FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

The Nearsighted Naturalist
Ann Haymond Zwinger
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Detailed, accurate, and reverent, the essays of Zwinger invite us to wander the natural world, eyes opened in wonder. Whether following the loping movements of a morning cloak butterfly or gasping for breath after an end-over kayak flip in the rapids of Green River, Zwinger's experiences are described with deep appreciation for the colors, sensations and the diversity of life. Through this far-ranging collection of 21 essays, the author offers detailed observations of botany, biology, geology and the natural processes upon which our existence depends.

Most naturalists are wanderers, collectors and fascinated observers. They "have an insatiable curiosity" about the natural condition, Zwinger says. As a myopic observer, she says, she is particularly detail oriented. However, she also demonstrates a real appreciation for the interrelationships of plants, insects and animals, frequently calling our attention to habitats and landscapes.

Zwinger is a solid writer with a clear appreciation for the power of words. She uses a quiet, conversational prose that is both accessible and scientifically accurate. Sometimes she waxes a bit too poetic, however, giving us a butterfly "flying off to sip, sup, and seduce, something essential in the air that says summer, summer, I knew this summer day."

Collected from works that span more than 20 years, these essays describe a broad array of experiences in a career devoted to field work and observation. Zwinger takes us collecting butterflies near Pikes Peak, exploring a sea cave on an island off the coast of Chile, and drifting down the Yangtze River in China. Like the career of a wandering naturalist, this collection of essays hangs together only loosely, but joyously celebrates the natural world.

Joe VanderMeulen