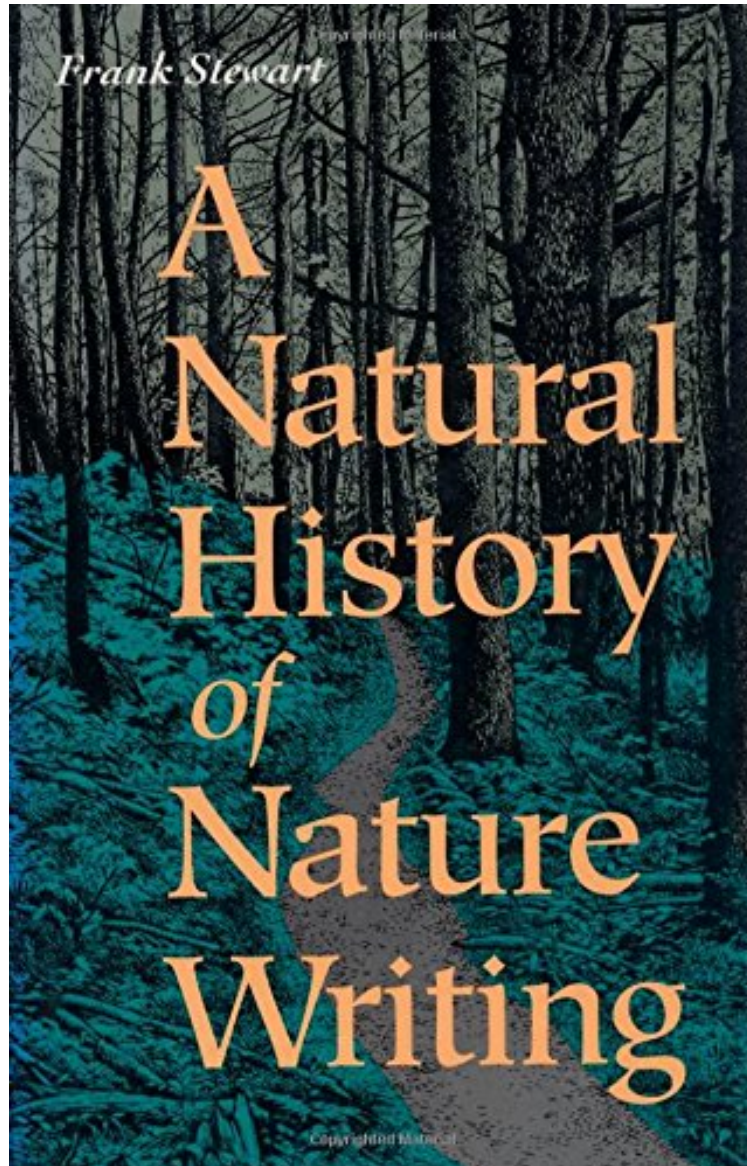


[Free and download] A Natural History of Nature Writing

## A Natural History of Nature Writing

*Frank Stewart*

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**Frank Stewart : A Natural History of Nature Writing** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised A Natural History of Nature Writing:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. An interesting approach By JDNMI took a course on nature writing and the teacher chose this as our textbook. It was a controversial choice with some students liking the book and others hating it. I think Connie's review above is a good review. The most important thing to understand is what this book is

not: it is not a "how to" book, an instruction manual; it is not a typical academic textbook. Rather it relates the history of nature writing in the Western world and tells it like a drama, a story. It puts the story in the history of nature writing. There is no intention on the part of the author to be fair-minded or even-handed and it is indisputable that Frank Stewart has an agenda beyond the academic. Personally, I liked the book because it challenges the reader to think beyond the "how" of nature writing and consider the "why" of nature writing. Nature writing serves an agenda in the larger culture--in the larger debate about what it means to be human and humanity's role in the cosmos--and the nature writer should be cognizant of what that agenda is both in other nature writers and within their own nature writing. In an era when much of nature writing worships at either the altar of an innocent subjectivity on one hand or at the temple of hard scientific objectivity on the other hand Stewart reminds us that people write because they want something. We should consider carefully what it that the writer wants and whether we think they should get it.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Brilliant. Frank Stewart's book is insightful and beautifully written. By RBrilliant. Frank Stewart's book is insightful and beautifully written. I had to go back and reread the chapter on Gilbert White, just to savor the quality of Stewart's prose and the appreciation in gave me of Thoreau's character. It came as no surprise to hear that Stewart is also a poet, so I plan to collect and read his verses too.

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. The background you need to understand the genre. By Corinne H. Smith. In considering this book, let me first explain what it is NOT. When a volume has the phrase "Nature Writing" in its title, it often turns out to be a mere anthology of such pieces by a variety of authors. The editors may preface the pages with a brief history behind the writers and the selections, but that explanation has to be necessarily cut short. (See examples in *This Incomparable Land: A Book of American Nature Writing*, *The Oxford Book of Nature Writing*, and *Norton Book of Nature Writing*.) These compilations are fine, if that happens to be what you're looking for. Each one is unique, too. *A Natural History of Nature Writing* is not an anthology or a compilation. It's a narrative that provides a natural history of the genre as it has progressed here in the United States. Author Frank Stewart (Univ. of Hawaii) covers the impacts of Gilbert White's 18th-century walks through his native Selborne, England; and then turns to the best-known Americans in the field: Henry David Thoreau, John Burroughs, John Muir, Aldo Leopold, Rachel Carson, and Edward Abbey. Stewart analyzes their lives and writings in chronological order, including the overlaps in their lifetimes and the influences each had on one another. A few additional folks surface as well, like Walt Whitman, Mary Austin (a southwestern author who was new to me), and Bill McKibben. Some works are quoted for illustration, but no complete pieces appear here. Nearly one full chapter is devoted to the "nature faker" controversy that took place at the turn of the last century. Pitting "a popular nature writer named William J. Long" against John Burroughs, this debate bounced around enough in the public media that President Teddy Roosevelt eventually got involved. Stewart provides a good analysis of the dispute and concludes that both sides "may have realized that the natural world is more complex than they had been willing to conceive." This story is key to any discussion about the scope and accuracy of nature writing today; and it is sometimes difficult to find the details of this controversy. (Of the anthologies previously noted, only the introduction in *This Incomparable Land: A Book of American Nature Writing* gives it a brief mention; and none of the three includes any works by Long. A quiet lesson in omission, perhaps?) Henry David Thoreau permeates every chapter here. Stewart is obviously a fan, and he claims (probably correctly) that Henry "is the touchstone throughout." The concept of nature writing in America begins and ends with the man. Stewart also shows no fear. He opens the book by tackling the most intricate and most debated passage in Thoreau's *WALDEN*: the parable of the hound, the bay horse, and the turtledove. What a way to start! If any faint-hearted readers are put off by this intense dissection of just one literary line, they should skip ahead to Chapter Two, where the chronological treatment begins with Gilbert White, and then leads into the others. Stewart concludes the book by getting personal: by exploring the wilderness found in his Hawaii homeland, and by considering statements made by environmentalist Bill McKibben in *The End of Nature*. Stewart is more optimistic than McKibben is, about the fate of nature and by extension, nature writing. The text thus ends on a positive note. Although this book was first released in 1995, it's still a worthy read and reference for anyone who is interested in nature writing and in the major American authors we associate with it. A real gift is the 12-page appendix of "Bibliography and Further Readings," which we can use as a home library checklist or as a program for future finds and purchases. This book is highly recommended for the nature/environment crowd.

*A Natural History of Nature Writing* is a penetrating overview of the origins and development of a uniquely American literature. Essayist and poet Frank Stewart describes in rich and compelling prose the lives and works of the most prominent American nature writers of the 19th and 20th centuries, including: Henry D. Thoreau, the father of American nature writing. John Burroughs, a schoolteacher and failed businessman who found his calling as a writer and elevated the nature essay to a loved and respected literary form. John Muir, founder of Sierra Club, who celebrated the wilderness of the Far West as few before him had. Aldo Leopold, a Forest Service employee and scholar who extended our moral responsibility to include all animals and plants. Rachel Carson, a scientist who raised the consciousness of the nation by revealing the catastrophic effects of human intervention on the Earth's living systems. Edward Abbey, an outspoken activist who charted the boundaries of ecological responsibility and pushed these boundaries to political extremes. Stewart highlights the controversies ignited by the powerful and eloquent prose of

these and other writers with their expansive and often strongly political points of view. Combining a deeply-felt sense of wonder at the beauty surrounding us with a rare ability to capture and explain the meaning of that beauty, nature writers have had a profound effect on American culture and politics. *A Natural History of Nature Writing* is an insightful examination of an important body of American literature.

From Publishers Weekly The task at hand in this well-documented, well-written volume is no less arduous than Henry David Thoreau's hopes for his extended stay at Walden Pond. Essayist and poet Stewart has attempted to capture the mystery as well as the history of nature writing. Without transgressing biographical or historical certainties, Stewart has created full-bodied characters in his interwoven portraits of the genre's most important practitioners. In doing so, the reader approaches an empirical understanding of that ephemeral "in-betweenness" with nature that is often left behind when reading the work of such disparate figures as Gilbert White, John Muir or Edward Abbey. Abbey's anarchic activism may have given him a cult following among renegade naturalists, but it is Thoreau to whom Stewart repeatedly returns for his historical understanding of the genre's ceaseless appeal. "They make us aware of a kind of knowing that is potential in us but that we are apt to ignore or suppress, as though asleep," Stewart writes of his subjects and their work. Rigorous research and engaging prose make this study a useful secondary text for the academic and the general nature enthusiast alike. The book's extensive bibliography of further readings points the interested reader down any number of new paths. Copyright 1994 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Library Journal Stewart (English, Univ. of Hawaii) focuses on the development of nature writing, arguing that "whatever forms it takes, nature writing at its best is a literary art as rigorous as natural science." Interweaving biography, history, and literary criticism, his book is a highly readable summary of what could otherwise have been a broad and complex topic. The authors featured are Englishman Gilbert White and Americans Henry David Thoreau, John Burroughs, John Muir, Aldo Leopold, Rachel Carson, and Edward Abbey, with mentions of others such as Mary Austin and Bill McKibben, with his disturbing message for our time. Stewart shows the relationship of each author to the previous one(s) and the social or historical context in which he or she was working, e.g., Leopold finally came to see that preserving the natural world is highly practical, not sentimental, but Americans returning from World War II did not want to hear his message. The director of Share Our Strength, a nonprofit agency that fights world hunger, editor Shore requested the essays in his volume as donations to the agency's fund-raising efforts. Such a formula doesn't automatically assure excellence, but in this case it has. Nearly all of the 28 essays are excellent examples of nature writing and of the essay form. Many well-known names are included here, such as McKibben, Peter Matthiessen, David Raines Wallace, Thomas Eisner, Sue Hubbell, Diane Ackerman, Janet Lembke, and Vice President Al Gore, who wrote the introduction. There is a wide variety in the topics and approaches, from a scientist excited about what electron microscope reveals to a bird watcher observing nature's reaction to rain after a drought. Nearly all the authors write with humor or enthusiasm or power or all three. This collection, like Stewart's, will be of interest to public and academic libraries. Nancy Shires, East Carolina Univ., Greenville, N.C. Copyright 1994 Reed Business Information, Inc. *A Natural History of Nature Writing* is a penetrating overview of the origins and development of a uniquely American literature. Essayist and poet Frank Stewart describes in rich and compelling prose the lives and works of the most prominent American nature writers of the 19th and 20th centuries. He examines Henry D. Thoreau (the father of American nature writing); John Burroughs; John Muir (founder of the Sierra Club); Aldo Leopold; Rachel Carson (author of *Silent Spring*); and Edward Abbey. Stewart highlights the controversies ignited by the powerful and eloquent prose of these and other writers with their expansive (and often strongly political) points of view. Combining a deeply-felt sense of wonder at the beauty surrounding us with a rare ability to capture and explain the meaning of that beauty, nature writers have had a profound effect on American culture and politics. *A Natural History of Nature Writing* is an insightful examination of an important body of American literature. -- Midwest Book