

Favorite Conservation Books

A dear friend asked me “what are your 5-10 favorite books on conservation? Ones that would be particularly smart for a budding conservationist to read and keep handy for reference?” I’ve been inspired and informed by books about conservation since reading A Sand County Almanac many years ago. Still, when I saw this question I wondered, “what am I missing?” I asked around, and friends and colleagues helped me create a list of essential and inspiring books.

The first section (“if you could buy only 10”) are where I would start (I cheated by including 14). There are many excellent books in the list that follows. Comments preceded by “JS” are brief comments from me. Comments in quotes are from others.

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If you could buy only 10 books

A Sand County Almanac by Aldo Leopold. (An “influential classic.”)

Braiding Sweetgrass by Robin Wall Kimmerer. Also by Kimmerer—Gathering Moss. (JS: I love how Kimmerer anchors in gratitude and relationship. I just finished her Gathering Moss—I didn't cry as often, but another lovely book.)

In the Shadow of Man by Jane Goodall. (Stephen Jay Gould called it, “one of the great achievements of twentieth-century scholarship.”)

As Long as Grass Grows: The Indigenous Fight for Environmental Justice, from Colonization to Standing Rock by Dina Gilio-Whitaker.

Trust in the Land: New Directions in Tribal Conservation by Beth Rose Middleton.

The Origin of Species by Charles Darwin.

The Home Place by J. Drew Lanham. (“An essential contemporary memoir.”)

Black Faces, White Spaces by Carolyn Finney (JS: plus, if you can see Dr. Finney speak, don't miss it.)

Essentials of Conservation Biology (6th edition) by Richard Primack.

A Primer of Ecological Principles by Richard J. Vogl.

Because I believe everyone should know about the natural life that surrounds them, good references for geology, mammal, plants, and birds in the place where you live are essential. These are the books I most often pull off my shelf. In Colorado, I recommend:

- Messages in Stone: Colorado’s Colorful Geology by Vincent Matthews.
- Flora of Colorado by Jennifer Ackerfield.
- Mammals of Colorado, Second Edition by David Armstrong, James Fitzgerald, and Carron Meaney.
- American Birding Association Field Guide to the Birds of Colorado by Ted Floyd, with photographs by Brian Small.

Other inspiring, informative books about nature and conservation

1491 by Charles Mann. Also by Mann—1493; *The Wizard and the Prophet* (JS: All of these books are excellent. 1491 and 1493 make a pair, pre- and post-Columbus. I liked *The Wizard and the Prophet* for its long 20th century view of how generations-old concepts that still infuse conservation, for good and bad.)

The Sixth Extinction by Elizabeth Kolbert.

The Invention of Nature: Alexander Humboldt's New World by Andrea Wulf. (JS: Humboldt is underappreciated in U.S. conservation as the originator of several big concepts—and perhaps one or two mythologies—that underpin our conservation work.)

Mind in the Waters by Joan McIntyre.

Let the Mountains Talk, Let the Rivers Run by David Brower

Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture by Wendell Barry. Also by Barry—*The Long-legged House; Port William Membership*.

Arctic Dreams by Barry Lopez. Also by Barry Lopez—*Of Wolves and Men*.

Silent Spring by Rachel Carson. Also by Carson—*The Sea Around Us*.

Walden by Henry David Thoreau.

Moth Snowstorm by Michael McCarthy.

The Hour of Land by Terry Tempest Williams. Also by Williams—*Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place*.

Mythical River by Melissa Sevigny. (“For Southwest water conservation issues”)

Pilgrim at Tinker Creek by Annie Dillard

A Feathered River Across the Sky by Joel Greenburg.

Cadillac Desert by Marc Reisner. (JS: essential history for anyone working on water in the American West.)

Uncommon Ground by William Cronon. Also by Cronon—*Changes in the Land; Nature's Metropolis*.

Diary of a Young Naturalist by Dara McAnulty. (the Guardian says, “He talks about life with autism and finding peace in the wilds of Northern Ireland.”)

The Overstory by Richard Powers. (“may not suggest socially acceptable approaches to conservation, both books, I feel, effectively foment a desire to put myself out there and take measurable action where possible.” JS: I found *Overstory* a rich, complicated, and intense book infused with love, amidst violence and pain.)

The Monkey Wrench Gang by Edward Abbey. (“may not suggest socially acceptable approaches to conservation, both books, I feel, effectively foment a desire to put myself out there and take measurable

action where possible.” JS: Personally, I'm not an Edward Abbey fan because I also think our action needs to be infused with love and care, for nature and for people. I don't see that with Abbey.)

Eating Stone by Ellen Meloy.

Wolves and Honey by Susan Brind Morrow. (“goes deep into the importance of immersion and makes you think a lot about our very primitive needs to conserve.”)

Upstream (an essay) by Mary Oliver. (“goes deep into the importance of immersion and makes you think a lot about our very primitive needs to conserve.”)

The Last Unicorn by William deBuys. (“the story of the search for the critically endangered saola is also an amazing book.”)

Song of the Dodo by David Quammen.

Coming into the Country John McPhee. Also by McPhee—Basin and Range; Annuals of a Former World; The Control Of Nature.

People of the Deer by Farley Mowat. Also by Mowat—People of the Deer; Sea of Slaughter.

Wilderness Warrior by Douglas Brinkley.

How to think about weird things: Critical thinking for a new age by Schick and Vaughn.

Consilience by E.O. Wilson. Also by Wilson—Biophilia; Naturalist.

Conserving Forest Biodiversity by David Lindenmayer and Jerry Franklin

Saving Nature's Legacy by Reed Noss and Allen Cooperrider.

Keeping the Wild: Against the Domestication of Earth by Wuerthner, Crist, and Butler (eds.)

Corridor Ecology, Second Edition: Linking Landscapes for Biodiversity Conservation and Climate Adaptation by Hilty, Keeley, Lidicker and Merenlender.

Conservation Science: Balancing the Needs of People and Nature by Peter Kareiva and Michelle Marvier.

Sustaining Life: How Human Health Depends on Biodiversity by Chivian and Bernstein (eds.).

The Wolf's Tooth by Cristina Eisenberg.

Native Science by Greg Cajete.

Cultures of Habitat by Gary Paul Nabhan.

Capturing the Landscape of New Spain by Rebecca Carte.

Intimate Nature: The Bond Between Women and Animals by Linda Hogan, Metzger, and Peterson (eds.)

All We Can Save: Truth, Courage, and Solutions for the Climate Crisis by Johnson and Wilkinson (eds.)

The Mind of a Raven by Bernd Heinrich (JS: Dr. Heinrich is among our great contemporary naturalist authors. He has several books worth reading, although this is my favorite.)

Compass and Gyroscope: Integrating Science And Politics For The Environment by Kai Lee and Philip Shabecoff

Discordant Harmonies: A New Ecology for the Twenty-first Century by Daniel Botkin.

Ghost Bears: Exploring the Biodiversity Crisis by R. Edward Grumbine.

Community and the Politics of Place by Daniel Kemmis.

The End of Nature by Bill McKibben.

What Elephants Know by Eric Dinerstein.

Nature's Best Hope: A New Approach to Conservation that Starts in Your Yard by Douglas W. Tallamy.

Down from the Mountain: The Life and Death of a Grizzly Bear by Bryce Andrews.

The Golden Spruce: A True Story of Myth, Madness, and Greed by John Vaillant.

Blood Meridian by Cormac McCarthy.

The River Why by David James Duncan.

Restoring Colorado River Ecosystems- A Troubled Sense of Immensity by Robert Adler. (“to get an understanding of how our water use is impacting one of the greatest river systems on earth and what we need to do to reverse that.”)

Eager Beavers and Why They Matter by Ben Goldfarb.

Last but not least . . . Books that will help you be a better conservation leader

How to Conserve Conservationists by Jessie Panazzolo (JS: Plus, see lonelyconservationists.com. A recurring theme I hear is how hard it is to stay positively engaged, and this resource may help.)

Getting to Yes by William Ury (JS: This is a classic book on achieving better outcomes for more parties.)

Ask a Manager by Alison Green

Lead From the Outside by Stacey Abrams

This is Marketing by Seth Godin

How to Win Friends and Influence People by Dale Carnegie

Maximum Achievement by Brian Tracy (JS: I listen to this every 3-6 months. It's a short but compelling book on taking personal responsibility for your life and what you achieve, with specific recommendations.)

Mastering Leadership: An Integrated Framework for Breakthrough Performance and Extraordinary Business Results by Bob Anderson and William Adams (JS: Love the dual focus on the 'internal' and 'external' game.)

Alone on the Wall by Alex Honnold. (“lessons of perseverance and dedication to goals”)