European Tree Climbing Championship (ETCC) held in Gijón, Spain, at Parque Isabel La Católica from 3-5 July.

Yet, both competitors are well acquainted with the champion title.

This is Hedger's eighth win at ETCC, and she will be returning to the International Tree Climbing Championship (ITCC) with this victory, where she has previously held the title of world champion six times. During this year's ETCC, Hedger said upon hearing her name for first place, she felt ecstatic.

"I worked really hard this year with training," she said. "It's a relief knowing you are doing the right stuff."

For her training, Hedger said she tries to concentrate on the five preliminary events individually, as well as putting it all together for the Masters' Challenge and fine-tuning the process.

Meanwhile, for Kilpatrick, this is his third win at ETCC, and before his move to Germany, he was competing in the Asia Pacific Tree Climbing Championship (APTCC), where he has won four times.

Kilpatrick is also the current world champion, having taken the title at the 2025 ITCC. He also has held the world champion title three additional times.

At the end of the day, Kilpatrick said he loves getting to be a part of these competitions; winning is just a bonus. Still, each year the competition is getting steeper, so training beforehand has become a key to success.

"I kind of felt like I only just scraped into the Masters' (Challenge), but once you get to the Masters' (Challenge), the competition starts from zero," Kilpatrick said, of his run at ETCC. "For me, the fun really starts when I can demonstrate really close-work practice, where you are starting from the ground and climbing throughout the tree."

This year, ETCC saw 58 male competitors and 12 female competitors. This competition also would not be possible without the 124 registered volunteers, ISA Component Asociación Española de Arboricultura, the ETCC committee, and the event's sponsors, especially the TCC Global Partner Husqvarna.

The ETCC champions will soon be heading to ITCC, where the event will be celebrating its 50th anniversary in St. Louis, Missouri, U.S., from 9-11 October.

ABOUT ISA

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Contact:
Alice Bagley
+1 4042294039
abagley@isa-arbor.com

The International Society of Arboriculture (ISA), headquartered in Atlanta, Ga., U.S., is an international nonprofit professional organization dedicated to promoting the importance of arboriculture and educating the public about the significance of trees and the value of their proper care. As part of ISA's advancing the arboriculture profession, it offers the only internationally-recognized certification program in the industry, including ISA Certified Arborist®. For more information about ISA and Certified Arborists, visit www.isa-arbor.com.

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