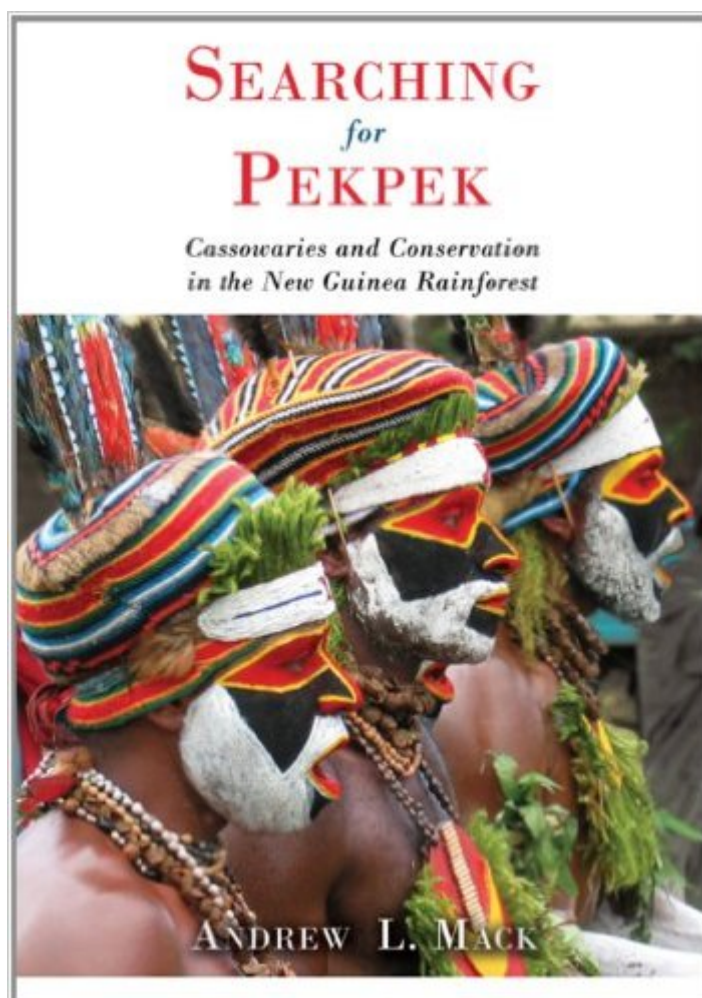


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Searching For Pekpek: Cassowaries And Conservation In The New Guinea Rainforest



Synopsis

Andrew Mack immersed himself in a vast expanse of roadless, old growth rainforest of Papua New Guinea in 1987. He and his co-investigator Debra Wright, built a research station by hand and lived there for years. Their mission was to study the secretive and perhaps most dinosaur-like creature still roaming the planet: the cassowary. The ensuing adventures of this unorthodox biologist--studying seeds found in cassowary droppings (pekpek), learning to live among the indigenous Pawai'ia, traversing jungles, fighting pests and loneliness, struggling against unscrupulous oil speculators, and more--are woven into a compelling tale that spans two decades. Mack shares the insights he garnered about rainforest ecology while studying something as seemingly mundane as cassowary pekpek. He ultimately gained profound insight into why conservation is failing in places like Papua New Guinea and struggled to create a more viable strategy for conserving some of Earth's last wild rainforests.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Andy Mack provides a captivating account of his efforts to establish a field research program and, ultimately, a research station and training program in the sparsely-studied rainforests of Papua New Guinea. But perhaps more importantly, he recounts his efforts to enact meaningful, lasting conservation programs by building intellectual capacity through training native students from that country. His experiences highlight how important such efforts are to producing any kind of lasting change, and how much more effective a lasting, education-based effort is likely to be compared to the more distant, corporate-led programs that are typical of "big conservation." I was riveted by his

accounts of the innumerable challenges he faced when establishing his research program. I have done my share of field work, but nothing that approaches the scope and scale of what Dr. Mack accomplished during his time in PNG. As a memoir of adventure, the book succeeds with stories of physical challenges, tropical diseases, and social pressures that are so extreme they are almost comical. This is helped by the fact that he seems amused, at least in hindsight, by many of the situations that he worked through. I found myself caring a great deal for the research station and its inhabitants, which made the later, darker turns of the story have even greater impact. As a reader, the most helpful insights were unquestionably those that Dr. Mack gained in trying to set up a lasting conservation program. The political environment in PNG is extremely decentralized, and therefore he identified that education of local people would be the most likely way to create lasting change. By sponsoring students and facilitating their access to graduate school, he helped create a nucleus of conservation-focused researchers who were still a part of local culture, thus empowering Papua New Guineans to conserve their own lands. The program was everything the US-led, distantly-controlled programs operated by large conservation firms was not. It's an important message and one that changed my perspective on how conservation programs should operate. Highly recommended.

Who'd have thought a book about collecting cassowary poop would be fascinating - but the author is amazingly successful! Having lived, worked and volunteered in PNG over the past 20 years I concur with the insightful observations and comments. This is a wonderful tale - even for those who have never visited this amazing country. Broaden your international perspective and read this book.

As someone who grew up enthralled by the books of Thor Heyerdahl, I found Andrew L. Mack's "Searching for Pekpek" an engrossing and passionate look at his years in the New Guinea rain forest. As exciting as any adventure novel, Andy's prose pulls us in to the challenges, discomforts, and joys of a world few of us can imagine, all the while exposing the reader to heartfelt lessons in conservation and the conflict of cultures. A beautifully written, breathtaking guide to the kind of scientific adventures you didn't think happened any more. Don't miss it.

This book has an interesting title, and it gets increasingly more interesting on each page after that. There is something here for everyone - adventure, travel, social and cultural observations, natural science, personal insights, and even some crime and mayhem. Andrew Mack chronicles the peculiarities of his scientific research and conservation projects in Papua New Guinea, and he

moves you through the ups and downs of his work at a good pace and with amusing commentary. At the end, the book leaves you with new insights about developing countries, economic progress, and conservation issues. While telling his story, Mack does a good job of balancing troublesome problems with glimmers of hope.

I was home in the middle of the day when "Pekpek" arrived in the mail. I had been doing an errand and thought I was going back to work, but not to be. I read Pekpek in one sitting. I laughed, I was riveted, I anguished, I was mesmerized. How Mack found the research station site and the story was fantastic. I felt the feeling of a chopper coming in to the helipad... Andrew Mack's description of the two captive cassowaries and their higher brain functions were excellent and funny. One sitting for you too is my prediction.

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