



Edisto River: Black Water Crown Jewel

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We don't need the Supreme Court to tell us that all books are created equal, even those with preexisting conditions. Books also have the right to pursue happiness which means they dream of being acclaimed works of intelligence, entertainment, and lasting influence.

Be that as it may, not all books achieve such lofty heights, which is not the case with our nonfiction book of the year winner, a work so loaded with knowledge and factual wisdom about a mysterious black water river in the American South, it defies belief.

Let's count the number of ways this book delivers:

One, master-level nature writing;

Two, a comprehensive field guide to the flora and fauna of upland and lowcountry South Carolina;

Three, a travelogue to the headwaters, forks, bends, tributaries, and estuaries of a 300-plus mile long blackwater river;

Four, an environmental compass to sustainable river management;

Five, an homage to the miracle and magic of moving water;

Six, a photography book par excellence;

And seven, a last word on coffee table books.

From its headwaters at the Midlands of South Carolina, the Edisto River meanders 305 unobstructed miles along low sandy banks before gently expiring into the Atlantic Ocean. Formally known as black water, the river's slow moving current doesn't sweep away its earthy riverbed, and the waters are stained the color of strong tea by the tannins of decaying plant matter. Such laziness has also kept the Edisto free of dams and other human interferences.

To quote from the book: "This moving liquid pathway provides a perfect mirror. Color reflections of sky, trees, flowers, and birds in flight are part of black water vistas, even on foggy or cloudy days. Broken light shimmering on tree trunks and the undersides of overhanging branches filled with broad green leaves allows one to see the movement of water without looking directly at the river itself."

MATT SUTHERLAND (June 26, 2015)