

Review: Natural Grace: The Charm, Wonder, and Lessons of Pacific Northwest Animals and Plants

By William Dietrich

Reviewed by Wallace Kaufman
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William Dietrich. *Natural Grace: The Charm, Wonder, and Lessons of Pacific Northwest Animals and Plants*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003. 236 pp. ISBN: 0-295-98293-4 (paperback). US\$16.95. Alkaline paper.

The assumption "nature is always right" is a grim Calvinistic determinism, but it sometimes, as in this book, produces good nature writing.

Sandwiched between familiar environmental alarms in the introduction and epilogue of this book the reader will find 21 brief, highly readable, and often humorous essays adapted from the author's articles in the *Seattle Times* and *Pacific Northwest* magazine.

Novelist and essayist William Dietrich begins with the unnoticed, unloved, or hidden gems of the Pacific Northwest-jellyfish, alders, mosquitoes, and spiders. But whether he is making these little known subjects entertaining and miraculous or writing about the more popular cougars, killer whales, and bald eagles, Dietrich knows where and how to find the facts and acts that make most pages a surprise for the non-specialist. When he's wrapped in the love of his subject and the crispness of his writing, he sets aside the somewhat clichéd environmental alarmism of the introduction and epilogue, and readers should go directly to the essays, in any order.

This is a natural history book, but it is also a fine introduction to the Pacific Northwest for anyone who has not lived there or knows little more than Seattle and Portland. "Northwest weather is like sex. It's mostly in your head. Oh sure, there's a certain amount of shivering and panting that goes with both subjects" (p. 139). A succinct summary of a region that has almost no weather catastrophes but some persistent rain and tediously long dry seasons. This is a book for the reader who wants natural history with a smile or a general introduction to the environment of the Northwest.

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