

The Living World

Art Wolfe

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“Saving nature has always been exhilarating, frustrating, poignant, and controversial,” writes William Conway in the introduction to *The Living World*. Perhaps never more so than during this new millenium explosion of virtual realities and high stakes global economic, social, and environmental challenges. In this lavish volume the visual acumen and brilliant technical grace of Art Wolfe’s photography emphasizes the exhilaration and poignancy of this process, bringing to the viewer images of animals great and small threatened by extinction if humans don’t bring considerable energy to bear on their behalf.

At the inception of the three-year global trek that would yield the 230 full-color photographs in this book, Wolfe decided to place as much emphasis on the environment as on the animal within it. He writes, “an animal without habitat is simply a curiosity biding time to its extinction. But an animal within its habitat is a vibrant representation of natural selection.”

The topography of the photographs moves from island and ocean, through savannah, desert, and steppe to tropical lands, and all points in between. They are punctuated by concise and eloquent essays. Each writer strives to balance sounding the alarm on behalf of these beautiful and threatened creatures with expressing hope that humans acting together can still turn back the threat of massive extinction.

The conclusion of every chapter includes a brief description of each species represented, followed by a map of its current remaining habitat, and commentary by Wolfe on the experience of taking the photograph, as well as the camera, lens, f-stop and film used. The end of the book offers generous lists of wildlife and conservation organizations as well as further reading.

Many people will never actually stand as close to an arctic wolf or Japanese macaque as Wolfe’s lens takes him; however, these vibrant and splendid images bring the living wild into the home and heart with an urgency that can only inspire awareness and action on the part of the dazzled viewer.

BRONWYN JONES (September / October 2000)

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