



Beauty and the Beast: California Wildflowers and Climate Change

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WinterBadger Press (Dec 12, 2019)

Hardcover \$60.00 (264pp)

978-1-73310-440-1

Beauty and the Beast is the story of an imperiled glory. Part of an inspiring documentary art project created by conservation photographers Rob Badger and Nita Winter, it highlights California's famed wildflower "superblooms" that, when conditions are favorable, herald the arrival of spring with a riotous display of color.

Shimmering in vast waves across the landscape or revealing their intricacies in intimate portraits of a single bloom, the wildflowers were all photographed in natural light using harm-free methods that are shared in detail at the end of the book. Eighteen short, insightful essays by a diverse group of scientists and nature writers tell the stories of these imperiled wildflowers and inspire action with suggestions for helping to tame "the beast."

The book celebrates California's remarkable biodiversity. Home to more native plant species than any other state, its varied landscapes—cool north-facing mountain slopes, scorching desert terrain, bay estuaries, and beaches—are the result of millennia of tectonic upheavals. The resulting microclimates have sheltered ancient organisms that are now extinct everywhere else, though they are now under threat as overconsumption destroys natural habitats, pollutes, and wreaks havoc on ecosystems.

While Earth's long and tumultuous evolution has always included periods of climate change, the book reveals that what is happening now is different. Sped up by human activity, climate change is occurring much faster than ever before, leaving plants without the time they need to adapt to changing conditions or migrate to environments better suited to them.

Sensitive and thought provoking, *Beauty and the Beast* is a delight for the eyes and nourishment for the soul—a strong reminder of fragile beauty on the cusp of destruction, given in the hope that people will be moved to care and then to act on its behalf.

KRISTINE MORRIS (May / June 2020)

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