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Kilpatrick, Hedger Take Home World Champion Title

ATLANTA, Ga. — The 2026 European Tree Climbing Champions, Josephine Hedger of The Arboricultural Association (UK/Ireland) and James Kilpatrick of the ISA Germany Chapter, won this year's International Tree Climbing Championship (ITCC).

For Kilpatrick and Hedger, this is a return to the world champion title. Kilpatrick is the returning champ, making this his second consecutive win of the ITCC. He previously held the world champion title three additional times. Hedger has held the title of world champion six times, with the most recent being 2023.

During the award ceremony, Kilpatrick gave a special thank you to all those involved in this year's ITCC.

"I know the volunteers, the judges and competitors have been thanked a thousand times; I am going to do it again anyway," he said. "Without your guys' time, without you just being here, obviously it wouldn't happen. Thanks for making it possible for us."

The ITCC made its return to St. Louis for the 50th anniversary, which is where the first ISA-sanctioned tree climbing event was held. This is also a full-circle moment for Hedger, as it was where she won her first world championship in 2008.

"Eighteen years later, I have come back and won, who knows, probably my last ITCC championship," Hedger said, as the crowd protested; she continued. "That was negative, sorry. Let's bring that back up. What I am trying to say is, for me, this has been a full circle. I came in, knew nothing, didn't know anybody, learned a huge amount, and wanted to get better and better and better. And that is because all of you make everyone get better and better."

Hedger echoed Kilpatrick's sentiments about all the important hands that make these tree climbing competitions come together.

This year, ITCC saw 52 male competitors, 39 female competitors, and 22 countries represented. This competition was possible thanks to the 130 registered volunteers, the Midwestern Chapter ISA, the ITCC committee, and the event's sponsors, especially the TCC Global Partner Husqvarna.

ABOUT ISA

The International Society of Arboriculture (ISA), headquartered in Atlanta, Ga., U.S., is a 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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