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Library Journal Book Reviews

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Library Journal, August 2007, p. 115

Nordhaus, Ted & Michael Shellenberger.
Break Through: From the Death of Environmentalism to the Politics of Possibility.
Houghton. Oct. 2007. c.368p. bibliog. index. ISBN 978-0-618-65B25-1. \$25. SCI

Nordhaus and Shellenberger contend that standard environmental tactics won't solve global warming and insist that a paradigm shift in our approach to the problem is essential. Their central point is that most environmentalists see global warming narrowly, as a pollution problem to be solved by the "politics of limits," such as using less energy and cutting carbon dioxide emissions. The writers, who have had long careers in environmental organizations, sparked great debate among the environmental community with their controversial 2004 essay, "*The Death of Environmentalism*," which detailed how the thou-shalt-nots of current environmental tactics are less effective than more global, market-driven solutions. Their book envisions a federal program, "a new Apollo project," to develop new energy technologies that would create new jobs and world markets. The book reads like a collection of interrelated essays; too bad the authors' vision is fleshed out only in the last chapter. But their fresh view may be reason enough to include it in any public or academic library collection.

- Michal Strutin, Santa Clara Univ. Lib., CA

Library Journal, February 1, 2008 p. 92

Regis, Ed.
What Is life?: Investigating the Nature of life in the Age of Synthetic Biology.
Farrar. Apr. 2008. c.192p. illus. bibliog. index. ISBN 978-0-374-28851-8. \$22. SCI

This slim volume by agile science writer Regis (*The Biology of Doom*) reminds you how exciting and provocative science can be, as the author pares down the answer to the title's question to the ability to metabolize, reproduce, and evolve. Regis introduces scientists who are synthesizing artificial protocells, which are the building blocks for creating life. Framing this view of synthetic biology are spirited chapters on the discovery of the Krebs cycle, nucleic acids, the idea of hereditary coding, its structure in DNA's double helix, and the role of RNA. Pointedly, *What Is Life?* echoes the title of Erwin Schrodinger's seminal 1945 book that challenged thinking of the time and, as Regis writes, "launched a thousand geneticists on to their careers, including Maurice Wilkins, James Watson, and Francis Crick." Occasionally, Regis's language strikes a wrong note, such as an awkward "As if!" comment on a questionable experimental supposition, but he stays on

point and presents big concepts clearly and concisely. A book that could spark young minds toward a career in science. Recommended for public and undergraduate libraries.

- Michal Strutin, Santa Clara Univ. Lib., CA

***Library Journal*, July 2008, p. 104**

Macdougall, Doug.

Nature's Clocks: How Scientists Measure the Age of Almost Everything.

Univ. of California. 2008.278p. illus. index. ISBN 978-0-520-24975-2. \$24.95. SCI

Since the late 1800s, scientists have used "nature's clocks" to measure Earth's age, human beginnings, evolution, and extinctions. In one of the few overviews of geochronology, Macdougall (earth sciences, Univ. of California's Scripps Inst. of Oceanography) looks at fixed dating via decay rates of radioactive isotopes of carbon, uranium, and potassium. He examines relational dating via dendrochronology, ice cores, and stratigraphy. And he tells the stories of the scientists who teased out these techniques with excruciating patience. Although the prose is serviceable rather than soaring, and the opening and closing chapters are slightly unfocused, the heart of the book reveals ingenious science. From assessing zircon crystals in a clean room to measuring greenhouse gases in the ocean, scientists use nature's clocks to clarify the formation and composition of our world. Giving a sense of the scope of early discovery, Macdougall writes, "in little more than a decade, the prevailing view about the Earth's age had shifted from Lord Kelvin's 20 million years to more than 15 billion years," Recommended for public and undergraduate libraries.

- Michal Strutin, Santa Clara Univ. Lib., CA

***Library Journal*, February 1, 2009, p. 88**

Humes, Edward.

Eco Barons: The Dreamers, Schemers and Millionaires Who Are Saving Our Planet.

Ecco: HarperCollins. Mar. 2009. c.368p. index. ISBN 978-0-06-135029-0. \$25.99. SCI

Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Humes (*Monkey Girl: Evolution, Education, Religion, and the Battle for America's Soul*) showcases environmentalists who are saving our planet. The millionaires of the subtitle are Doug Tompkins, who put Esprit clothing profits to work protecting Argentina's Patagonia; Roxanne Quimby, who used Burt's Bees cosmetics earnings to purchase vast wild lands in Maine; and Ted Turner, whose CNN fortune allowed him to become America's single largest landowner, with 15 immense ranches

managed for native species. Others featured in the book get the job done through sheer tenacity. Humes writes of a former pool cleaner who developed what became California's Global Warming Solutions Act; the professor who is the go-to guy for plug-in hybrids; and the volunteer who saved the Kemp's ridley sea turtle. Humes has written a page-turner. Although too fast-paced for much nuance, this book is full of captivating facts and well-told tales of environmentalism's human side. End notes and an appendix point the way toward more detailed sources. Best for public libraries and undergraduate collections.

- Michal Strutin, Santa Clara Univ. Lib., CA

***Library Journal*, October 15, 2009, p. 100**

Sampson, Scott D.

Dinosaur Odyssey: Fossil Threads in the Web of Life.

Univ. of California. Dec. 2009. c.352p. illus. bibliog. index. ISBN 978-0-520-24163-3. \$29.95. sci

This fine volume brings the Mesozoic era and dinosaurs to life. Not only does paleontologist Sampson (Utah Museum of Natural History; geology, Univ. of Utah) explain the dynamics between sauropods and the tyrannosaurs that preyed on them, he also reveals the environments that these huge and hugely successful species inhabited. From geologic events and climate change to the botanical base of the food chain upward, Sampson allows the reader to see—and understand—whole Mesozoic ecosystems. Why did dinosaurs grow so large, and how did the herbivores reach gigantic proportions eating conifers and horsetails? To answer such questions, he presents his colleagues' debates, highlighting the vitality of this field. Although his tone is engagingly conversational, Sampson does not shy from close explanations of, say, dinosaur metabolism. In addition to detailing how life worked in the Mesozoic era, Sampson brings eloquence to the grand pageant of evolution and voices concern about how we must take care of our own world.

VERDICT This book draws scientifically accurate pictures in a style that is accessible to researchers and general readers alike.

- Michal Strutin, Santa Clara Univ. Lib., CA

***Library Journal*, February 1, 2011, p. 81**

Gilding, Paul.

The Great Disruption: How the Climate Crisis Will Change Everything (for the Better).

Bloomsbury Pr, dist. by Macmillan. Apr. 2011. c.304p. ISBN 9781608192236. \$25. sci

Civilization is on a collision course, warns Gilding, former head of Greenpeace International and adviser

to Fortune 500 companies, as he details dire stats; humans using 140 percent of Earth's resources, overpopulation, fisheries collapsing, deforestation, extreme weather, and lots of scary math. He advocates putting the world on an economic war footing, as during World War II. His "One-Degree War" is an action plan to reduce the planet's temperature, caused by greenhouse gases, to only one percent higher than at the start of the Industrial Revolution. Gilding maintains that the real solution is changing world economies from spiraling growth to a steady state. The goal is to upgrade goods and services to meet needs, not to pump up a gross national product that takes no account of quality of life. This joins similar recent books such as Thomas L. Friedman's *Hot, Flat, and Crowded* and Clive Hamilton's *Requiem for a Species*.

VERDICT Though Gilding's prose is plain and his sustainability message is unapologetically advocative, he backs up his arguments with plenty of facts and avenues for readers to pursue. For general readers and programs with a sustainability component.

- Michal Strutin, Santa Clara Univ. Lib., CA

***Library Journal*, February 15, 2012, p. 124**

Cerulli, Tovar.

The Mindful Carnivore: A Vegetarian's Hunt for Sustenance.

Pegasus. Feb. 2012. c.320p. ISBN 9781605982779. \$26.95. SCI

Part memoir and part meditation, this title is one of a growing number of books that examine what we eat and where it comes from. In this book, Cerulli, a communications Ph.D. candidate at the University of Massachusetts, tracks his journey from youthful veganism to mindful hunting, weaving his story with a history of America's up-and-down attitude toward hunting and vegetarianism. Referencing sources as diverse as Cotton Mather, Mohandas Gandhi, and Michael Pollen—whose *Omnivore's Dilemma* explores a similar subject—Cerulli recounts how he learned to kill deer to improve his protein-poor health. Yet he retained his vegan values; respect for nature and for how food habits affect our environment. Cerulli's concerns about killing are sometimes overwrought, but he compensates with ample doses of humor. His descriptions of waiting in the woods for the appearance of prey speak eloquently to the difference between a deer on the hoof and a plastic-wrapped package of meat.

VERDICT A personal and historical view of carnivorous eating in America, this should appeal to a general audience whose interests include food, hunting, and the environment, and especially to those studying bioethics..

- Michal Strutin, Santa Clara Univ. Lib., CA

***Library Journal*, May 1, 2012, p. 96**

Pyne, Lydia V. & Stephen J. Pyne.
The Last Lost World: Ice Ages, Human Origins, and the Invention of the Pleistocene.
Viking. Jun. 2012. c.320p. index. ISBN 9780670023639.
\$26.95. SCI

Stephen Pyne (history, Arizona State Univ.; *Voice and Vision: A Guide to Writing History and Other Serious Nonfiction*) and his daughter Lydia (lecturer, history of science, Drexel Univ.) reveal how Africa served as a continental refugium during the Pleistocene era. Least affected by ice, most adapted to hominids, Africa lost less than 25 percent of its megafauna. In contrast, South America, whose relatively recent link to North America helped trigger the Ice Ages, lost more than 85 percent. The world that resulted was shaped by climate and by the hominids that came out of Africa. The Pynes then hold a mirror to the history of scientific thought on the Pleistocene era. Influenced by the culture of their time, scientists created then discarded evolutionary tropes such as the great chain of being, the tree of life, the missing link, etc. Using examples from Plato to philosopher Karl Popper, they show how culture shapes science and our view of the world. VERDICT Written in clear, supple prose, this title will interest historians, anthropologists, and anyone fascinated by the Ice Ages, human evolution, and the history of science and culture.

- Michal Strutin, Santa Clara Univ. Lib., CA

***Library Journal*, September 1, 2012, p. 129**

Bass, Rick.
A Thousand Deer: Four Generations of Hunting and the Hill Country.
Univ. of Texas. (Ellen and Edward Randall). Sept. 2012.
c.198p. ISBN 9780292737952. \$24.95 . NAT HIST

Prolific writer Bass (*The Wild Marsh: Four Seasons at Home in Montana*) makes clear that no one in his extended family suffers from nature-deficit disorder. These 12 essays, all previously published elsewhere, form a seamless celebration of family, tradition, and nature as seen through the scope of deer-hunting. Bass focuses his nonfiction on the wild and is at his best when telling stories: helping his cousin dig a truck out of a gumbo sidetrack in the driving rain or taking his teenage daughter on her first hunt, where he observed the snow-quiet world and "tracks that reminded me of the trident calligraphy of shorebirds on the beach." Bass draws his portraits of family and the cedar-studded hill country of Texas with care and grace. His

descriptions are matched by insights: at his family's annual hunt they spend time shaping stories, "even as we knew also it was more the tellers than the stories themselves who were being shaped."

VERDICT This book is for anyone who appreciates evocative prose and close observation of nature.

- Michal Strutin, Santa Clara Univ. Lib., CA

***Library Journal*, December 1, 2013, p.121**

Connett, Paul.

The Zero Waste Solution: Unrashing the Planet One Community at a Time.

Chelsea Green. 2013. 400p. illus. notes. index. ISBN 9781603584890. \$24.95. SCI.

This is both a handbook for and history of the zero waste movement worldwide. Connett (retired, environmental chemistry, St. Lawrence Univ.) became involved in the movement in 1985 when an incinerator—and its poisonous dioxin emissions—was slated for construction near his community. He has been a major player ever since. This text has three parts: an overview of zero waste's history, philosophy, and practical steps; examples of initiatives worldwide; and essays by prominent activists. Connett castigates burn-and-bury (i.e., incinerators and landfills) as wasteful, expensive, and deleterious to health and presents factual backup. To "reduce, reuse, recycle" he adds "redesign" to limit the flood of disposable goods. Connett advocates that businesses take responsibility for disposal of goods not easily recycled. San Francisco's zero waste prominence is no surprise, but Italy's is eye-opening. The author offers plenty of paths to zero waste, from donkeys providing recycling transport in Italian hill towns to econometric analysis in Seattle.

VERDICT Community organizers, environmentalists, and environmental studies students will all benefit from this work, which complements Samantha MacBride's *Recycling Reconsidered: The Present Failure and Future Promise of Environmental Action in the United States*. The book also includes a rich list of resources for further study.

- Michal Strutin, Santa Clara Univ. Lib., CA

***Library Journal*, February 1, 2014, p. 93**

Lochbaum, David & others.

Fukushima: The Story of a Nuclear Disaster.

New Pr. Feb. 2014. 320p. illus. notes. index. ISBN 9781595589088. \$27.95; ebk. ISBN 9781595589279. SCI.

Lochbaum (head scientist, Nuclear Safety Project, Union of Concerned Scientists [UCS]; Nuclear Waste

Disposal Crisis), Edwin Lyman (senior scientist, Global Security Program, UCS), and science writer Susan Q. Stranahan (*Susquehanna, River of Dreams*), with the UCS itself as an additional author, write compellingly of why the tsunami-driven Fukushima tragedy of March 2011 happened and how to avert future nuclear disasters. During the ordeal, Masao Yoshida, the nuclear engineer in charge of the Fukushima Daiichi power plant, inspired his workers to persevere despite miscommunications from authorities and a litany of errors: water hoses too short to reach reactors, insufficient backup batteries, missing instruction manuals, and more. Japan's emergency plans included plenty of redundancies but did not anticipate a 42-foot tsunami. They should have, say the authors, who explain why the disaster was compounded by human error and corruption. They detail how nations suffer a too-cozy relationship between their regulatory agencies and their nuclear industry, underestimating disaster modeling with the refrain, "It can't happen here." Yet it does.

VERDICT There are other books on Fukushima, but the only one covering this ground is David Elliott's *Fukushima: Impacts and Implications*, which takes a more global and policy-related approach. Told with economy, drama, and scientific accuracy, this book is a must for anyone involved in energy assessment or concerned about nuclear energy issues..

- Michal Strutin, Santa Clara Univ. Lib., CA