



The Best American Science & Nature Writing 2000

By David Quammen, Burkhard Bilger

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David Quammen, together with series editor Burkhard Bilger, has assembled a remarkable group of writers whose selections appeared in periodicals from NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC, SCIENCE, and THE NEW YORKER to PUERTO DEL SOL and DOUBLETAK. Among the acclaimed writers represented in this volume are Richard Preston on “The Demon in the Freezer,” John McPhee bidding “Farewell to the Nineteenth Century,” Oliver Sacks remembering the “Brilliant Light” of his boyhood, and Wendell Berry going “Back to the Land.” Also including such literary lights as Anne Fadiman, David Guterson, Edward Hoagland, Natalie Angier, and Peter Matthiessen, this new collection presents selections bound together by their timelessness.

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Bibliography

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Editor David Quammen's approach with *The Best American Science and Nature Writing 2000* is broad. So broad that he juxtaposes Mormon archaeology with wild African dogs, computer science with the origins of HIV. As a whole, the collection should be awkward, but it's not. Quammen's insistence that nature is bigger than we think, that science rests within culture, which rests within nature, allows each of these pieces to fit. The focus is on good writing, writing that might change your mind, or make you shout "YES!" or even make you angry. In narrowing the field, Quammen considered straight science reporting, book reviews and excerpts, and articles published in 1999.

One of the best pieces in the book is Natalie Angier's essay "Men, Women, Sex, and Darwin"--which became *Woman: An Intimate Geography*--a lucid and sharp challenge to the prevailing notions of evolutionary psychologists about what women want. Wendell Berry's "Back to the Land" praises the notion of an agrarian mindset, in contrast to the prevailing industrialism, and urges no less than a consumer revolt. Atul Gawande addresses the myth of the cancer cluster, Anne Fadiman recalls her reaction to a young boy's drowning, and Edward Hoagland imagines life in the third millennium in his elegant piece, "That Sense of Falling:"

Science is not sluggardly yet seems devoid of grief, because this would be a life without Mozart or other succulent choices at our fingertips, but oddly truncated, with so little sky and green and random sound or scent blowing in. We may need to grow not only hydroponic vitamins, but also oxygen, if the forests and oceanic vegetation are mauled beyond resuscitation: breathing units, to complement what may be denoted as affection units once the components of a child's emotional needs have been mapped precisely.

Millennialism drives several of the works, as a testament to our 1999 obsession with Y2K. Brief chronicles of the year's scientific revolutions are here, like Paul Ewald's work on microbiological evolution, as are more personal accounts, like Peter Matthiessen's pure naturalist prose and Oliver Sacks's "Brilliant Light," telling of his childhood obsession with chemistry. Browsers will find wonderful excerpts from the two major schools of science and nature writing that Quammen calls "Stay Home and Observe with a Gentle Heart" and "Go Forth and Observe with a Probing Mind." This collection is a very worthy addition to Houghton Mifflin's Best American series, and a science reader's dream come true. --*Therese Littleton*

From Publishers Weekly

In the first volume of what will be an annual series, longtime science writer Quammen (The Song of the Dodo) assembles 20 cogent, informative and sometimes beautifully written essays, explanations and reports on (among other fields) AIDS, apes, archeologists and "Africa's wild dogs," all published in the last calendar year. Split about evenly between lab science and reports from wild places, the essays also vary greatly in length: some are substantial investigations, while others offer only a few lyrical pages. Natalie Angier (Woman: An Intimate Geography) leads off the book with a powerful salvo against evolutionary psychology, reprinted from the New York Times Magazine. Accomplished nature writer Ken Lamberton (Wilderness and Razor Wire) contributes a compact, well-observed piece about toads from an Arizona prison where he is an inmate. Anthropologist Craig Stanford shows how "ecotourism works" on a Ugandan reserve that succeeds in protecting its gorillas. Biology writer Judith Hooper (The Three-Pound Universe) describes the fascinating

Amherst researchers who think that many human traits may come from infectious microorganisms. Part of Scribner's successful (and ever-lengthening) series of Best American titles, this entertaining and worthy volume directly competes with Dand arrives one month later than DEcco's equally polished Best American Science Writing, edited by James Gleick (Forecasts, July 3), which draws from many of the same sources (the New Yorker; the Sciences; the New York Review of Books). Not only do Oliver Sacks and Atul Gawande appear in both volumes, but Sacks contributes the same piece (a memoir) to both. Readers most interested in DNA or particle physics may find Gleick's slightly more substantial. For readers devoted to animals and the environment, Quammen's volume will be the one to seek. (Oct.)
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From [Booklist](#)

In their rousing introductions to the first installment in what promises to be an important annual series, both series editor Bilger, senior editor at *Discover*, and volume editor Quammen, author most recently of *Wild Thoughts from Wild Places* (1998), observe that as science has grown and technology's impact on nature has increased, the border between the genres of popular science and nature writing has dissolved, and the audience for the resultant hybrid has burgeoned. The 19 essays collected here were chosen not only for their compelling subject matter--which ranges from camels and toads to sex and evolution, AIDS, smallpox, computers, and string theory--but for their emphasis on reflection rather than mere information; and many originally appeared in such nonscientific venues as the *Atlantic Monthly*, the *New Yorker*, and *American Scholar*. Quammen has selected illuminating and timeless works by such eloquent scientists as Oliver Sacks, Helen Epstein, and Paul De Palma, and gifted writers at home in the scientific and natural worlds, including Peter Matthiessen, Natalie Angier, Richard Preston, and Edward Hoagland. *Donna Seaman*
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Users Review

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Deborah Hagan:

Is it a person who having spare time then spend it whole day simply by watching television programs or just telling lies on the bed? Do you need something totally new? This The Best American Science & Nature Writing 2000 can be the answer, oh how comes? The new book you know. You are so out of date, spending your extra time by reading in this completely new era is common not a nerd activity. So what these books have than the others?

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