

The Oasis This Time: Living and Dying with Water in the West

Rebecca Lawton

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Rebecca Lawton's powerful and poetic *The Oasis This Time* celebrates water as a precious natural resource.

Though its essays focus primarily on water in the western US, the book also explores humanity's complex relationship with water. The collection is as diverse as it is illuminating. Lawton writes with authority about desert oases, rivers, reservoirs, bird watching, and wildfires in places from Las Vegas to Edmonton. Each essay addresses a unique topic, but all are anchored by keen observations of the environment and musings on alternative solutions to pressing environmental problems.

The most compelling and timely essays revolve around California's deadly wildfires. Lawton, who lived in the Sonoma area, was personally affected by some of them, and her firsthand accounts of their devastation is chilling. Still, somehow there is hope: A birder named Christine Engle tells Lawton, "In dynamic California, with its fires, earthquakes, and floods, the birds teach us about beauty and survival."

Other essays are just as impactful. In an essay about Las Vegas, Lawton reveals the stunning fact that "sixty percent of drinking-quality water delivered to homes and businesses in Las Vegas irrigates landscaping and fills water features." In another essay about damming rivers, she presents an impassioned argument against large dams: "Building reservoirs that can only be semi-filled at great dollar and cultural cost—not to mention with huge loss of wildlife—and human-critical habitat is the same wisdom that destroyed the Stanislaus [River] for no good reason."

Lawton's sensitive observations about protecting birds and other wildlife are worthy of careful consideration. So too are her closing thoughts about the small steps each of us can take to preserve and protect water, our most precious natural resource.

BARRY SILVERSTEIN (March/April 2019)

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