

SCIENCE CHRONICLES

June 2013



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The Mid-Year Books Issue 2013

35 Book Reviews by...

Mike Beck, Charles Bedford, Silvia Benitez, Ralph “Bud” Cook, Sarah Hauck, Matt Herbert, Peter Kareiva, Eloise Kendy, Bob Lalasz, Craig Leisher, Lynn Lozier, Matt Miller, Jensen Montambault, Jeff Opperman, Darci Palmquist, Jeannie Patton, Charlotte Reemts, Megan Sheehan, Corinne Smith, Stacy Wais Seretto, Alan White

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The Mission(s) of *Science Chronicles*:

1. To bring you the latest and best thinking and debates in conservation and conservation science;
2. To keep you up to date on Conservancy science — announcements, publications, issues, arguments;
3. To have a bit of fun doing #1 and #2.

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Fiction

Mystery of the Misfit Detective

Talking to the Dead: A Novel. By Harry Bingham. Delacorte Press, 2012. 368 pages.

Reviewed by [Bob Lalasz](#), director of science communications, The Nature Conservancy

A prostitute and her six-year-old daughter are found murdered in a Cardiff flat — the mother asphyxiated during a heroin OD, the daughter with the top of her head cleaved off by a heaved sink, and the credit card of a missing millionaire left at the scene. There you have the mystery of *Talking to the Dead*, and it's a cracking good one.

But the enigma of the book — Detective Constable Fiona Griffiths, one of the investigating officers — is even better. Whip-smart, with a philosophy degree from Cambridge, she's also surpassingly odd — affectless, unable to empathize with the basic emotions of others, given to rude questions and breaking and entering, and prone to an intimacy with dead people that's out of *Dark Shadows*. Does she have Asperger's? Is she a necrophiliac? Good questions that her even better methods of detection distract you from — both when they're getting results, and when they have her on the verge of getting fired. Comparisons between Griffiths and Lisabeth Salander of *Dragon Tattoo* fame (another mystery misfit) are inevitable, but Griffiths lives in a bell jar of her own — desperate to join "planet normal," but a great detective precisely because she's a bit alien, and can see the rest of us so clearly.

It's a triumph for author Bingham that any hint at a happy ending for Griffiths personally feels like a bit of a letdown. You'll buy into her clean, unencumbered vision — a bit like Spock's in *Star Trek* — as superior, and feel reluctant to return to the messy confusions of your own line of sight. **SC**



Fiction

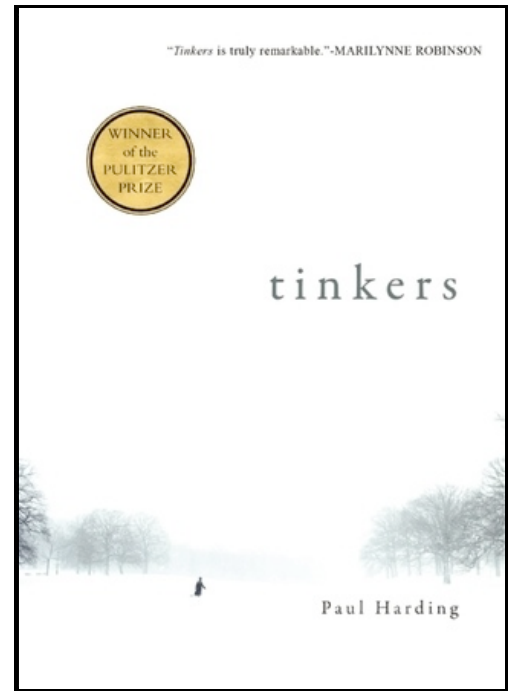
Read This Yesterday

Tinkers. By Paul Harding. Bellevue Literary Press, 2009. 192 pages.

Reviewed by [Jeanne Patton](#), communications coordinator, TNC-LANDFIRE

People tend to think of time as linear — yesterday, today, tomorrow — though physics informs us otherwise. Clocks, grids, the stories we tell ourselves, keep us from blowing apart. They offer the illusion of order.

Tinkers, the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel by Paul Harding, makes linear thinkers cranky. The story doesn't unfold "in order." It begins at the end, wanders all over the middle, changes voices and narrators without so much as a hint ("...and then Kathleen said to Howard,") of who is speaking, where and when. Pick the book up, fan the pages — nary a set of quotation marks in sight.



Faulknerian in tone and style, *Tinkers* is a convoluted exploration of time and memory. It opens with a dying old man, George Crosby, hallucinating tumbling walls and cracking plaster, a collapsing roof and falling stars. Harding's prose is lyrical and specific: we're inside George's head, feeling the panic, calling out warnings in language no one understands. With the introduction of each character — his father, wife, grandfather, children — time expands and contracts, memory lives, fades, lives again. Dream logic overtakes exposition. Clocks literally and metaphorically tick while consciousness and unconsciousness become each other, providing a doorway to perceiving magnificent realms of history and mortality.

A small book at 192 pages, *Tinkers* is compelling and deeply moving, an extraordinary exploration of the porousness of soul and identity. It is a fusion of language and perception, a meditation on the fierce beauty of nature, the wonder of clocks and the mystery of our breathless lives. It is a masterpiece. **SC**

Fiction

Scientist Turned Sleuth

The Devotion of Suspect X. By Keigo Heigashino. 2011. Minotaur Books. 304 pages.

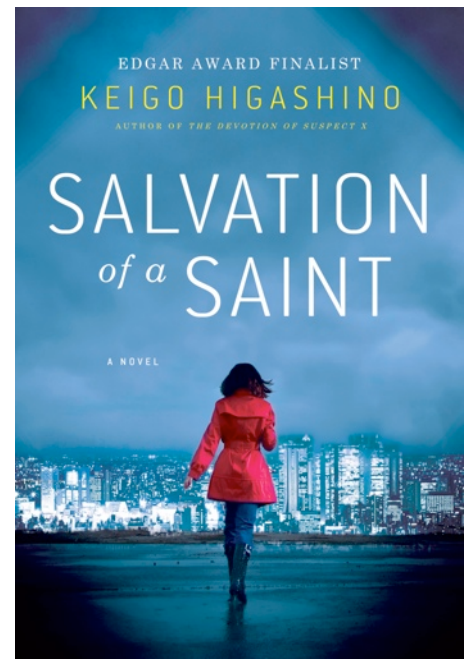
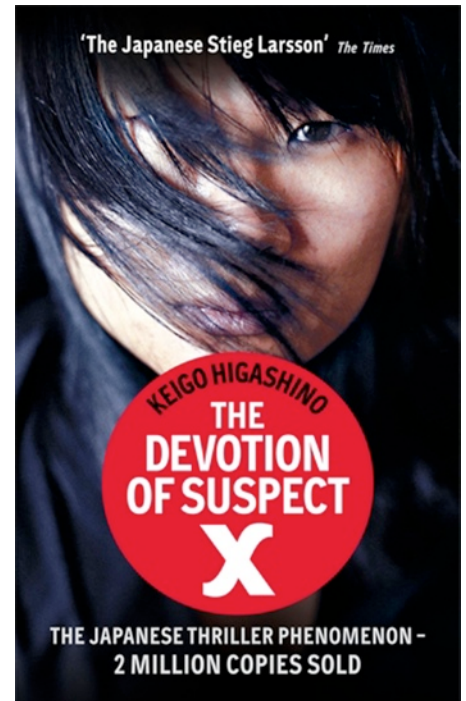
Salvation of a Saint. By Keigo Heigashino. 2012. Minotaur Books. 336 pages.

Reviewed by [Bob Lalasz](#), director of science communications, The Nature Conservancy

No mystery: From the first chapter, you already know the killer in Keigo Heigashino's detective stories. The delight lies in seeing how intricate the crime was, how cunning the cover-up, and how ingenious the investigation that eventually unpeels it all — led by Professor Manabu Yukawa, who turns out to be not a policeman but a scientist, the "Detective Galileo" that gives this series by Heigashino its name.

Yukawa is a joy — half Columbo, half Richard Feynman, shambling but full of brilliance, and psychologically acute. He's reluctant to tear himself away from his physics classes to even get involved in a case, but the intellectual temptations of sleuthing are eventually too seductive. In *Salvation*, for instance, a woman is accused of murdering her husband by arsenic-poisoned coffee, even though she was hundreds of miles away. In *Devotion*, a math genius in unrequited love with his next-door neighbor helps her hide the body of the ex-her daughter just killed and then lays a labyrinthine trail of alibis and red herrings for the trio.

There's something more than just the how-and why-dunit in Heigashino, though — a stoicism bordering on martyrdom that is ineffably Japanese. The emotions that flash through the steel mesh of these brainy procedurals are all the more powerful because of their compression; you're moved as well as entertained. Detective fiction is a high art in Japan, and Heigashino a household name there — one worth getting to know. **SC**



Fiction

Flying Over the Future

The Dog Stars. By Peter Heller. Knopf, 2012. 336 pages.

Reviewed by [Lynn Lozier](#), Conservation Track program director, The Nature Conservancy in California

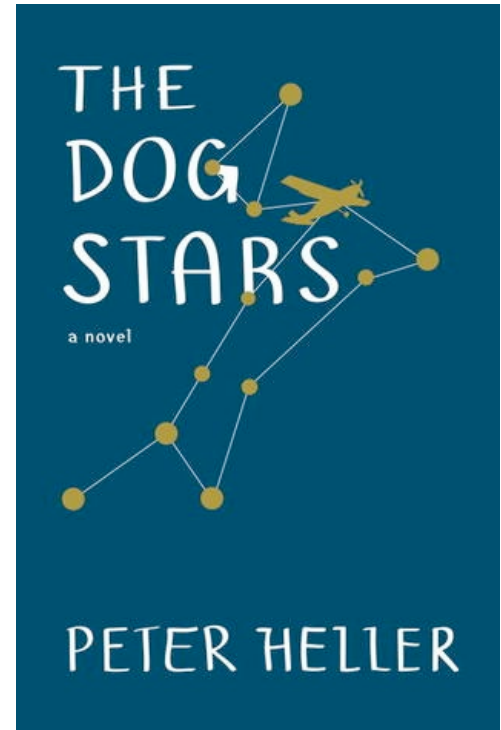
Author and adventure kayaker Peter Heller says of his first foray into fiction, “I always wanted to write something with the power of song, of music.” Not what you’d expect in novel of a post-apocalyptic time with humans decimated by pandemic and each other, and the environment suffering the thousand cuts of climate change.

Hig survives in what remains of a small airport on the plains just south of Denver, taking his old Cessna up to “fly the perimeter” and to get the distance his soul requires. He shares the site with the enigmatic Bangley who showed up early on hauling a trailer full of fire power. Together with Hig’s dog Jasper, they are a defensive trio constantly alert to assault by others. Human meat is salvaged and made into jerky to feed Jasper. Hig is deeply ambivalent about this life, an attitude which Bangley actively derides.

The airport is eight miles from the foothills. That two-hour trot in the pre-dawn darkness takes Hig to a standing cover of dead trees, rising ground and his safety valve and connection. There he hunts for deer and studies dwindling streams. He fishes, hoping to sight a surviving trout in the warming waters while taking home suckers and carp. A few new green trees, as well as returning timber wolves, are noted.

Hig’s experience is imbued with deep wonder and with tenderness for nature’s losses. In this, and in his tentative connections with other people, he struggles with daring to hope while feeling acutely the cost of love and survival. This is a beautiful book, and a real surprise given the subject matter. It’s a moving, bizarrely hopeful song.

SC



Fiction

Undercover Mom

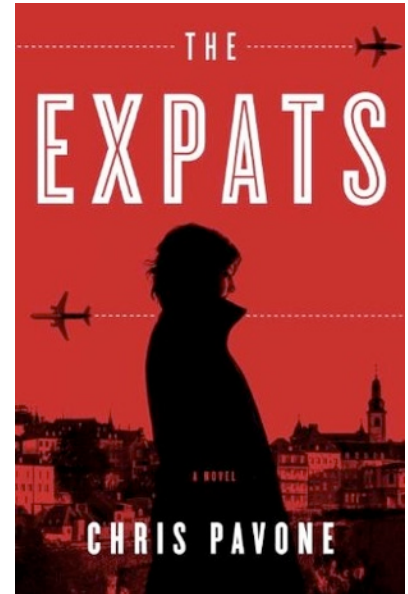
The Expats. By Chris Pavone. Crown, 2012. 326 pages.

Reviewed by [Peter Kareiva](#), chief scientist, The Nature Conservancy

This is a spy novel to rival the best of John Le Carre. The heroine, Kate Moore, is married, with children, a sometimes disappointing husband, and a past that threatens to catch up to her. Kate is not the sort of female spy one sees in movies or on television — she is smart, reserved, a mother of two young boys who goes on play dates with her girlfriends. She was also a CIA spy and assassin before retiring to a life in Europe with her consummately nerdy husband. Kate wants to have left her CIA operative life behind but is not sure she has.

Because Kate has lied so often to so many (including her husband) for most of her young life, she greets every individual assuming they are lying. She thought she had thoroughly investigated her husband before marrying him (the CIA would not have it any other way), but now is suspicious of his new job. The story is told from Kate's perspective and you end up being as suspicious as she is, and also totally entranced with her personality and the muted adventure and mystery that surrounds her.

Kate's commentary on people, and life as an expat are an added bonus — especially for those of us who have lived overseas for an extended period of time. This is the most sophisticated and engaging spy novel I have read in 10 years — and you will be taken in by Kate. **SC**



Fiction

A Bone-Crushing Good Read

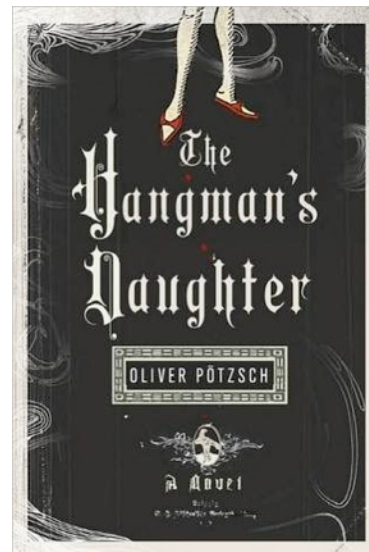
The Hangman's Daughter (*The Hangman's Daughter* #1). By Oliver Pötzsch, Lee Chadeayne (translator). Amazon Crossing, 2010. 448 pages.

Reviewed by [Peter Kareiva](#), chief scientist, The Nature Conservancy

I recently discovered *The Hangman's Daughter* series by Oliver Pötzsch, who is a German journalist, filmmaker and descendent of a dynasty of executioners in Germany that did their business in the 1500s through 1700s. The first three books in this series take place in the 1600s and follow the adventures of the Kuisl family — led by the patriarch and hero, Jakob Kuisl. Jakob, who straps criminals to a wheel and breaks every bone in their body before cheering villagers, is one the most compelling heroes I have discovered in a long time.

The stories are terrific, the descriptions of place and period are extraordinary, and the characters are engaging. These books, which are translated from German, are cult classics in Germany — partly because Oliver Pötzsch researched his family's history and includes the sort of detail that makes the novels feel very real. In addition to the adventure and mysteries that each book entails, there is a bonus sideline commentary on the emergence of modern medicine in the midst of superstition, as well as a healthy respect for evidence-based herbal remedies.

Start at the beginning (*The Hangman's Daughter*) and work forward (*The Dark Monk* and then *The Beggar King*). These books will make any summer vacation a joy. **SC**



Fiction

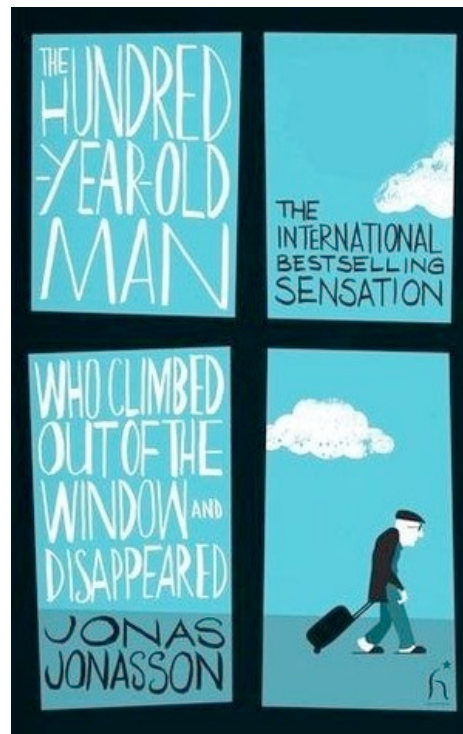
The Great Nursing Home Escape

The Hundred-Year Old Man Who Climbed Out the Window and Disappeared. By Jonas Jonasson, Rod Bradbury (translator). Hesperus Press, 2012. 396 pages.

Reviewed by [Silvia Benitez](#), conservation projects manager and ecosystem services coordinator, Northern Andes, The Nature Conservancy

This is the perfect book for summertime if you are looking to take a break, relax your mind and have fun. Jonas Jonasson, the Swedish author, will refresh your 20th century history through the story of Allan Karlsson, who decides to escape from an old people's home the day he turns one hundred. This centennial man, still full of energy, starts a new adventure as soon as he descends from the window of the home and arrives at the bus station, where he gets hold of a suitcase with a big amount of money. The old man escapes dangerous criminals and engages in hilarious situations, which are not new for this man who, without planning, had traveled around the world meeting important characters of the last century such as Truman, Stalin and Franco.

It is surprising to know that this international bestseller is Jonasson's first novel. The good news is that he is already working on his second novel, which may be available for your next summer reading. **SC**



Economics

A Bank Account for Planet Earth

***Right Relationship: Building a Whole Earth Economy.* By Peter G. Brown and Geoffrey Garver. Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., San Francisco, 2009. 216 pages.**

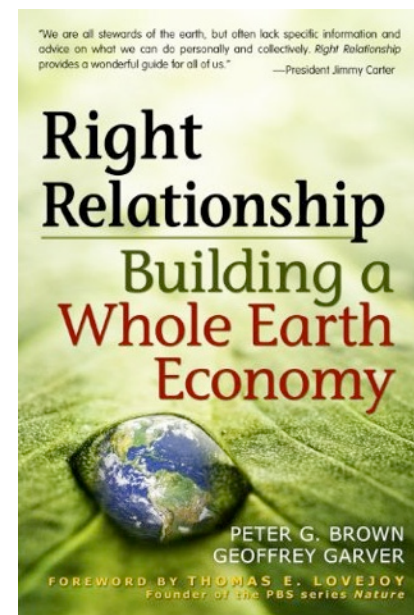
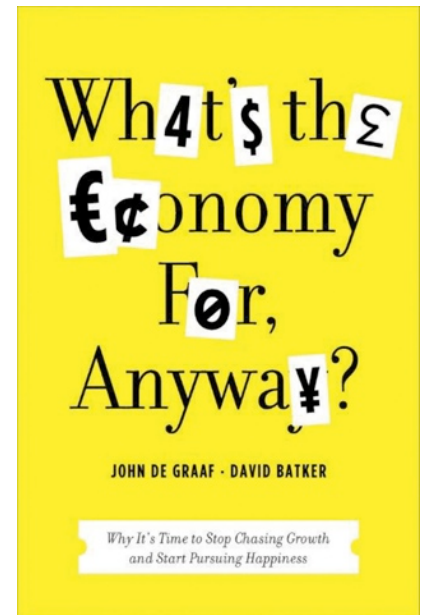
***What's the Economy For, Anyway?* By John De Graaf and David K. Batker. Bloomsbury Press, NY, 2011. 304 pages.**

Reviewed by [Corinne Smith](#), Mat-Su Basin program director, The Nature Conservancy in Alaska

Until recently, I understood the economy to be about the flow of goods, services and money but never thought much about its purpose other than increasing bank accounts and maintaining the value of the dollar worldwide. Two books have expanded my thinking by exploring what underlying purpose the economy serves. Is it just about financial wealth or does it play a broader role in society? These books also ask the question that affects our work at The Nature Conservancy — can we have continued unlimited economic growth if the Earth's resources are finite?

What's the Economy For, Anyway? (subtitled *Why it's time to stop chasing growth and start pursuing happiness*) details how other countries use their economies to increase people's well-being and to help them achieve happiness through health, time for friends and family, and fair wages for everyone. DeGraaf and Batker use a phrase by Gifford Pinchot to describe the goal of the economy: *the greatest good for the greatest number over the longest run*. Drawing upon his experience valuing ecosystem services, Batker outlines how we can use our resources sustainably **and** have a better, stronger economy.

Right Relationship draws upon a core principle from the Buddhist and Quaker traditions and references another early conservationist, Aldo Leopold, to define it: "A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise." They lay out a bold vision for a global economy that recognizes the ecological limits of the



Earth and focuses on fairness of resource distribution and contribution to the spiritual and material well-being of people.

If, like me, you've never thought of economics as something other than buying and selling, I recommend reading either of these books to expand your thinking about how the economy can help us to live more fulfilling lives.

What's the Economy For, Anyway? is also condensed into a [50-minute film available online](#) that presents its points in a very accessible way and gets a thumbs-up from economists I know. **SC**

Economics

The 3 “I’s” of Poverty

***Poor Economics: A Radical Rethinking of the Way to Fight Global Poverty.* By Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo. PublicAffairs, 2012. 320 pages.**

Reviewed by [Craig Leisher](#), senior social scientist, The Nature Conservancy

Steven Levitt, author of *Freakonomics*, says *Poor Economics* “represents the best economics has to offer.”

Building on 15 years of studies in developing countries, Banerjee and Duflo demonstrate the power of Randomized Control Trials (RCTs) and why such trials are considered the “gold standard” for measuring impacts on people.

Banerjee and Duflo are top economists at MIT’s Poverty Action Lab and use RCTs to measure what works to reduce poverty and what doesn’t.

Who knew, for example, that micro-savings has far greater benefits to the poor than micro-credit, or that de-worming students in developing countries is one of the most cost-effective ways to keep kids in school? It’s because of RCTs by Banerjee, Duflo and others that we now have this knowledge.

The key advantage of RCTs is that when people are randomly selected from the population and divided into participant and control groups, the two groups will be very similar. RCTs eliminate the problem of pre-existing differences. All the hard-to-measure qualities and quirks of individuals get averaged out. Thus, any impacts over time on participants can be attributed with some certainty to the activity or the treatment.

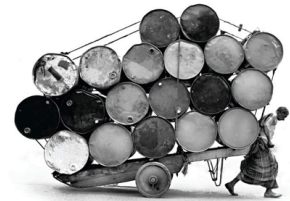
Banerjee and Duflo write this book without the polemics of Jeffery Sachs or William Easterly that often color the discussion of poverty. They note that the biggest problems for reducing poverty are the “three I’s”: ideology, ignorance and inertia.

It makes me wonder if we couldn’t say the same for conservation. **SC**

ABHIJIT V. BANERJEE
& ESTHER DUFLO

‘A marvellously insightful book by two outstanding researchers on the real nature of poverty.’
AMARTYA SEN

**POOR
ECONOMICS**



rethinking poverty
& the ways to end it

Memoir/History

The Good Old Days of Baseball Past?

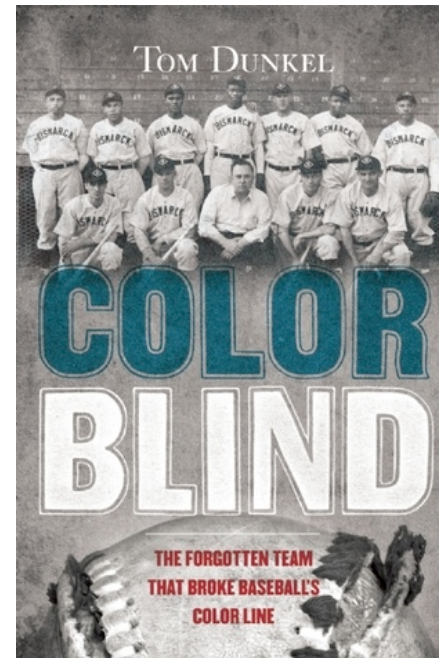
Color Blind: The Forgotten Team That Broke Baseball's Color Line. By Tom Dunkel. Atlantic Monthly Press, 2013. 368 pages.

Reviewed by [Peter Kareiva](#), chief scientist, The Nature Conservancy

It is my favorite season — baseball season. The Jackie Robinson movie, *42*, is out. And then there is Tom Dunkel's terrific summer book for anyone who is a baseball fan, or who likes to have stereotypes of America's past overturned. The semi-pro baseball team for Bismarck, North Dakota, was a national powerhouse in 1935. And long before Major League Baseball was integrated, Bismarck fielded an integrated team led by the legendary Satchel Paige. Racism was at full strength then, and slurs and viciousness were everywhere. But what comes through in this story of a team and the league it played in is the love of a game, and a time before sports became corporate.

Can you imagine a modern National League Most Valuable Player — a pitcher with a 30 and 7 record and a World Series ring, no less — barnstorming the country for \$5,000 an exhibition game a few weeks after winning the seventh game of the World Series with a shutout? Dizzy Dean did just this in 1934, pulling in crowds of 20,000 when he faced the legendary Negro League pitcher, Satchel Paige. Satchel often won. The characters who play baseball in this book are what make it so special.

For some reason baseball has always been blessed with crazy characters who capture our imagination. Even in digital, corporate 2013, baseball still has plenty of characters who give the game something no other sport has. When you're at bat, you are on an island — it is just you versus the pitcher and no one can help you. If you love that feeling, you will love this book. **SC**



Memoir/History

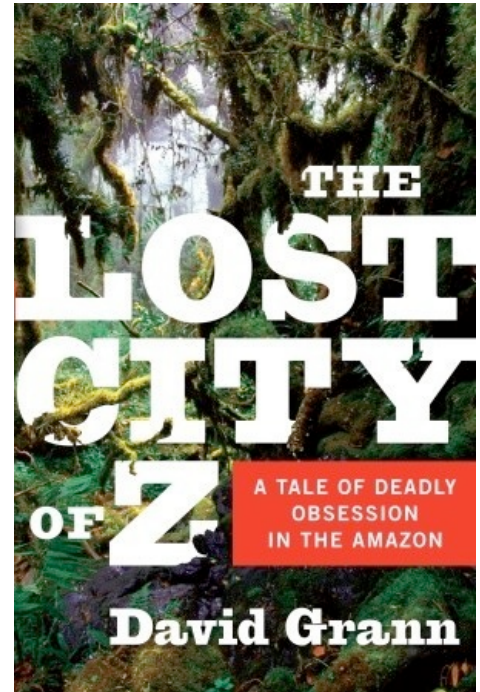
Search for the Holy Grail

The Lost City of Z: A Tale of Deadly Obsession in the Amazon. By David Grann. Doubleday/Random House, NY, 2009. 351 pages.

Reviewed by [Megan Sheehan](#), web writer and producer, The Nature Conservancy

If seeing is believing, then many would counter that the 1925 expedition of Percy Fawcett to discover El Dorado — Amazon's "City of Gold" — was an exercise in futility. The renowned British explorer never found El Dorado, as David Grann writes in *The Lost City of Z*, but Fawcett was so obsessed with its existence that his tale of exploration, discovery — and ultimately his disappearance into the unknown Amazon — will have you wanting to venture into the Amazon yourself to solve one of history's greatest mysteries. What ever happened to Percy Fawcett?

Grann himself was swept up in the mystery of both the idea of finding El Dorado and the famed explorer who disappeared during his own search in 1925. As he weaves Fawcett's compelling background in with descriptions of an unexplored Amazon, Grann immerses us in a true story that reads like a tall tale. I was left in awe of the idea of searching out the unknown. When so much of our world today is touched by human hands — and mapped — it's compelling to think about the thick beauty of a place being seen by a pair of "civilized" eyes for the first time. All the while, you know the outcome: Fawcett not only never documents finding the *Lost City*, but himself becomes a mystery almost greater than El Dorado itself. But it doesn't matter. The journey taken to discover more about this time of exploration in our history — and a man who mapped out many places — will leave you believing. **SC**



Memoir/History Poetry in Motion

***Goodbye to a River.* By John Graves, Russell Waterhouse (illustrator). Vintage, 1960. 320 pages.**

Reviewed by [Jeff Opperman](#), senior freshwater scientist, The Nature Conservancy

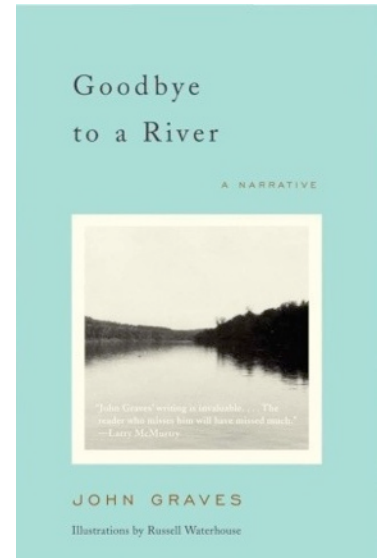
Not surprisingly, a river runs through the heart of John Graves' *Goodbye to a River*. The book describes Graves' several-week paddle down the Brazos, accompanied only by a dachshund pup he calls "the Passenger," in a sort of farewell to a river he grew up paddling down, swimming in and hunting and fishing along. Five dams had been planned for the Brazos and his beloved twisting river was soon to be transformed into a series of lakes, so Graves and the Passenger take one last float.

But even more than a river, what winds through the heart of this book is Texas. Sure, Graves knows all the birds and fish and every bend and pool in the river. But even more, he knows the valley's people and their stories of loss and grit, many of the tales soaked in the blood that was spilled during the decades that the Brazos was contested territory between Anglo settlers and the Comanche. These stories aren't retold from history books but from first-hand accounts from the old folks he knew growing up.

Graves amalgamates that Texan frontier toughness with a deep love of nature. He's like Thoreau with a shotgun and a Stetson. He'll spend hours trying to figure out what species of warbler is singing in the brush, and then blast a low-flying goose from the sky for dinner.

Read it if you love rivers, Texas, or simply flat-out beautiful writing. For example: "Big oaks gone red, and yellowed ashes rose precariously from slanted alluvial soil beneath the cliffs, piles of drift against their boles in prophecy of their own fate..."

Pretty poetic for riparian vegetation, depositional features, and instream wood. If Cormac McCarthy floated a river with a dachshund, it would sound a lot like *Goodbye to a River*. **SC**



Memoir/History

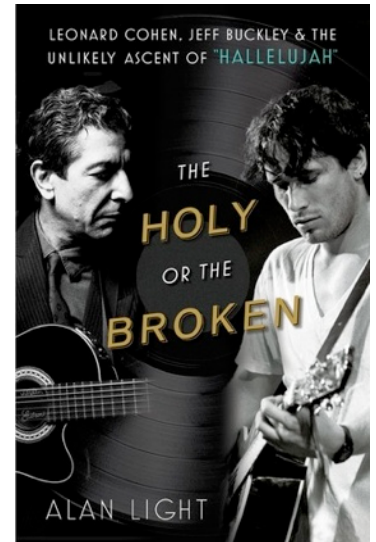
Seeking Salvation

***The Holy or the Broken: Leonard Cohen, Jeff Buckley and the Unlikely Ascent of "Hallelujah."* By Alan Light. Atria Books, 2012. 288 pages.**

Reviewed by [Charles Bedford](#), Asia regional managing director, The Nature Conservancy

"It's [hallelujah] an amazing word to say," says Bono. "It's its own kind of mouth music, just singing it."

In the general theme of religion (see my review of *The Man Who Quit Money* by Mark Sundeen), I recently heard Leonard Cohen's song *Hallelujah* for the first time. This is pretty remarkable because I listen to a lot of music, and I like Leonard Cohen, so I should have heard this 20-year-old-song before now. But this sort of thing happens to me. For instance, I never listened to or appreciated Led Zeppelin until recently. All I knew of their music was *Stairway to Heaven* from the countless times it was played as the slow dance at Lesher Junior High School parties in Ft. Collins, Colorado in the late '70s. I've since recovered this lost period of my life, now own the entire canon of Led Zeppelin and count *Kashmir* as one of my favorite songs of all time. I also love dancing to my daughter's music with her — Carly Rae Jepsen is awesome. I'm pro Taylor Swift, too. So music has always been a big part of enjoying life for me.



When I heard the song, I was absolutely taken by it. It's a long song, with 5 verses and complex lyrics. It has a compelling melody that is also easy to sing. And it's a religious song, especially for those of us who are agnostic or atheists (there aren't many atheist spiritual songs out there — but there must be a market for them....). And then I was walking past an airport bookstore and saw Alan Light's book about the song. I had just read the autobiographies of Neil Young and Keith Richards, which made me like them both less and put me off of their music for a couple of months, so I wasn't really in the market, but I picked it up and couldn't put it down.

The book is a great story about a great song: Cohen's decade-long struggle to write it. The lack of reaction to its release. The tragic story of the promising artist Jeff Buckley recording the song (with [haunting video](#)) then walking into the Mississippi River five months later and drowning before his version made the song popular. Leonard Cohen then retreating to a Zen monastery, to reappear 8 years later, bankrupt, having been robbed by his manager, and then beginning a series of world tours, playing stadiums, at the age of 70.

It's a religious epic in itself, about a man whose purpose in writing the song was

to "push the Hallelujah into the secular world, into the ordinary world." The song provides a bridge of faith into the everyday. As Light says, "There is simply no getting around the power of that chorus: one word, charged with centuries of meaning, delivered ironically or solemnly or both."

The magic of music and its ability to transport the soul and make connections makes me remember something from my childhood in the American South. I was six or seven, and my babysitter had taken me to a Southern Baptist church in Nashville. My parents weren't churchgoers so I wasn't sure what it was all about, but there was a lot of singing. I remember asking her afterwards about the singing. She said, "When you sing, you pray twice." Hallelujah. **SC**

Memoir/History

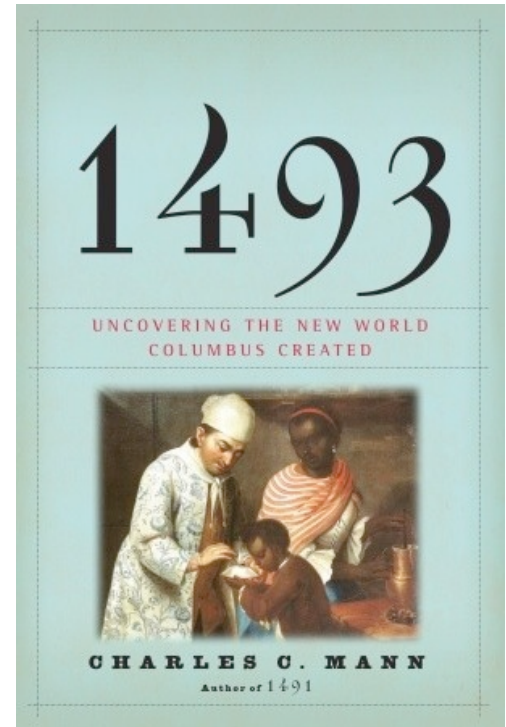
Conserve Your Optimism

1493: *Uncovering the New World Columbus Created.* By Charles C. Mann. Alfred A. Knopf, 2011. 557 pages.

Reviewed by [Ralph “Bud” Cook](#), northeastern PA program director, The Nature Conservancy

I liked this book! *1493* is a great big synthesis of the “Columbian Exchange” — the ecological, cultural and economic impact of Europe’s exploration and exploitation of Africa and the Americas, and the ensuing trans-oceanic trade between Europe and Asia (across two oceans, actually).

The book was written for a general audience and it’s very accessible to non-specialists — I found it to be literally a page-turner. But *1493* is abundantly researched and documented (65 pages of end-notes, 66 pages of works cited). Mann characterizes *1493* as an update to Alfred W. Crosby’s *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492* (first published in 1973) and *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe* (1986).



Mann writes compellingly of the explosive global effects of inter-continental species movements, with their many, mostly unintended, consequences — like the massive spread of smallpox, malaria, and yellow fever; “potato blight;” and the ongoing devastation of Asian ecosystems by rubber tree plantations. But he’s also a skilled storyteller at a small scale, adding a flesh-and-blood reality to his larger themes. His accounts of slave labor are blood-chilling, the more so because of his dispassionate, well documented style.

Some of Mann’s assertions will be familiar to TNC staff, but I feel most of us will be enlightened by *1493*’s revelations and the skillful synthesis of history, ecology and economics. How, for example, did the enslavement of Africans become more dominant in the American South than in the North? How did potato species in the Andes persist while a massive blight decimated potato crops in Europe and North America? How did the enormous quantities of South American silver that “enriched” Spain and China undermine both the Chinese and Spanish governments?

While not overlooking the ways in which globalization has been enriching the world for five centuries, the overall picture Mann paints is grim: exploitation, greed and

brutality. But it's an accurate portrait of how the world came to be what it is today, a world we must understand if we are to achieve TNC's mission truly "at scale."

Mann shows that the most meaningful scale for understanding ecological reality has been world-wide for half a millennium. Many of the issues posed in early phases of the Columbian Exchange still dominate global discourse: agro-industrialization, inequitable distribution of wealth, exploitation of weak countries by the strong, and of course the juggernaut of massive, irreversible destruction of natural resources. But if we pick carefully through 1493's tale of "the crash and chaos of constant connection," we can find stories of people living in harmony with nature, transcending the onslaught of "ecological imperialism," communities very much like the ones TNC works with today. They inspire us to conserve our most important asset — optimism! **SC**

Memoir/History

Going the Distance

What I Talk About When I Talk About Running. By Haruki Murakami. Alfred Knopf, 2008. 180 pages.

Reviewed by [Charles Bedford](#), Asia regional managing director, The Nature Conservancy

Murakami is most well known for innovative and surreal fiction like *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* and *1Q84*; he has described his writing goal as putting “Dostoevsky and Raymond Chandler together in one book.” No easy task, I think, but his novels are exactly that. However, this short book, really a collection of essays, is a memoir of his life through the lens of something he does every day — running.

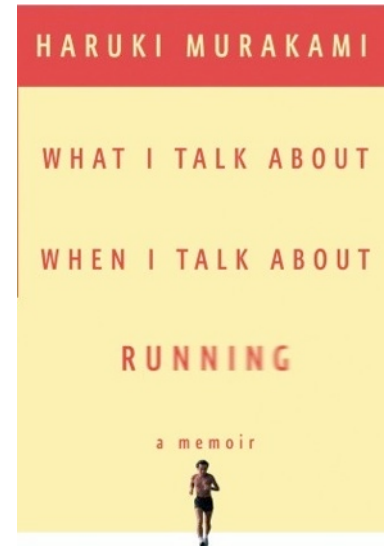
“Long-distance running suits my personality, though, and of all the habits I’ve acquired over my lifetime I’d have to say this one has been the most helpful, the most meaningful.”

Starting his adult life as a bartender and jazz club owner, he never intended to be a writer, yet running and writing have intertwined to define his life — the running allowing him to write, to sustain himself and the well of creativity needed for the long distance test of writing.

“When I’m in writing mode for a novel, I get up at four a.m. and work for five to six hours. In the afternoon, I run for ten kilometers or swim for fifteen hundred meters (or do both), then I read a bit and listen to some music. I go to bed at nine p.m. I keep to this routine every day without variation. The repetition itself becomes the important thing; it’s a form of mesmerism. I mesmerize myself to reach a deeper state of mind.”

The reason I picked up this book on running was that I had just finished his recent book, *1Q84*, having been unable to put it down during a 14-hour flight over the Pacific. I felt like I had come late to a writer I should have discovered long ago. I haven’t felt like reading could be so engaging and transporting, packed with poetry and meaning, since picking up Garcia Marquez’s books in university, or more recently with the Canadian poet Anne Michaels’ books.

I was raving to my wife about *1Q84*, and she mentioned that he’d written a book on running. I was curious to understand what his relationship was to an activity, a meditation, a discipline really, that I’ve also pursued over my lifetime. I’ve never had a good reason to give people who ask me why I run every day, why I compete in events from the mile to the ultramarathon distance, why I so often find myself in what normal



people would consider unpleasant, uncomfortable and intense situation. So I wondered what Murakami had to say about it:

"Even if, seen from the outside, or from some higher vantage point, this sort of life looks pointless or futile, it doesn't bother me. Maybe it's a pointless act, pouring water into an old pan that has a hole in the bottom, but at least the effort you put into it remains. Whether it's good for anything or not, cool or totally uncool, in the final analysis what's most important is what you can't see but can feel in your heart."

While not so much an eloquent articulation (though possessing a lovely double entendre!), he does capture something about the question of why we keep pouring water into a pan that has a hole in it. What else can we do but make an effort? What is the point of "meaning" and "purpose" except to access some deeper feeling? Something of the holy in us perhaps? Or our submerged animal?

For me, the why of running has been as unanswerable as the why of breathing, eating and sleeping. Stopping any of these things is unthinkable, though they all, including running, will come to an end some day.

"Even if he doesn't break the time he'd hoped for, as long as he has the sense of satisfaction at having done his very best — and, possibly, having made some significant discovery about himself in the process." **SC**

Memoir/History

The True Tale of a Transvestite Botanist

The Discovery of Jeanne Baret: A Story of Science, the High Seas, and the First Woman to Circumnavigate the Globe. By Glynis Ridley. Crown, 2008. 288 pages.

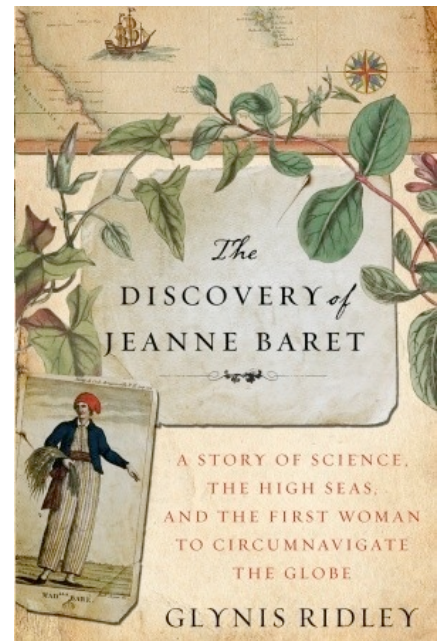
Reviewed by [Matt Herbert](#), aquatic ecologist, The Nature Conservancy in Michigan

This book is based on the remarkable story of the first woman to travel all the way around the world. She did so by disguising herself as a man (it was illegal in 18th century France for a woman to even be on the ship) and working as an assistant to the ship's botanist (but providing much of the botanical expertise). The three-year journey was a difficult one — particularly given her situation — and her gender was eventually discovered, though well into the voyage.

The book is fascinating, not only for the amazing story, but also for the descriptions of the state of 18th century botany and the importance of the botanical work to the voyage and to French society (the story made me think that we are actually *relearning* to value many ecosystem services).

The author clearly did a lot of research, but many uncertainties were dealt with in ways that will not sit well with some readers. The facts and uncertainties are generally laid out, but the author often selects a conclusion and proceeds with the book as if it is certain that that is what happened. Many of the author's deductions seem logical, if not probable, but she goes too far in treating many as if they are facts.

Despite the odd treatment of the historical uncertainty, I would highly recommend the book. It is an incredible story. **SC**



Memoir/History

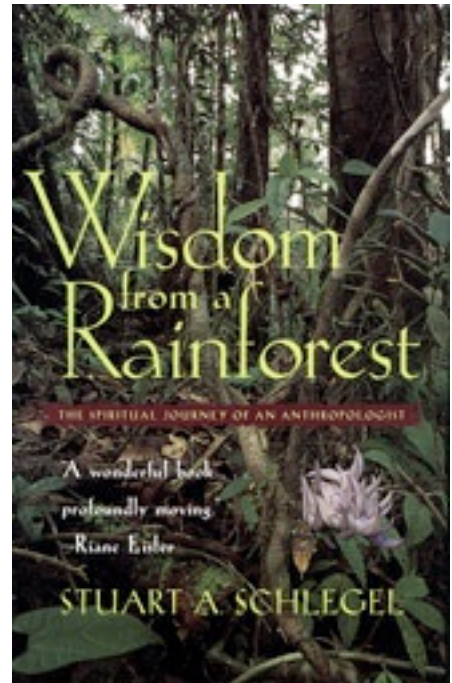
The Nutty Professor

Wisdom from a Rainforest: The Spiritual Journey of an Anthropologist. By Stuart A. Schielgel. University of Georgia Press, 2003. 288 pages.

Reviewed by Alan White, [senior scientist](#), The Nature Conservancy's Asia-Pacific Program

This 2012 Ateneo de Manila Press book caught me by surprise as it was given to me by an editor of the Press and is not a book one will find in most bookstores, but it is available through Amazon and was published by the University of Georgia Press in 2003.

The author, Stuart Schielgel, was a professor of anthropology at the University of California Santa Cruz for a number of years and wrote this book based on his dissertation research in the Philippines in the 1960s. Because of my interest in Philippine history I jumped in and was surprised to find a story based in southern Mindanao at a time when the rainforest was still intact, together with a culture of people called the Teduray who I had never heard of but whose culture and society made a wonderful story.



The interaction between Schielgel and his Teduray informants, who he lived with in a remote forest enclave for about 2 years, reveals a view of the world hard to imagine in our times. And although it is easy to romanticize people who live totally in tune with their environment, understanding their view of the rainforest and its values through the eyes of Schielgel was fascinating. The added dimension of this book is that Schielgel weaves in his own life experience in Santa Cruz since he didn't write the book until 35 years after his forest encounter. One 2003 reviewer quote might entice you to seek this book out:

"Schlegel went into the Philippine rainforest looking for a dissertation; what he found was a way of life and a people that continue to speak to him more than thirty years later. In their honesty, love, and simplicity, the Teduray embody values that we seem to have left behind on the road to an environmental and interpersonal wasteland. *Wisdom from a Rainforest* is a small marvel." **SC**

Memoir/History

Slow Down, You Move Too Fast

A Field Guide to Getting Lost. By Rebecca Solnit. Penguin Books, 2006. 224 pages.

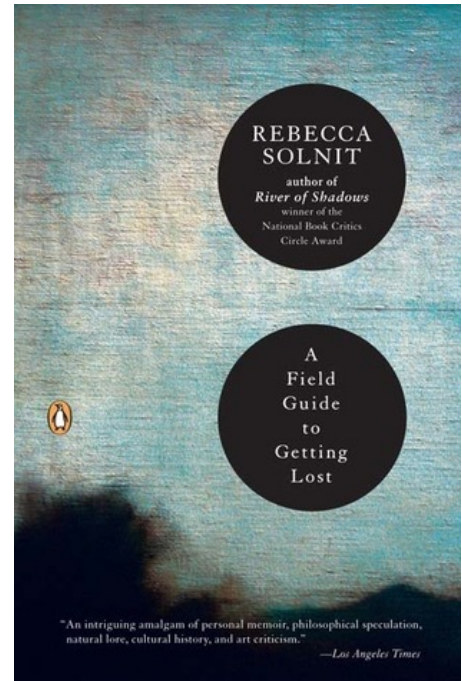
Reviewed by [Darci Palmquist](#), senior science writer, The Nature Conservancy

This is a book to turn to when everything else seems too formulaic, gimmicky or over-promised; when you don't want to educate yourself, nor escape; when you want to be surprised by where each punctuation mark leads.

Solnit is a true intellect and original thinker. She weaves through discipline after discipline — history, art, philosophy, ecology, astronomy, physics — with a needle and thread, stitching everything together into a complex, poetic masterpiece. The “getting lost” she explores is both a physical and psychological concept, spurred by a question attributed to the pre-Socratic philosopher Meno: “How will you go about finding that thing the nature of which is totally unknown to you?” In other words, how can you know what you don't know? Solnit takes the reader on her personal journeys, wandering through both her landscapes and mind-scapes.

I first read this book shortly after it came out in 2006 and have since considered it the gold standard for literary non-fiction. It's been a few years since I last picked it up, and I was curious to see how Solnit's meandering, philosophical style would hold up in the Information Age. Here's what I think:

This book is not for everybody, and certainly not for every mood. If you like your information straight-up, no tangents, then this book will likely annoy you to no end. You'll be screaming, “Get to the point!” after two pages. But when you feel hemmed in by your own thought patterns or unsurprised by a world that should reveal mystery around every corner ... well, then a book like this is the perfect anecdote. Pick it up, let your mind wander and, as the title suggests, get lost. **SC**



Memoir/History

A Shot of Resourcefulness

My Beloved World. By Sonia Sotomayor. Alfred A. Knopf, 2013. 336 pages.

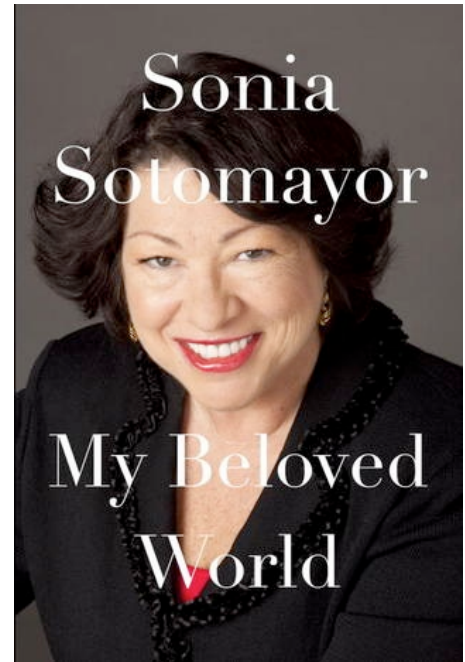
Reviewed by [Eloise Kendy](#), senior freshwater scientist, The Nature Conservancy

Sonia Sotomayor, the first Hispanic and third female U.S. Supreme Court Justice, was not always destined for greatness. As a child, she was diagnosed with diabetes — at the time, a prognosis tantamount to a death sentence. With her mother working to support the family, she was left in her alcoholic father’s care. But his hands shook so violently that he couldn’t inject the insulin upon which his daughter’s life depended. To end her parents’ fighting, 8-year-old Sonia resolved to administer her own injections. Shortly thereafter, her father died.

As one of the first affirmative action beneficiaries, Sotomayor endured repeated accusations of displacing better qualified “American” kids. And she readily admits how utterly unprepared she was for the Ivy League, despite stellar grades in high school. At first, she failed miserably. But in short order the resourceful Sotomayor not only learned, but eagerly embraced, the art of critical thought.

While Sotomayor’s fellow law school graduates headed straight to big law firms, big salaries and big, long waits to make partner, Sotomayor joined the New York County District Attorney’s office. There, she immediately began prosecuting high-profile cases. This chapter of her life contains some of its most interesting and bizarre anecdotes, and explains Sotomayor’s belief that some criminals simply are beyond redemption.

Two themes resonate: the enduring love of her close-knit Puerto Rican family, and the power of hard work to overcome fear of failure. Notwithstanding the trite “and that’s how I learned such-and-such important lesson” that concludes each chapter, this is an incredibly inspiring American story. **SC**



Memoir/History

Money Can't Save You

The Man Who Quit Money. By Mark Sundeen. Riverhead Trade, 2012. 272 pages.

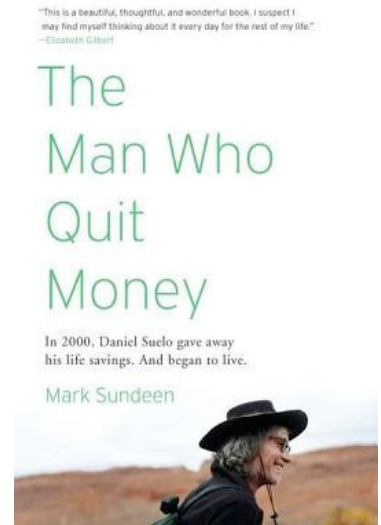
Reviewed by [Charles Bedford](#), Asia regional managing director, The Nature Conservancy

Daniel Suelo comes from the same state that I do, Colorado. He's about the same age and background as me. He, too, loves being in nature and being outside. He lives near Moab, Utah, where my wife and I met and hope to retire someday (more on that later!). But he inhabits an entirely different universe with different rules, mores and customs. His world is so dramatically different that it's unclear whether the laws of physics apply to him.

You see, Daniel Suelo is a bum. In the nicest, least pejorative, most thoughtful sense of the word. About 15 years ago, in response to spiritual, intellectual and personal crises, he gave up money. He refuses to touch it, has no credit cards, works no job, punches no clock. He lives on public lands around Moab, Utah. He doesn't beg, but eats what he can gather from nature and the dumpsters behind restaurants and supermarkets or what he is offered by friends. He isn't a hermit or a recluse, but maintains a vigorous social life in Moab. He blogs about his experiences from the Moab Public Library. He works occasionally, but mainly for the experience or to help out something he believes in, never for pay.

And I live in Hong Kong, the most capitalistic city on the planet. This city was founded on trade and business and has thrived on it ever since. Money is the *raison d'être* of this town. This city is the shrine to the very notion of money — a medium of exchange or a store of value — as having meaning in and of itself. The acquisition and maintenance of money, the profit motive, is the religion of Hong Kong. The notion that capitalism properly organizes itself (supply) through signals of the people's desire (demand) to provide for efficient provision of goods and services is not mere abstraction here, but rather the very foundation of the city itself. In addition to the undeniable benefits of economic growth, Hong Kong also offers some of the best examples of conspicuous consumption and economic inequality. I've given up counting the number of Louis Vuitton outlets and watch stores with strange Swiss names that sell watches for more than my mortgage.

Appreciating both of these worldviews has, I must admit, taxed my limited intellectual capacity. And, certainly, I am in the middle of the two extremes — though a lot closer to Daniel's situation than to some of my neighbors in Hong Kong — and thus



have a foot in both camps. Reconciling these visions of the world, however extreme, is what I do in my day job. We in the environmental movement make the case daily to wealthy people and to captains of industry (and to governments) that they need to invest in the natural world in order to ensure that it continues to provide the clean air, clean water, safe food, and healthy atmosphere that will sustain their children. That, in fact, even their money cannot protect their children from the rages of a frayed climate, a dead ocean and a global toxic miasma.

And TNC also supports people who are in Daniel's situation, but not by choice. I recently visited Manus Island in Papua New Guinea, where a no-cash, barter society exists on coastlines that are already feeling the pressure from sea level rise and coral bleaching. The ocean has pushed their villages back many meters and the rising sea temperatures have impacted their primary food source, fish, which relies on corals as breeding grounds and nurseries. They have organized themselves around these challenges and are zoning their ocean and self-regulating their fishing. They are building dry rock walls to protect their vegetable fields from salt-water incursion. They are staring down the barrel of the gun of climate change, without money, with a little help from TNC, and planning their future despite seemingly insurmountable challenges.

My wife and I respectfully disagree about money. I think we won't have enough to retire until I am 120 years old. She thinks we can retire next week. Perhaps the real truth is that retirement in Moab or on Manus may be a false promise given the threats that climate change pose. And money and capitalism probably will play a central role as signals from the environment — like Hurricane Sandy, Typhoon Nargis, drought, wildfires and pollution — begin to more directly and clearly impact global markets.

Since the global and national political systems have failed us all on climate (honestly, a global deal on climate is a structural impossibility!), perhaps the market will save us. Otherwise, we may all find ourselves with useless Piaget watches trying to learn how to start anew from Manus Islanders and Daniel Suelo. **SC**

Food

License to Eat

Faviken. By Magnus Nilsson. Phaidon Press, 1997. 272 pages.

Reviewed by [Matt Miller](#), senior science writer, The Nature Conservancy

Faviken may be a cookbook, but it's more entertaining than most novels.

It's the first title by Magnus Nilsson, the highly regarded and hyper-locavore chef who built a gourmet restaurant in remote, rural Sweden. Despite a sub-arctic climate, Nilsson's restaurant features only ingredients that are grown, raised, hunted or gathered on immediate or nearby properties. A lot of the recipes are wildly impractical (fried thrush heads, anyone?), but the writing is so damn enjoyable that I found myself reading it cover to cover.

Nilsson offers two pages on how to respectfully peel a carrot. He proposes a meat-eating license similar to a driver's license (to qualify, you'd have to kill and butcher an animal so you know your dinner's true costs). But he also gives practical advice on shooting grouse. He eats lichens and fermented fish and raw hearts and flour made from pine trees. And he has fun.

Faviken shows that whatever argument you make for local food, the strongest is this: it is delicious and diverse, which translates into more enjoyable meals, and a more enjoyable life. If you agree with that philosophy, you'll love Nilsson, and his beautiful, and beautifully written, book. **SC**



Food Chop Chop

***Cooked: A Natural History of Transformation.* By Michael Pollan. The Penguin Press HC, 2013. 480 pages.**

Reviewed by [Sarah Hauck](#), freelance writer for The Nature Conservancy

In *Cooked*, Michael Pollan serves up another bestseller that looks at the world of cooking — where “the stuff of nature gets transformed into the things we eat and drink.”

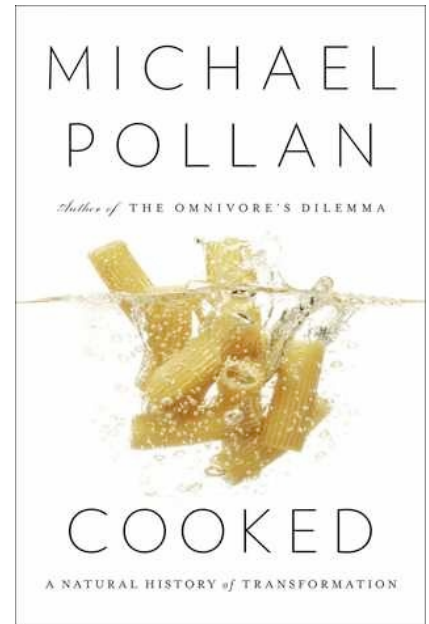
The narrative is divided neatly into four chapters based on the classical elements — fire, water, air and earth — and follows Pollan as he learns first-hand the art of grilling barbecue, pot cooking, bread baking and various types of fermentation including pickling, cheese making and home brewing.

Along the way, his colorful teachers — from “the cheese nun” with a Ph.D. in microbiology to the “most famous fermentor in America” — are whole-heartedly devoted to their respective craft, and getting a glimpse into their lives is half the fun of the book.

He also mixes in history and literature along with a dash of religion (“bread... is an everyday proof of the possibility of transcendence”) and sex (“a cheese that stinks — of manure, of sex — offers a relatively safe way for us to flirt with forbidden desires”) for good measure. Extolling the ills of processed foods, Pollan cautions against over-reliance on corporations, proclaiming that we are so disconnected from the making of our food that we stop thinking about where our food comes from, much less the labor, money or energy it takes to get it onto our plate. To cook, he says, is to reclaim a bit of our independence.

Cooking is what separates us from the rest of the natural world and, paradoxically, also what keeps us connected to it: “The most important thing I learned ... is how cooking implicates us in a whole web of social and ecological relationships: with plants and animals, with the soil, with farmers, with the microbes both inside and outside our bodies...”

Ultimately, *Cooked* is an invitation “to alter, however slightly, the ratio between production and consumption” in our lives. It is the continuation of an ongoing commentary on food, nature and modern society that will not fail to satisfy. **SC**



The Future

Co-Evolving Technology and Life on Earth

***What Technology Wants.* By Kevin Kelly. Viking Adult, 2010. 416 pages.**

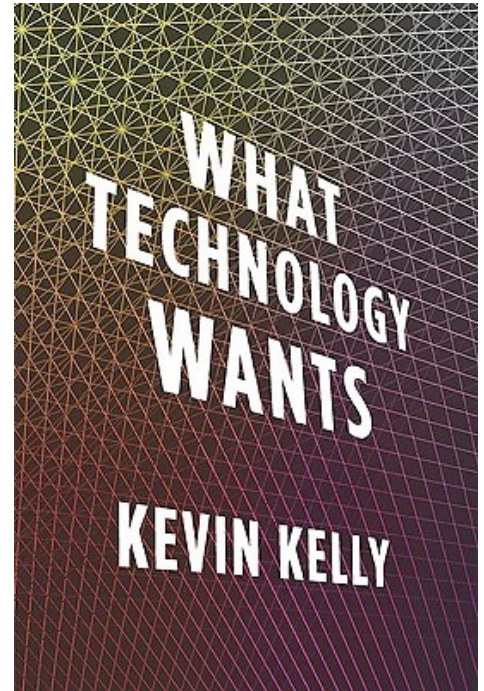
Reviewed by [Peter Kareiva](#), chief scientist, The Nature Conservancy

This is the non-fiction book that I am telling everyone to read. Kevin Kelly, who helped launch *Wired*, is a trenchant analyst of technology. Because conservation has a very uncomfortable relationship with technology — often fearing it as unnatural and a “threat” — it is important for conservation leaders to have a more nuanced understanding of technology than the anti-civilization collapsarian view commonly held by extreme environmentalists.

Conservationists are prone to listen to and admire the writings of Henry David Thoreau or Wendell Berry — thinkers who largely scorned technology. Kelly thinks these naturalists were wrong. He argues that technology is part of civilization and that technology produces choices, including choices for good.

While you may not be persuaded by Kelly’s argument, I am confident you will learn a lot from his stories and syntheses of data. For example, while exploring why some technologies advance very rapidly and others do not, he recounts Gordon Moore’s commentary regarding the airline industry — apparently, Moore remarked that if the airline industry had made the same progress as the Intel chip, today’s commercial airliner would sell for \$500, take 20 minutes to circle the Earth, use only five gallons of fuel in that round-the-world trip, and be the size of a shoebox. That stuck with me.

In addition to stories, Kelly has assembled a remarkable set of statistics and metrics that reveal amazing trends. My favorite trend concerns the tendency of societies to initially declare new technologies to be dangerous, immoral, unwise, or simply too unknown for our own good. As a result, societies restrict, severely tax, or even ban these technologies. This has been going on for a thousand years: crossbows, guns, mines, and nuclear bombs may have in the balance been negatives, but bans were also applied to things we commonly rely upon — electricity, automobiles, bathtubs, blood transfusions, copy machines, TVs etc. The gun was outlawed for three centuries in Japan. Kelly did not run a regression on his data, but I eyeballed a slope of roughly a 25-year decline in prohibition duration every century. The more interesting question is whether prohibitions are effective.



You may not be a technology junkie, but the future of conservation is interwoven with the future of technology, and just as we seek to understand the trends and linkages between nature and humans, we should also seek to understand how technology is evolving and what that means for our mission of securing a sustainable planet. **SC**

The Future

Restrain Yourself: Data Ahead

***The Willpower Instinct: How Self-Control Works, Why It Matters, and What You Can Do to Get More of It.* By Kelly McGonigal. Avery, 2011. 275 pages.**

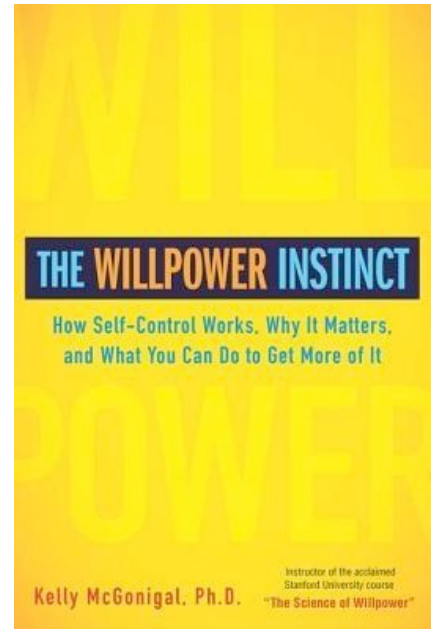
Reviewed by [Charlotte Reemts](#), research & monitoring ecologist, The Nature Conservancy in Texas

The Nature Conservancy relies on data to inform our conservation work; without data, our decisions are based only on opinions. Too many “self-help” books rely only on opinions of TV personalities, celebrities, or business owners about how to be successful, lose weight, win love, etc.

For *The Willpower Instinct*, Kelly McGonigal uses data (lots of data!) to show how simple activities can help us all accomplish what we set our minds to. She explains the various experiments psychologists (and economists) have used to learn about how willpower works and how their findings apply to the real world (how many of us stick our hands into buckets of icy water for fun?).

Although willpower is a neural activity, it has a lot in common with your biceps. Using it continually will make it tired, leading to lapses in judgment; exercising it will make it stronger. Interesting enough, exercising your biceps (or at least exercise in general) will also make your willpower stronger. Another easy activity: spend five minutes focusing on your breathing. Don’t worry if your attention drifts; continually bringing your focus back to your breath is a great willpower workout!

To keep the book from becoming too dry, McGonigal includes stories about students in her adult-education class who have applied these strategies in their own lives. The examples include ending procrastination, overcoming parenting challenges, sticking to diets, and more. As a scientist, I appreciated the strong experimental background of the book; as a reader, I enjoyed McGonigal’s engaging writing style. **SC**



The Future Please Kick Me

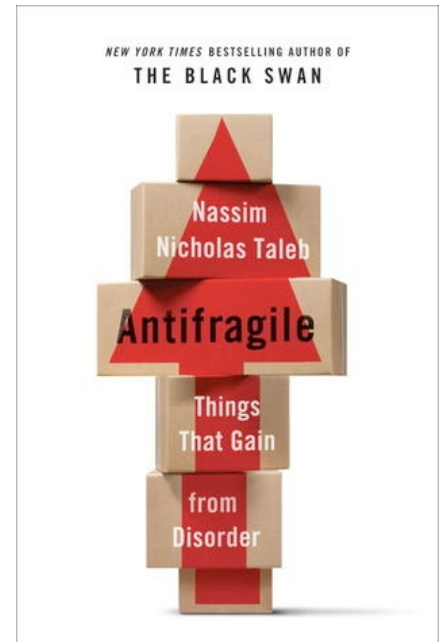
***Antifragile: Things that Gain from Disorder.* By Nassim Nicholas Taleb. Random House, 2012. 519 pages.**

Reviewed by [Stacy Wais Seretto](#), philanthropy manager, The Nature Conservancy in New York

In our work we often speak of resilience, but should we be talking about antifragility? This book very thoroughly explores something nature has done for millennia: not merely thrive in spite of events, but thrive *because* of events. The author argues that volatility has benefits — being hit with a shock can be a good thing, even necessary. I immediately thought of a wetland — the occasional hurricane is welcomed by a coastal wetland, but artificially stabilized water levels (reduced volatility) bring degradation.

Antifragility has implications far beyond simply recognizing it as nature's way — the author does everything he can to convince the reader that antifragility is the answer to risk, especially in our economic institutions. This is not a light beach read. It ranges from the ancient Roman writing desk of Seneca to the souks of the Levant to the restaurants of New Jersey, throwing out words like optionality, teleology and nonlinearity (amid a smattering of profanity). I found myself arguing with the author on occasion, and in certain sections the author is arguing with himself. This is a deep, honest, irreverent and occasionally technical explanation of a concept present everywhere and acknowledged nearly nowhere.

Resilience is futile. You will be antifragile. **SC**



Science & Nature

Old-School Observation

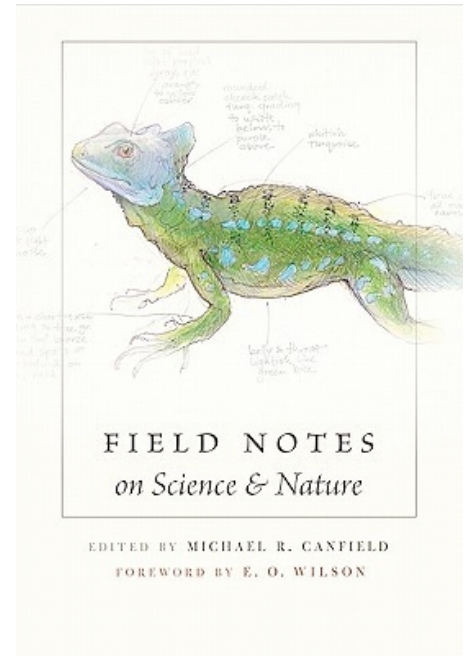
Field Notes on Science & Nature. Edited by Michael R. Canfield. Harvard University Press, 2011. 297 pages.

Reviewed by [Matt Miller](#), senior science writer, The Nature Conservancy

Look over the shoulder of a great field scientist and what will you find? Copious notes, of course. Here's an engaging essay collection on the science (and art) of recording observations in the field.

Twelve accomplished researchers — including wildlife conservationist George Schaller, old-school naturalist Bernd Heinrich and anthropologist Anna Behrensmeyer — share pages from their notebooks as well as their varied approaches for recording observations. The essays include tips on recording data, the appropriate use of technology, the value of sketching and how to organize massive amounts of information.

There are several chapters on how note taking can help scientists with popular writing — of particular value to Conservancy scientists looking to publish books or [Cool Green Science](#) posts. Even the most desk-bound modeler can find something of interest within these pages. Follow the advice here and you'll emerge a better observer and better writer — and by extension a better scientist. **SC**



Animals

Blurring the Lines

Wild Ones: A Sometimes Dismaying, Weirdly Reassuring Story About Looking at People Looking at Animals in America. By Jon Mooallem. Penguin Press HC, 2013. 368 pages.

Reviewed by [Peter Kareiva](#), chief scientist, The Nature Conservancy

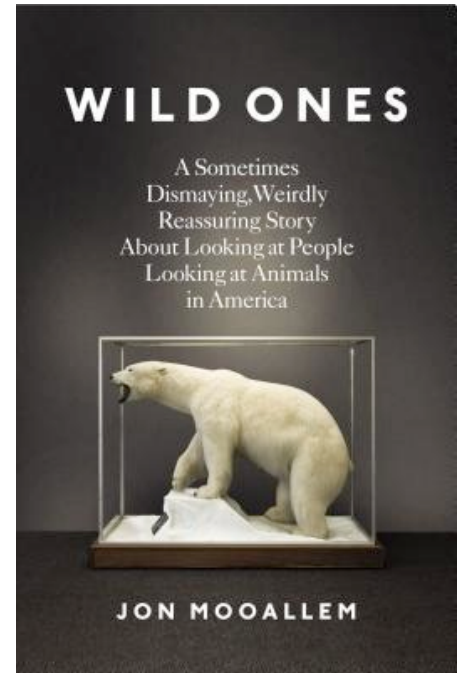
If you have children, I am sure you have witnessed their fascination with stuffed animals, nature videos, pajamas adorned with squirrels (TNC's CFO still has those PJ's), plastic dinosaurs, and other representations of wild things. But what is the connection between that Christmas stuffed polar bear and the real thing — which is in dire straits due to climate change?

Mooallem was struck by the way his daughter saw nature and decided to probe more generally the relationship between Americans and iconic endangered species in particular. Most conservation biologists are well aware that many of our endangered species are totally reliant on management and help from humans into perpetuity if they are to survive, and that the state in which they currently exist has no resemblance to what once was. Mooallem's book is about the stories we each create about the species we most love, and the way we can straddle despair and hope as we work to secure a future for a species whose habitat is dwindling.

Wild Ones can be a disturbing book because it questions our greatest success stories. Our national bird, the bald eagle, has recovered from only 417 nesting pairs in 1973 to roughly 10,000 nesting pairs. But should this be cause for celebration when we realize there were likely 50,000 in the late 1700s and probably many more when Columbus arrived in 1492? Should we be bothered that extreme measures are required to keep many species from disappearing forever? Or should we be inspired that people are willing to do so much to keep the whooping crane or the California condor around?

The best part of the book is its examination of the relationship between children and animals. Mooallem does not romanticize this relationship: "We like to imagine our children as miniature noble savages, moving peacefully and naked among the beasts — 'the naturals' as the first colonists called the Indians. But they're more like the colonists: greedy, vindictive, wary, shortsighted, and firing panicky musket shots at any rustling in the woods."

Lastly, this book is worth buying if for no other reason to learn where teddy bears come from — a marketing triumph barely rooted in a "true story" about Teddy Roosevelt. **SC**



Home & Garden Stay On Trend

The Chicken Whisperer's Guide to Keeping Chickens. By Andy Schneider and Brigid McCrea. Quarry Books, 2011. 176 pages.

Reviewed by [Jensen Montambault](#), applied conservation scientist, The Nature Conservancy

“Biosecurity.” The first time I read the word, I slammed the chicken book shut. It sounded vaguely military and this was supposed to be a hobby, not a regimen. But, I have returned to the book again and again, the same way that the authors refer to “biosecurity” over and over.

Our family has followed the sub-/peri-urban fad of backyard chicken-keeping and even my claims to being born on a large, working, communal, organic-ish farm cannot distract from the sense that this may be a phase for our family and perhaps generation. In the process, however, we’ve read the blogs and websites, joined the Charlottesville League of Urban Chicken Keepers (CLUCK) and, above all, read chicken books. If you are starting out or considering keeping backyard chickens or have suffered predation or disease in your own flock, this is the book I recommend.



The authors cover the basics of most primers: biology, breeds, housing, care and feeding. For me the difference lies in a merciless preparation for cohabitating with another species. Illustrations include electromagnetic imaging of common parasites, print matchers to diagnose would-be predators, and stern lectures about keeping wild birds away from your flock and not trusting that an occasional gift of eggs will stop your neighbors from turning you over to the authorities if your coop is not permitted.

I particularly appreciate the “talking point tips” for presenting in public forums to get chicken laws changed, including crowd control, building a case with facts, not emotion, and breaking down objections one point at a time rather than getting defensive. I’ve a hunch that’s the tactic for most urban conservation, too.

So now, instead of hurling the book against the wall when the authors suggest you should “consider renting a trencher” for burying wire half a meter deep to discourage digging predators, I instead contemplate the restorative value of light machinery in the natural world. **SC**

Graphic Novel

Make Your Own Adventure

***Building Stories: A Graphic Novel in 14 Parts.* By Chris Ware. Pantheon, 2012. About 260 pages.**

Reviewed by [Bob Lalasz](#), director of science communications, The Nature Conservancy

Building Stories is special right from the moment it arrives on your doorstep — in a box as big and sturdy as a board game's, containing 14 different pieces of a story about three women living in a Chicago apartment building in the 1990s and early 2000s. The pieces — including a newspaper, a poster, an infographic, filmstrips, something that looks like a Golden Book, a zine, and, yes, a game board — have all been meticulously drawn by Chris Ware, author of the previous masterpiece *Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth* and one of the revolutionaries of the graphic novel genre.



The multiple formats sound annoying; but they ingeniously force you to build your own narrative and make up your own mind. And the sum of the parts is exhilarating, granting us a privileged vantage point to the swirl of memory, time, routine, small achievement, trauma and boredom that build into a life and ultimately sweep it away. Ware is a master of the visual narrative gesture: One character ages 60 years as she descends a staircase in four panels, saying the same things she's said for decades, while in other panels, he's confident enough to allow almost nothing to happen while a momentous decision builds. He's also an incredibly close observer, and one of those rare male authors that creates convincing and sympathetic female characters (as well as characters of the apartment building, and a frustrated bee). You learn seemingly everything about these mundane people, and yet by the end you come to distrust much of it, wondering how much was just their fantasy.

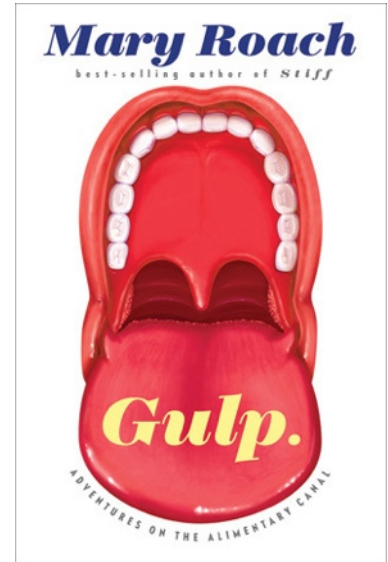
Building Stories is an anti-Kindle or -iPad — a book that insists on being an object and demands immersion. True, you can't take it to the beach. After reading it, you'll carry it in memory everywhere else. **SC**

Mike Beck's Picks and Pans For the Rule Breaker in All of Us

Four quick reviews by [Mike Beck](#), senior marine scientist, The Nature Conservancy

***Gulp: Adventures on the Alimentary Canal.* By Mary Roach. W. W. Norton & Company, 2013. 348 pages.**

A fairly interesting assemblage of facts on the alimentary canal and the scientists who untangle them. Her books now feel too formulaic. And once you've done sex and death, poop is really just ... well, you know.



***Sacré Bleu: A Comedy d'Art.* By Christopher Moore. Harper Collins, 2012. 416 pages.**

Moore shows how to do formula busting. His many books are great summer reads — often light and amusing tales of the undead on the central California coast. But they were getting formulaic. *Sacré Bleu* covers the undead but many of the main characters are all late 19th century French painters (e.g., Monet, Renoir, and Cezanne) and their masterpieces. A light, amusing, completely unique read, and I learned something without having facts shoved down my throat every page.

***Justine.* By Marquis de Sade. Harper Perennial, 2010. 224 pages.**

The New York Times reported on the recent sale of one of his works done practically on toilet paper while he was in jail. I thought, we hear about this guy all the dang time, there's got to be something redeemable, maybe even excellent, in his work. Nope. Truly depraved and bad writing to boot.

***Tao of Surfing: Finding Depth at Low Tide.* By Michael Allen. iUniverse, Inc., 2007. 188 pages.**

His brother dies from AIDS, and Michael searches for peace and meaning. He writes with incredible skill and pithiness in describing the essence of the sea and our relationship with it. He does this better than any book I have ever read (and I've read plenty on the sea). They are doing a major film on it. (Disclaimer: Michael was my son's middle school surf coach.) **SC**