

Editorial : Environmental Book Publishing : Trends and Tendencies

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As the new book review editor for the Electronic Green Journal, I sought an overview of environmental book publishing and trends within the industry. This review would familiarize me with the field and ease the assumption of my duties. The process proved to be more difficult than anticipated as there is little resource material on the subject of environmental publishing.

Initially, it seemed a good starting point would be to unearth some statistics on the volume of publishing in the environmental field. Another useful statistic might be to look at the proportion of funding spent on collecting such materials within our library. The Bowker Annual of Library and Book Trade Information provides information regarding the number of books published in a given subject area in a year. However, environmental studies or sciences do not stand as categories on their own. The cross-disciplinary nature of environmental book publishing makes it difficult to collect such statistics. This is also true when it comes to local statistics. Within the University of Idaho Library it is conceivable that a number of librarians are responsible for selecting materials termed "environmental" in nature. Our social sciences librarian might buy a title such as *The Environment and NAFTA* that deals with the subject of environmental law. The sciences librarian would perhaps opt for *Nature in Danger: Threatened Habitats and Species*. Both titles fall under the guise of "environmental publishing" although they vary in focus.

A literature search using "environmental publishing" and similar terms turned up few relevant citations. Many of the articles focus on the environmental impact of materials and processes used by the publishing industry. I was able to locate a couple of sources that spoke to the issue at hand. These suggest that the focus of environmental publishing has altered as the public has become more aware of environmental issues and their importance. What began as a special interest is now of relevance to all elements of society. The audience for environmental publications is now more diverse. Publishers in the industry have sought

to reflect this diversity in their titles.

While the number of books published that fall into the hard-core environmental category may have decreased, other categories of environmental literature are flourishing. Most notably two areas are witnessing a surge in popularity: natural history titles with a spiritual or philosophical slant; and titles that provide practical hands-on information (Publishers Weekly, March 25, 1996). In the case of the former the focus is on uncovering "mankind's place in the natural order of things." Shearwater Books, an imprint of Island Press, publishes a number of books that fit into this category. With titles such as *Traces of an Omnivore* and *The Others: How Animals Made Us Human*, Shearwater is living up to its mandate of exploring "the relationship of nature, science, and human culture" (Island Press, Fall 1996 catalog). The environmental publishing houses are not alone in following this trend. Publishers such as Oxford University Press, Routledge, and Norton are also releasing titles with an eco-spiritual focus. *Ecologies of the Heart: Emotion, Belief, and the Environment*, examining how religion and folk beliefs can help people protect the environment, is one example of a recent Oxford title.

The second category of titles relates to what we can do to better our environment and enjoy nature. Among the topics that appear in this area are sustainable living, empowerment, outdoor recreation and field guides. New Society Publishers (NSP) explores issues of sustainable living and empowerment in a number of their titles. *Our Ecological Footprint: Reducing Human Impact on the Earth*, an NSP release, provides a tool for measuring the resources needed for sustainable living. Another example from a different publisher is *The Sierra Club Guide to Safe Drinking Water*, which seeks to empower the public to protect their drinking water. Sierra Club Books also publishes a number of titles involving outdoor recreation: most notable is its *Adventuring* series.

Regardless of whether you are a specialist in the field or someone with a general interest in the environment, you will find a variety of publications available. One way to locate a publication that will best suit your needs is by consulting reviews. The *Electronic Green Journal*, in continuing to publish book reviews, can provide you with some guidance and direction.

The titles identified in this overview are all open for review. If you would like to find out more about reviewing for the *Electronic Green Journal*, please contact me: Karen Schlegl, Book Review Editor, *Electronic Green*

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