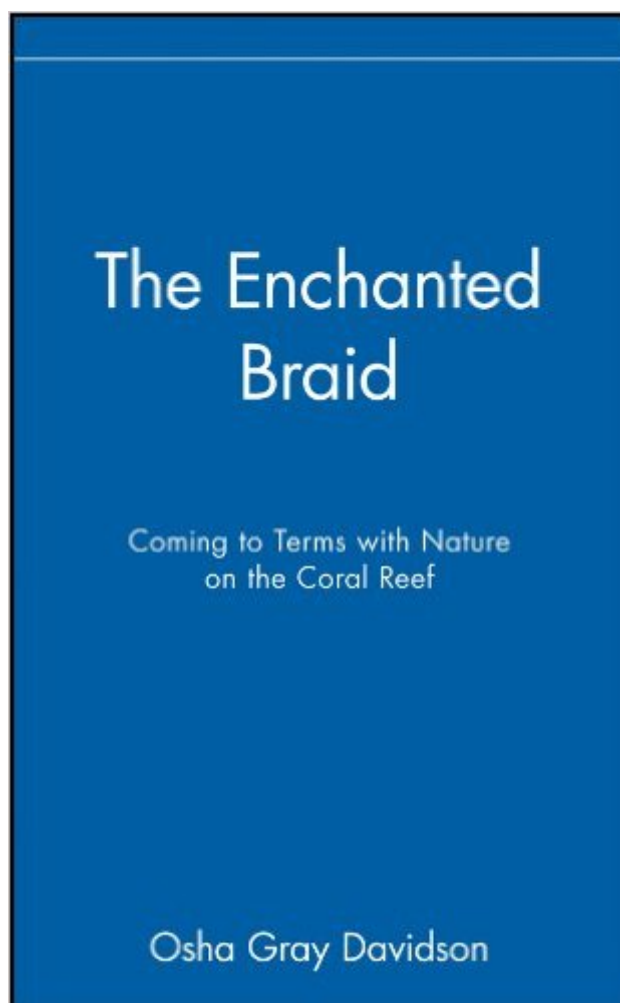


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The Enchanted Braid: Coming To Terms With Nature On The Coral Reef



Synopsis

"There is a word for what Darwin and the rest of us have felt when in the presence of the reef: 'awe.' Confronted with the reef, awe is the most appropriate response. It is probably in our nature. It is also, apparently, in our nature to destroy that which we hold in awe." --from *The Enchanted Braid*

Of the myriad ecosystems populating the underwater world, coral reefs are by far the most complex. While their stunning beauty has been extolled for centuries, the intricate workings of reef environments remained largely hidden from view. In fact, until the advent of scuba diving just fifty years ago, corals have been among the last natural histories to be extensively explored. The high passion with which scientists have greeted this particular investigation --beginning with the foundational theories of Charles Darwin in 1842--is perhaps unprecedented, but hardly difficult to understand. A phenomenon of both awesome beauty and vital importance, the coral reef is home to the most diverse range of species of any environment on the planet, including fish, shrimps, worms, snails, crabs, sea cucumbers, sea stars, urchins, anemones, and sea squirts. The crux of reef life, scientists have discovered, lies in nature's most intimate example of symbiosis: the mutually beneficial relationship between the coral polyp and its "tenant," the zooxanthellate algae. Davidson's history begins with this deceptively diminutive hybrid, the engine behind the construction of the limestone-based coral structure. Together, the three elements comprise a unique zoophytalite (animal-plant-mineral) form, or an "enchanted braid." Aided by an eight-page, full-color photographic insert demonstrating the incredible intricacies of the reef and its unique inhabitants, *The Enchanted Braid* identifies the approximately 240,000 square miles of coral reef on the planet today as indispensable not only to the livelihood of the oceans but also to humans. The reef is, after all, the "soul of the sea," the spawning ground for tens of thousands of marine species. As sources of food (many islands rely on reefs for all their protein), medicine (corals are used in bone grafts and to fight cancer and leukemia), and detailed insight into the history of climatic conditions, coral reefs are critically important to human life on Earth. However, in a world of oil tanker disasters, global warming, and dwindling natural resources, they are also in grave danger of extinction. Osha Gray Davidson's urgent clarion call to halt today's man-made degradation of coral reefs is both alarming and persuasive, effectively underscored by the rich historical context of passages from Darwin's captivating diary of his seminal work on reefs 150 years ago. Like the coral reef, *The Enchanted Braid* is itself a rare hybrid, a graceful combination of aesthetic appreciation, scientific inquiry, and environmental manifesto.

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Customer Reviews

I have read hundreds of articles and books about coral reefs, "The Enchanted Braid" offers one of the best introductions you could ask for into the world of coral reefs. The book features both biological and historical descriptions of coral reefs as well as reporting on what is happening today to coral reefs around the world. It is clear, well written and easy for us "non-scientists" to understand. SCUBA divers, snorkelers and anyone else who loves the ocean should read this book.

A book well written and researched for the layman. The Enchanted Braid describes the addiction to the sea that many sport diving enthusiast experience. It provides a global perspective of the mysterious plight of our coral reefs. I read the book while in Bali, Indonesia. The well travelled author's feelings about the plight of the reefs is true to form from my perspective. The message is one we all should read and heed.

This book was required reading for a course that I took in Tropical Marine ecology. It is a rather interesting narrative, that brings together facts and the personal experiences of the author. It would be an excellent book for people who were interested in this topic and whose major in college was not science. As a scientific resource, however, it was very slow reading; it was descriptive rather than detailed, and at times I felt like I was reading the transcript from a Richard Attenborough episode of Planet Earth. Nonetheless, the author hit upon a very important concept for understanding coral reefs and their inhabitants: corals are animals who incorporate into their tissue

small plants. This symbiotic relationship gives them the energetic wherewithal to synthesize calcium carbonate which is used in the construction of the calcified reef. Thus, it is the interweaving of the animal, vegetable, and mineral aspects of coral which comprise the enchanted braid, and hence, the title of the book.

"The environment is the theater and evolution is the play." -G. Evelyn Hutchinson

The natural history of coral reefs helps determine the relationship between human and the environment, and an understanding of climate change. The great mystery of the coral reefs is an interesting factor to study on because they represent less than two-tenths of one percent of the area of the global ocean, but overflowing with life in astonishing ways. About ten percent of the world's coral reefs have already been degraded beyond recovery, and another 30 percent are likely to decline significantly over the next two decades. Osha Gray Davidson, an award-winning author, freelance writer, and a photographer, grew an interest in the coral reef to find out that they are an important essential to understand the enchanted braid of our global ecosystem. Coral reefs, often referred to as the rainforest of the sea, which provides a home to approximately one quarter of all marine species, such as fishes, shrimps, sea urchins, and many more. Coral reefs are very important to the environment because they are responsible for half of all calcium sedimentation in the ocean and one of the most complex ecosystems in the sea. Along with that, they help us understand the history of the environment, but also the key to understand climate change. But devastating, climate change and human activities is causing the declining of the coral reefs. And without coral reefs, the susceptibility of all the marine species that depend on the reefs will hit a devastating decline of population, or even worse, extinction. Also, it will be a downfall for humans as well, because some people around the globe also depend on coral reefs for food, livelihood, protection from battering waves, and many more. Therefore, the natural history of the coral reef has hit a roller coaster ride, and will continue to ride it until we do something about it. The beauty and fascinating colors of the coral reefs is important to both the marine life and humans, which Davidson explains so well in this worth reading novel. Since I'm not much of a book reader, reading this book has caught my eyes and fascinated me. I enjoyed every second I read this book. Davidson did a great job in writing this novel and explained well about the natural history of coral reefs. Also, he did a great job in tying why the coral reefs is considered as "the enchanted braid" of the global ecosystem. Additionally, this book features eight beautiful color pages of photographs. And it is an easy read, but with some science terminologies if you are not familiar with. But overall, I enjoy reading this book!

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