

UCLA

Electronic Green Journal

Title

Review: The Naturalist: Theodore Roosevelt, A Lifetime of Exploration, and the Triumph of American Natural History

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/54b9n64k>

Journal

Electronic Green Journal, 1(41)

Author

Miller, Ryder W.

Publication Date

2018

DOI

10.5070/G314138009

Copyright Information

Copyright 2018 by the author(s). This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Peer reviewed

**Review: The Naturalist: Theodore Roosevelt A Lifetime of Exploration and
the Triumph of American Natural History**

By Darrin Lunde

Reviewed by Ryder W. Miller

New York, NY, USA

Lunde, Darrin. *The Naturalist: Theodore Roosevelt, A Lifetime of Exploration, and the Triumph of American Natural History*. New York, NY, USA: Crown Publishers, 2016. 335 pp, ISBN: 9780307464309, hardcover, US\$28.00. Also available in paperback and as a Kindle ebook.

Darrin P. Lunde, a writer, and a Supervisory Museum Specialist in the Division of Mammals at the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History, tells the story of Theodore Roosevelt's interest in natural history. Theodore Roosevelt (1859-1919) was the 26th American President (Sept. 14, 1901-March 4, 1909) having replaced President William McKinley (March 4, 1901-September 14, 1901), for whom he was a Vice President, when McKinley was assassinated. Lunde clearly mostly admires Roosevelt in this telling, even if he was a bit enthusiastic about shooting buffaloes and other things.

Roosevelt had a passion for natural history from early in his life. One can find some of the animals he brought back from the wild at The Smithsonian Museum. Roosevelt had many adventures during his life being a Naturalist, Cowboy, Rancher, Soldier, Commander, Politician, and Scientist... Despite having bad eyesight and asthma, he had vigor, courage, curiosity, charisma, luck, and energy. Told here though is mostly his fascination with the natural world, which made him also a scientist and sent him around the world.

To get a broader sense of his political and military achievements one might want to read other books. Also recently published is *The True Flag* from Fellow and American Foreign Correspondent Stephen Kinzer who recounts Theodore Roosevelt's time and place during The Spanish American War and the colonization of the Philippines, Cuba, and Hawaii. This other book also does not cover everything, but Roosevelt was an influential soldier and Commander in Chief. It is a larger tale about the debates over the role of American Empire at the turn of the last century. Having guided American through the assassination of an American President, Roosevelt was an intimidating presence and a powerful leader believing in American expansion.

Natural history was Roosevelt's first love, however, and Lunde takes us on some adventures with him. He was a museum collector, birder, and traveler. He made it to Africa, into print, into science, as a father, and as an author. He was happy to return more fully to natural history when his time was finished in public office. This was a rough and tumble time for him, and he rose to the challenge.

It is difficult to know how to evaluate Teddy Roosevelt now. There are East Coast historians who give him the credit for protecting public lands (one can hunt on them though). There are West Coasters though who have been able to protect and inspire more parks since the West is still wilder than the east and, due to the efforts of the preservationists, will probably always remain so. West Coasters including John Muir, Edward Abbey, and David Brower leave a more contemporary legacy even if the term preservationist is not widely used still.

As a big game hunter, Roosevelt however had a different philosophy, him being a big game hunter who got things into Natural History Museum knowing that they might not continue to exist. Different strokes for different folks with their also being different camps with those who like to mostly just camp out, those who go to zoos and aquariums, and those who know we need to be able to take walks in green places for our own well-being in what is left of the wild. It is important though those environmentalists know who he was and how he and hunters saw him. Telling in this one is the absence of John Muir despite the famous picture of Teddy Roosevelt at Yosemite, where they had an important conversation, on the cover.

Ryder W. Miller, dolphin1965@hotmail.com, Freelance environmental and science reporter, New York, NY, USA.

Electronic Green Journal, Issue 41 Spring 2018, ISSN: 1076-7975