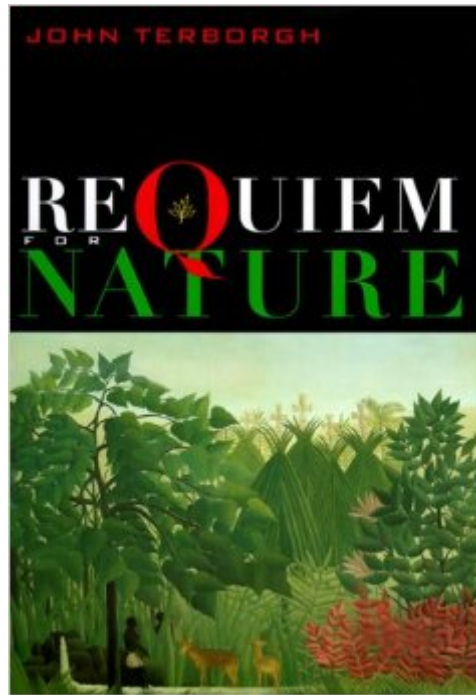


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Requiem For Nature



Synopsis

Ecologist John Terborgh has been witness to the relentless onslaught of civilization in some of the remotest areas of the planet. Here he raises urgent questions: is enough being done to protect nature? Are current conservation efforts succeeding? Terborgh makes the case that nature can be saved - but that the greatest challenges are social, economic and political rather than scientific.

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Customer Reviews

When John Terborgh publishes a book, anyone interested in the conservation of nature should read it. One of the world's foremost tropical ecologists, Terborgh writes in an unusually pleasing and, at the same time, provocative style. If the reader is only seeking entertainment or if a rigorously researched documentary of the context of personal experiences is sought, s/he will be disappointed; but, if the interest is in stimulating thought about the problems of nature conservation, the reward will be extraordinary. "Requiem for Nature" surpasses even Terborgh's own "Where Have All the Birds Gone?" as an intellectually challenging treatise. For me, the richest passages in "Requiem for Nature" are those in Chapter 2 that describe the ecological relationships that must be maintained if nature is to be conserved and the need for a coherent, long-term strategy to meet the challenges. As an anthropologist who has worked in areas near Manu National Park since 1971 --even before Terborgh arrived there-- I have long been following his work and thinking on tropical forest conservation issues. And I have many, many disagreements with his perspectives. However, no one can deny the value of his contributions in challenging current fashions in thinking about nature

and its conservation. The weaknesses of "Requiem for Nature" include serious inaccuracies in Terborgh's information about the historical and political contexts of the places he describes on the basis of his own and others' work, particularly in Chapters 3 and 4. For example, the Summer Institute of Linguistics is said to have brought the Machiguenga into the Manu Park in the 1960s (p. 29); the Manu Park has been a Machiguenga homeland since at least Inka times and probably much longer. The purpose of Belgian linguist Marcel d'Ans's work is inaccurately described as "to open communication with uncontacted indigenous groups as a prelude to luring them out of the park" (p. 42).; d'Ans was there to develop policies for incorporating the indigenous peoples into park strategies, not to contact isolated Indians. There are numerous references to Amahuaca Indians in the Manu National Park (pp. 42-45). There are no Amahuaca in the Manu Park; they live along tributaries of the Urubamba and Ucayali Rivers farther north. The people referred to are Yora, a Yaminahua sub-group, in voluntary isolation until 1984. Terborgh attributes many of the Manu Park's problems to regionalization (p. 35). But the regional governments in Peru only existed between late 1990 and April 1992, when they were closed by the Fujimori government. The inept Park officials accurately described by Terborgh, although designated and with administration from Cusco, were representatives of the central government, like those who served during "the halcyon days of the park's early period" (p. 31). The inspired Agrarian University professors of that time were in Lima, not in the Manu Park. The Park's director until July 2000, Ada Castillo Ordinola, accurately described as "competent and committed" (p. 38), worked closely, from an NGO, with the Inka Regional Government in planning for more satisfactory Park administration, while that Government lasted. Terborgh praises the policies of the Fujimori Government as enlightened (p.38), but he fails to recognize the failure of that Government to involve local peoples and institutions in planning for and administering the Park in a more effective manner. Democratic processes are clearly not one of Fujimori's strengths. In Chapter 10, Terborgh makes convincing arguments regarding the limitations of most conservation efforts in recent decades, although he inaccurately describes USAID's role as promoting sustainable development in a manner opposed to conservation (pp. 164-165). Moreover, in chapter 11, he raises important points about the illusions of continuous economic expansion at the expense of nature. Terborgh correctly calls for "a new paradigm" (Chapter 10) and a coherent public strategy to safeguard nature and its besieged ecosystems, forests, and biological diversity. However, such a paradigm and strategy are more likely to be successful if they involve people and entire national territories, rather than exclude people from a few unique protected areas that justify, in the public mind, the destruction of natural wealth everywhere outside these areas. Local communities, especially indigenous peoples, are unlikely to accept relocation, as Terborgh

advocates, and there is little reason to expect support for the massive public effort that Terborgh calls for on behalf of theoretically pristine natural areas unless they may serve people, including their indigenous inhabitants and other communities in surrounding areas, or even national populations, not just a few privileged scientists from northern hemisphere countries with large research budgets. In short, "Requiem for Nature" is must reading even for those, like myself, who will be infuriated at the arrogance of some of its proposals. The debate it is inspiring cannot fail to be useful to our understanding of nature and conservation needs. Thomas Moore; Lima, Peru; moore@terra.com.pe

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John Terborgh has written a book that is a must read for anyone involved or interested in the protection of biodiversity through reserves and parks in the tropics. This book contains content that

is tough to swallow but like a prescribed bitter pill hopefully it will have a salubrious effect. I am not a biologist or professional park administrator but as a member of a board of directors on a regional land conservation organization. I will be recommending this book to all on the board. Through my travels in Africa, Central America, and South America I can understand the plight of the parks that Terborgh describes. His experience and his passion for biodiversity show in the book and as I read it I found it hard to put down. Reading this was like attending an excellent lecture knowing that the speaker was presenting a clear assesment of the situation and a novel and important directive to solve the problems. Terborgh brings up startling facts in the book such as the entire funding for tropical conservation by all conservation organizations in the United States totals \$200 million per year. This again is for every country, every continent, all the tropical parks. Yet within the United States the National Park Service has funding of 1.7 billion per year and is underfunded. If you consider the difference in species diversity in one park such as Manu National Park in Peru with a possible 1,000 species of birds compared to all of North America north of Mexico with about 700 species you can understand the significance of protecting these sites. I hope that many people will read this and that many more will take action to rectify the problems that Terborgh has written about.

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