

When Millionaires and Zealots Save the Planet

Author: Shivik, John A.

Source: BioScience, 59(7) : 624-625

Published By: American Institute of Biological Sciences

URL: <https://doi.org/10.1525/bio.2009.59.7.15>

BioOne Complete (complete.BioOne.org) is a full-text database of 200 subscribed and open-access titles in the biological, ecological, and environmental sciences published by nonprofit societies, associations, museums, institutions, and presses.

Your use of this PDF, the BioOne Complete website, and all posted and associated content indicates your acceptance of BioOne's Terms of Use, available at www.bioone.org/terms-of-use.

Usage of BioOne Complete content is strictly limited to personal, educational, and non - commercial use. Commercial inquiries or rights and permissions requests should be directed to the individual publisher as copyright holder.

BioOne sees sustainable scholarly publishing as an inherently collaborative enterprise connecting authors, nonprofit publishers, academic institutions, research libraries, and research funders in the common goal of maximizing access to critical research.

square kilometers in area, as the tables cover only land area, total protected area, and total number of sites. It would have been helpful to have such information available as percentage figures for those who want to make comparisons between countries. For example, in contrast to Ukraine, India has just 662 protected areas, but the average area of each is nearly 270 square kilometers.

This volume left me with the impression that a monumental effort is being made in many parts of the world to save what remains of wild nature. Compromises between biodiversity conservation goals and pressing human needs are inevitable, but new approaches are being strongly promoted, especially approaches that seek to promote trans-boundary protected areas and to link protected areas with compatible forms of land use, thereby providing potential migration corridors as climates inevitably change in the future. With more than half of the world's population now living in cities, it is even more important that we conserve samples of wild nature so that people can retain a measure of contact with the world in which our species evolved. As the human population soars toward nine billion and pressures on natural resources intensify, it will become increasingly important to ensure that protected areas are well managed and strongly supported by the general public. Books like *The World's Protected Areas* will help to justify the necessary investments, though those involved professionally in protected-area management will want more specific advice and maps at a more informative scale. These undoubtedly will become available as a consortium of leading conservation organizations further develops the World Database on Protected Areas.

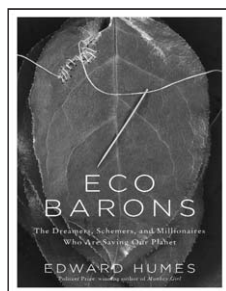
JEFFREY A. MCNEELY

Jeffrey A. McNeely (e-mail: jeffrey.mcneely@iucn.org) is a chief scientist at the headquarters office of IUCN, the International Union for Conservation of Nature, in Gland, Switzerland.

WHEN MILLIONAIRES AND ZEALOTS SAVE THE PLANET

Eco Barons: The Dreamers, Schemers, and Millionaires Who Are Saving Our Planet. Edward Humes. Harper-Collins, 2009. 384 pp. \$25.99 (ISBN 9780061350290 cloth).

The author of *Eco Barons: The Dreamers, Schemers, and Millionaires Who Are Saving Our Planet*, Edward Humes, is a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist, nonfiction novelist, and writer-at-large for *Los Angeles* magazine. In this book he applies his journalistic expertise to the stories of present-day notables who, unlike the robber barons of yesterday, use their wealth and skills to preserve the environment. The topic and content is surprisingly optimistic, given the usual gloom, doom, and panic of most current environmental reports. The book reads easily and has the simplicity and positive outlook of one of those human-interest stories that tend to close airings of local television news, but it also includes facts, figures, and research that heighten its credibility.



The purpose of the book is simple: to highlight a few notable people who have dedicated immense quantities of wealth or time toward the preservation of the environment. The narrative is most heavily weighted toward the exploits of Doug Tompkins, chief executive officer of the fashion brand Esprit during the 1970s and 1980s; he now owns vast swaths of Patagonia (the land, not the brand, although a nexus of all three is detailed in the book). But other eco

doi:10.1525/bio.2009.59.7.15

barons are included too, such as Kieran Suckling and Peter Galvin, who started as lowly owl hooters in the Southwest and then went on to establish the Center for Biological Diversity, which is more or less a little green organization that wields an environmental lawsuit the way that Yoda swings a light saber. Roxanne Quimby amassed her fortune selling natural-products cosmetics under the Burt's Bees brand, sold her interests to Clorox, and now focuses on saving the Maine woods. Andy Frank's electric and hybrid car designs may lead us to better ways of driving. Terry Tamminen, former pool-cleaner turned adviser to Governor Schwarzenegger, positions California to lead the nation in a war on climate change, and the sea turtle fanatic Carole Allen shepherds the Ridley back from the brink. And of course, no book about barons of industry who buy lots of land would be complete without a short chapter on Ted Turner.

Eco Barons is most interesting to me for its well-researched figures, good notes, and details of even very current events. Being a scientist, as I suspect most readers of this review are, I am mostly enthralled by the technical solutions to logistical, legal, and economic problems and the facts and figures that suggest, for instance, the conspiratorial delay tactic of the promise of hydrogen. But for someone reading this book out of love for the environment, it is inspiring to read the stories of mavericks who have dedicated their lives and significant sums of money to the protection of wild places and wild things. It's the story of lone wolves and little Davids such as HEART (Help Endangered Animals—Ridley Turtles) and not a tale of the mainstream environmental organizations who are matched in corporate size to the Goliaths they battle.

It's a feel-good book and meant to inspire, like a *Lives of the Saints* for environmentalists, often with the characteristic back story of a misspent and sinful youth that ultimately led to complete conversion and dedication to the Earth. These eco barons have the same religious zeal and are typically, as Humes points out, convinced of their

own righteousness. Most seem to have humble beginnings—living in tents, cabins, or minibuses without heat and electricity—but then through shrewdness and force of will, they rose to positions of international standing. As a cheerleading effort, the book performs well, and if you are interested in reading stories of people who are much richer and more dedicated to saving the environment than you are, you won't be disappointed. If you are amused by fanatics whose homes are shrines to turtles or who consider raising a forest supervisor's blood pressure by 50 points every morning to be a noble goal in itself, then you'll love these people.

*When \$600,000 can buy 24,000 acres in Chile,
but can't buy a condo in San Francisco, is it
noble to ignore how much money we've made
paving over our environment while praising
ourselves for purchasing land somewhere else
and locking it away so that country's
poor citizens can't use it?*

As a feel-good description of some positive developments in the environmental wars, however, it may be too much to ask for a more critical assessment of the subject and subjects, but I find that I can't help myself. I do like to be challenged more in nonfiction reads and to have an author present the subject from a variety of angles, rather than to rely too heavily on a formulaic journalistic device. The iron triangle of journalism—hero, villain, victim—is too closely adhered to; all of the protagonists are unblemished in their wholesome goodness, and their scrappy, sanctimonious, and uncompromising approaches are dotingly described as virtues. Reading uncritically, I was quite convinced that the Center for Biological Diversity single-handedly ended the timber industry in the Southwest, saved the polar bears, and will protect us all from global warming by transforming the Endangered Species Act. Mother Nature, whether in the guise of an adorable sea turtle or the rugged beauty of the Pata-

gonian forests and its araucaria trees, is the perfect passive, unsuspecting, and innocent victim. And of course, the villains are the usual cast of unredeemable and evil characters: corporate greed, Reagan and Watt, the US Forest Service (which, Hume notes, *hates* the Endangered Species Act), and George W. Bush.

In this light, the undercurrents and recurring unstated themes of the book did cause me to think of the age-old question of ends and means. These are all noble and motivated people, and their generosity and dedication cannot be denied. After all, I haven't purchased and preserved thousands of acres of pristine forests, but then I haven't made millions by marketing excess to a commercialistic society. That is, is it OK to exploit people and the planet at a global scale as long as I use some proportion of my wealth to buy and hold swaths of rainforest or the Maine countryside? When \$600,000 can buy 24,000 acres in Chile, but can't buy a condo in San Francisco, is it noble to ignore how much money we've made paving over our environment while praising ourselves for purchasing land somewhere else and locking it away so that country's poor citizens can't use it? Should we, as Tompkins did, feel surprised when the locals feel exploited and resistant, and perhaps insulted?

So, the book can be used on two levels: One, as a cheerful portrait of the people out there who are doing big things and using their fortunes to help Mother Earth; perhaps we can do good too. Alternatively, if we think and read a little deeper, we will ask ourselves if what the eco barons have done is always right and without downfalls and costs, which should lead to a little self-examination. Indeed, even though the book left me wanting just one more chapter that examined the hard questions, it also left me with the desire to put up some solar panels.

JOHN A. SHIVIK

John A. Shivik (e-mail: john.shivik@aphis.usda.gov) is a supervisory research wildlife biologist with the USDA Wildlife Services' National Wildlife Research Center in the Department of Wildland Resources at Utah State University.

NEW TITLES

The Big Thaw: Travels in the Melting North. Ed Struzik. Wiley, 2009. 288 pp., illus. \$26.95 (ISBN 9780470157282 cloth).

Biological Control of Tropical Weeds Using Arthropods. Rangaswamy Muniappan, Gadi V. P. Reddy, and Anantanarayanan Raman, eds. Cambridge University Press, 2009. 508 pp., illus. \$126.00 (ISBN 9780521877916 cloth).

The Biology of Caves and Other Subterranean Habitats. David C. Culver and Tanja Pipan. Oxford University Press, 2009. 272 pp., illus. \$60.00 (ISBN 9780199219933 paper).

Cold: Adventures in the World's Frozen Places. Bill Streever. Little, Brown, 2009. 320 pp., illus. \$24.99 (ISBN 9780316042918 cloth).

Conserving and Valuing Ecosystem Services and Biodiversity: Economic, Institutional, and Social Challenges. K. N. Ninan. Earthscan, 2009. 432 pp., illus. \$136.50 (ISBN 9781844076512 cloth).

Critical Transitions in Nature and Society. Marten Scheffer. Princeton University Press, 2009. 400 pp., illus. \$45.00 (ISBN 9780691122045 paper).

Dragonflies and Damselflies of the West. Dennis Paulson. Princeton University Press, 2009. 536 pp., illus. \$29.95 (ISBN 9780691122816 paper).

Ecosystem-based Management for the Oceans. Karen McLeod and Heather Leslie, eds. Island Press, 2009. 368 pp., illus. \$45.00 (ISBN 9781597261555 paper).

doi:10.1525/bio.2009.59.7.16