

Mistletoe Winter

Roy Dennis

Saraband (Oct 11, 2022)

Softcover \$16.95 (240pp)

978-1-913393-25-0

Roy Dennis is a UK wildlife conservation pioneer; in the past six decades, he has been particularly active in reintroducing birds of prey, including ospreys and white-tailed eagles. In the essays of *Mistletoe Winter*, his excitement over everyday encounters with the natural world matches his zeal for momentous rewilding projects.

In this companion volume to *Cottongrass Summer*, Dennis is heartened by stronger connections with nature forged during pandemic-enforced lockdowns. The short pieces cluster under seasonal headings and entice others with wonders experienced through close attention, like the dozen species' worth of tracks identified on a snowy morning's walk. Their topics range from the reuse of woodpecker holes to the California condor captive breeding program.

Dennis is sober about wildlife declines witnessed in his lifetime and aware of the contradictions involved in conservation: the comparative lack of protection for marine environments; the fact that invasive species must be killed to minimize damage. Envisioning future rewilding, he insists that humans must act as apex predators (for example, by shooting surplus deer) to mend broken food chains.

Practical, plain-speaking, and marked by bold proposals, the book wonders about setting up "carrion 'restaurants'" for raptors as a way of clearing carcasses, and building green bridges to prevent wild animal deaths on roads. Even more radical, it muses over giving the vote to younger teenagers, and about taking it away at sixty: "older people have had their chances and in many ways we've failed." There are slight entries, too, as with a 1988 essay about a trip to Iceland, and a 1998 list of birds seen on Fair Isle. Still, the general principles of these essays are widely applicable.

Noting that "everything affecting nature" has sped up, *Mistletoe Winter* is a passionate call to arms to appreciate and fight for the species we have left.

REBECCA FOSTER (September / October 2022)

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