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A Natural History Of Quiet Waters: Swamps And Wetlands Of The Mid-Atlantic Coast



Synopsis

Although swamps today are recognized as one of the richest and most prolific natural systems on Earth, they have long held a mysterious and tenuous place in America's history and culture. Ernest Hemingway equated them with madness and death in "Big Two-hearted River." We have images of Humphrey Bogart covered with leeches while slogging through a swamp in the film *The African Queen*. In our culture, swamps have been associated with mystery and evil, and we spent generations draining, filling, and otherwise destroying them. Indeed, in the four centuries since the European colonists arrived, we have lost more than half of the forested wetlands that were native to America. Swamps have until now received little attention, despite recent efforts to protect them. With *A Natural History of Quiet Waters: Swamps and Wetlands of the Mid-Atlantic Coast*, Curtis Badger takes us on a personalized trip to the swamp, providing an insightful look at the nature of these special places, and arguing persuasively that these natural systems should be protected, not destroyed. Using such locations as the Pocomoke River and the Great Dismal Swamp as exemplars of swamps in general, Badger examines the natural history of wetlands, and also relates the role they have played in the history and culture of the mid-Atlantic coast. A great iron furnace and its surrounding village once stood in a cypress swamp along Nassawango Creek in Maryland. The Great Dismal was a safe haven for runaway slaves, and it has been the source of many ghostly tales and legends. Although swamps have for centuries been cast in a negative light, they are wonderfully productive places, a refuge for migrating songbirds, insects, fish, animals, and rare plants. Swamps and wetlands provide us with clean water, they protect uplands from flooding, and their waters serve as a spawning ground for valuable fish and shellfish. And, Badger writes, they provide us with an island of forested wilderness, a place where one can launch a canoe and temporarily escape the irritations of the modern world. Notwithstanding the government's goal of "no net loss" of wetlands, swamps are still being drained, filled, and paved over each year. With this book, Badger invites us to appreciate these special places and the natural communities they support.

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Customer Reviews

"Curtis Badger is one of the Delmarva, Peninsula's authentic voices, local as dirt, but also possessing an ecologist's sensibility. With paddle, pen, and rod, he explores and gives voice to the under-appreciated wet places of the mid-Atlantic. Whether writing about the hidden lives of dragonflies or the global migrations of birds, he weaves the local and the farflung into a web of life. Badger shows us, eloquently, how 'swamps' are not only places of beauty and mystery, but places for people. (Tom Horton is the author of six books about the Chesapeake Bay region, including Bay Country and Island Out of Time)

Curtis J. Badger is the author of Virginia's Wild Side, The Wild Coast, and A Naturalist's Guide to the Virginia Coast (all Virginia).

Excellent book for anyone interested in nature. Anything written by Curtis Badger is very informative and well written. Well worth the price.

When I became interested in Virginia's Eastern Shore, I soon discovered Curtis Badger's books. He made it sound so appealing, that I bought a house on Folly Creek, which he describes in several of his books. I also started taking graduate courses in natural history. I love the Shore and my home, but if he'd written this book a few years earlier, I'd probably have bought near him on Pungoteague Creek. This short book is set on the Delmarva Peninsula (principally in Maryland) and in the Dismal Swamp, southwest of Norfolk. It's intended to be about wetlands, but the way Curtis Badger works is to start off on a trail and then wander where his curiosity leads him. Accompanying him is always interesting: He's a skilled writer with a careful eye and a discerning instinct. The book opens with a natural history of wetlands but it follows with chapters on the economic history of a small village, Furnace Town, outside Snow Hill, Maryland; bird migration; the Dismal Swamp -- its history and

legends; dragonflies and damselflies; and a description of the property he bought in Pungoteague. Every chapter is engaging, but the book reads like a collection of essays related by geography rather than a treatise that develops deeper understanding as it unfolds. After you've read the first chapter, you can read the others in any order you wish. Regardless of which order you read them, you'll want to visit the places he describes and meet the people he met. The book was well designed by the University of Virginia Press, but with a glaring omission: a map of the area Badger describes. It will be of most interest to Delmarva residents. But if you're not a resident, and you read it, you might find yourself calling real estate agents like I did.

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