



The Rarest of the Rare: Vanishing Animals, Timeless Worlds

Diane Ackerman

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Ackerman journeys in search of monarch butterflies and short-tailed albatrosses, monk seals and golden lion tamarin monkeys: the world's rarest creatures and their vanishing habitats. She delivers a rapturous celebration of other species that is also a warning to our own. Traveling from the Amazon rain forest to a forbidding island off the coast of Japan, enduring everything from broken ribs to a beating by an irate seal, Ackerman reveals her subjects in all their splendid particularity. She shows us how they feed, mate, and migrate. She eavesdrops on their class and courtship dances. She pays tribute to the men and women who have devoted their lives to saving them.

The Rarest of the Rare: Vanishing Animals, Timeless Worlds Details

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From Reader Review The Rarest of the Rare: Vanishing Animals, Timeless Worlds for online ebook

Karen says

Ackerman has a lovely personal way of writing about the wonders of the world. She calls herself a nature ecstatic and that description is perfect! Not all essays in this collection are equally interesting but I enjoyed the language throughout.

Geof Huth says

Took me just under 8 months to read this book only while I was microwaving my lunch on those few times I'm at the office and eating lunch. (NB: reading occurred only during microwaving, not during the eating of the lunch, except for today, when I decided to finish reading the last page's worth of the book at the beginning of lunch.) Not sure if I'll try to do this with another book or not.

An interesting book on rare and extinct-leaning animals, but it loses much of its power as it goes on. The earlier chapter are the better ones.

Ross says

This is the second Ackerman book I've tried, and the second I've put down after less than fifty pages. I only tried again because of my interest in the book's topic, endangered and extinct fauna. Fool me twice, shame on me.

On the plus side, this book did reaffirm why I dislike her writing style: overuse of metaphor. Instead of judiciously sprinkling metaphors where needed to better explain a concept or to draw a pleasing parallel, Ackerman seems to work towards a quota. Two or three per sentence, minimum. And if that requires fifty-word sentences, so be it. It may prove that she's clever, but it makes for bloodless prose with zero narrative momentum.

For a much better read on the same topic, check out Douglas Adam's non-fiction Last Chance to See.

Lisa says

Purple prose. Purple, like when Jason Stackhouse took too much V and his you-know-what swelled up like an eggplant. Purple, like Barney. I needed to read no further than the introduction, where, excuse me if I'm on crack, but the author calls an airplane a "steel mastodon". Are airplanes extinct but resembled elephants?

Do they have big wavy tusks? I don't get it.

Her over-written, flowery, and corny prose flat-out drowns, suffocates, and obliterates any insights or interesting facts that just might be buried in this book. Here's another example, and you won't need another one: "Sometimes the filthier, hungrier, sorer, and more weather-beaten I get, the more I feel a deep-down child-of-the-earth radiance". I think I just threw up in my mouth a little.

Julia says

I love Diane Ackerman's writing for the same reason I love Annie Dillard; both have excellent science backgrounds, and both write like philosopher/poets.

If you don't have time to read the whole book, the introduction itself is a small gem. I had to smile when she talks about pulling out *The Home Planet*, which is one of my favorite books of photographs of earth taken from space. As she looks through the book, she says, "the book contains visual mnemonics of how I feel about nature...From the deserts of Namibia to the razor-backed Himalayas, there are wonderful creatures that have roamed Earth much longer than we, creatures that not only are worthy of our respect but could teach us about ourselves....In a sense, we are a virus that has swept over the world, changing and devouring it. Whether or not we are a plague remains to be seen."

She proceeds to visit and spend time with monk seals, the creatures of the Amazon, the short-tailed albatross (in 1982 there were only 10 left, up to 400 today thanks to Japan), the golden lion tamarin, the monarch, and a final chapter called "Insect Lore". In that chapter, I was mesmerized by her description of the six by ten foot spiderweb, woven by the fawn-colored wolf spider and taken down each morning to be rewoven in the evening.

The abundance of detail in this book is sometimes overwhelming; I read one chapter at a time (much as I do Dillard) so as not to lose the incredible threads of connection which Ackerman feels to these rare creatures.

What came to my mind were Henry Beston's words from *The Outermost House: A Year of Life On The Great Beach of Cape Cod*. He said, of our fellow creatures, "In a world older and more complete than ours they move finished and complete, gifted with extensions of the senses we have lost or never attained, living by voices we shall never hear. They are not brethren, they are not underlings; they are other nations, caught with ourselves in the net of life and time, fellow prisoners of the splendor and travail of the earth."

Ackerman's willingness to endure mud and muck, rain and discomfort--all are tributes to how much these creatures matter to her. We should listen to her message.

Preeti says

So after reading *The Zookeeper's Wife*, I wanted to see what else Diane Ackerman had out there. Of course I was happy to learn that she loves animals and has written a few books about her adventures. I was able to find this at my library. Though it took me a while to get through (summer is always busy!) I finally finished and I really liked it. I do like Ackerman's writing - it can be so lyrical and thoughtful, though at times it was a bit too sappy for me. I would give it 4.5 out of 5 stars but I rounded up since Goodreads doesn't do half

stars.

I love how in love she is with the animals and how she shares their stories with the reader. My favorites were probably the monk seals, short-tailed albatross and the Amazon. I didn't think I'd enjoy the butterfly and insects chapters much, but I actually did. One thing I really wanted to see (and I think some other reviewers have mentioned this as well) is some photographs. She does weave a great picture with her words, but as a photographer myself, I did feel that was a missing piece.

Now I really want to get my hands on *The Moon by Whale Light*.

Bendick Ong says

Ackerman did it again! This is the second book I'd read written by her. My first, *the moon by whale light*, was the most heartening read, which caused me to want to read more of her fabulous stories - each being an adventure of its own.

The stories about amazon fishes and insects are not that impressive, the ones on monk seals and tamarins are more engaging, but I love the writings on short-tailed albatrosses and monarch butterflies most. Their migration across oceans and continents is the most inspiring. The resilience and single-heartedness of God's minutest creation dwarf easily the greatest of man's achievement.

Mads says

I have a theory that each writer has a place somewhere in the world that will make him bloom artistically if he can find that place. Just as 1930s Paris ignited Henry Miller, the Amazon fired up the imagination of Diane Ackerman (not that she wasn't an accomplished writer before traveling there). In "In the Amazon, Where the Sun Dines," one of the reportage pieces here, Ackerman's rich prose is well-matched by the fecundity she sees around her. She wrote, "There was so much life at every level that my senses felt almost bruised from the overload."

Jamie says

I almost put this one down after only 5 pages being read, and I don't regret my choice to have continued until the end. Ackerman is very inspiring to animal and nature lovers alike and she makes one want to go off on a wild goose chase trying to find and study some rare endangered animal so that you might tell their story to the ignorant masses. I'm well aware of many species disappearing from our planet but was surprised by her choices of animals to pursue, having no idea how beautiful, important and endangered these particular creatures are. A fascinating read!

Virginia says

The author gives us vignettes of excursions she took to observe endangered wildlife. She provides us with

colorful word paintings of the sights, sounds, and scents of creatures and their environments. There are factoids to help us understand the ebb and flow of this web of life. There are other books that offer more concrete science; this book is more about inspiring interest in biodiversity.

Megan O'keefe says

Diane Ackerman is absolutely a new favorite author of mine. I am currently reading two of her other books. The Rarest of the Rare was the first book of Ackerman's that I read after she was recommended to me by a friend. She doesn't simply write about her life experiences, she truly describes and uses language that makes you feel like you were there or like you want to be there. I found myself re-reading passages several times as well as reading them to other people. Fantastic book!

Maggie Jaicomo says

I wanted to like this book. Diane Ackerman seems like such an interesting lady with lots of experiences to share. But the one thing I just couldn't get over was how hard it felt like she was trying to be poetic. Well I enjoy prose and I believe it adds to the reading experience, not every single object needs that much description and some of the analogies were just plain bad.

Stephen says

Rarest of the Rare.

Books are windows on the world. I rely on writers like Diane Ackerman to take me places that I perhaps will never get to go. Ackerman is a poet that likes to explore, as she writes in "Rarest of the Rare," another collection of her adventures in faraway places.

"In the rain forest, no niche lies unused. No emptiness goes unfilled. No gasp of sunlight goes untrapped. In a million vest pockets, a million life-forms quietly tick. No other place on earth feels so lush. Sometimes we picture it as an echo of the original Garden of Eden—a realm ancient, serene, and fertile, where pythons slither and jaguars lope. But it is mainly a world of cunning and savage trees. Truant plants will not survive. The meek inherit nothing. Light is a thick yellow vitamin they would kill for, and they do. One of the first truths one learns in the rain forest is that there is nothing fainthearted or wimpy about plants."

Great read for someone who cannot afford the price of an airline ticket.

Margo says

Classic Ackerman. Beautifully rendered portraits of creatures and habitats you didn't know you cared about until you opened this book. Now you'll never forget them.

Carl Rollyson says

Diane Ackerman, working once again as a kind of poet of the natural world, chronicles her interactions with and meditations on a series of endangered species and habitats. Diane She has a gift for describing natural phenomena in a manner, at once direct and lyrical, that allows readers to participate with her in her adventures in spheres both familiar and strange. In *THE RAREST OF THE RARE*, her focus shifts from the exotic short-tailed albatrosses, golden lion tamarinds to the well-known monarch butterflies, fireflies--but in each instance her intent is to bring attention to bear on the need to preserve biodiversity. Far from being didactic, the book reads almost like a story cycle in which each creature's destiny is linked to the others.
