

★ **Sweet in Tooth and Claw: Stories of Generosity and Cooperation in the Natural World**

Kristin Ohlson

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Descriptions of nature as competitive (Charles Darwin) and “red in tooth and claw” (Alfred, Lord Tennyson) shaped the way people perceive it today. *Sweet in Tooth and Claw* debunks such concepts to reveal that, in fact, cooperation and generosity allow nature to thrive. It also speculates about what differences would be possible if human beings followed nature’s example.

“Living things engage in constant, complicated interactions,” writes Kristin Ohlson, whose book affirms the ancient Indigenous perspective of nature as cooperative, generous, sustainable, and hopeful. Provocative and inspiring, her book invites consideration of the ways that humans—often considered to be exploiters, colonizers, and destroyers of nature—can learn from the natural world and partner with it to solve some of the planet’s most pressing problems.

Stories of cooperation between plants and bees, forests and fish, and microbes and trees celebrate nature’s astounding, calibrated complexity and the benefits of cooperation over attempts at domination. A moving example is that of ranchers in northeastern Nevada who, with a simple change of mindset and grazing practices, and with respect for the role of beavers in the ecosystem, saw desert lands turn into thriving, lush wetlands with flowing streams, ponds, and renewed aquifers—all without human help.

The book’s astounding revelations of how trees communicate through chemical “sentences” or emit chemical “screams” that prompt other plants to produce substances that deter attacking pests only scratch the surface of what there is to learn about nature. Without understanding such intricate, delicate systems, intervening humans often disrupt and destroy ecosystems that, with patience, would renew themselves.

A rich and fascinating book, *Sweet in Tooth and Claw* is stunning in its vision of how, by embracing nature’s cooperative, generous spirit, human beings might do part of the great work of helping the planet and its inhabitants to thrive.

KRISTINE MORRIS (September / October 2022)

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