

Review: Organ Pipe: Life on the Edge

By Carol Ann Bassett

Reviewed by [Robert D. Hook](#)
University of Idaho, USA

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Carol Ann Bassett; photographs by Michael Hyatt. *Organ Pipe: Life on the Edge*. Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 2004. 89 pp. ISBN 0-8165-2384-3 (paperback). US\$13.95. Alkaline paper.

The Desert Places series has another hit. Carol Ann Bassett, an instructor in magazine writing, environmental journalism, and literary nonfiction at the University of Oregon, provides us with a capsule of the Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument in this short but very informative book. Michael Hyatt, whose fourteen photographs beautifully enhance the text, has been photographing the people and landscape of the American Southwest for more than thirty-five years. One of the things that I believe makes this book and the others in the series valuable is the deft intertwining of text and photographs.

Bassett says she wanted to show her “deepest feelings about Organ Pipe and why it has been for me a place of solitude and refuge” (p. xii). She has done this admirably. I particularly enjoyed her pithy comments and poems which add glimpses into her personal impressions of the area. Her writing evokes such sharp images that the reader can almost see the saguaro cactus bloom or the nighthawk swoop and skim over the Quitobaquito Springs.

The text is the record of Bassett’s many trips into the Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument since 1988. It is more than a record of her treks through the area; it is her perception of the area, whether it is a view of the Ajo Mountains or the experience of a prehistoric sleeping circle found within them. She has done an excellent job in reviewing the many aspects of the area including the human habitation as well as the flora and the fauna of the area. She discusses the different flora (Organ Pipe, Saguaro, poppies, etc.) and fauna (packrats, bats, lizards, birds, etc.) found in the monument, showing how they have adapted to the hostile environment in which they live. She guides us through the changes currently taking place. She discusses how the drug dealers make use of the area and how the migrants who move through the Organ Pipe into the United States are threatening the biodiversity of the monument and changing the environment. Throughout the book she has shown how the fragile wilderness has changed in the last several years and why she believes that the Monument needs to be protected more than ever.

Anyone interested in learning about the environment of this southwest desert area can benefit from this book. It will make an excellent addition to any library. Intended for a general readership, this book can be used as a reminder for pure pleasure reading, as a supplemental guide on a trip into the Organ Pipe National Monument in southern Arizona, or as a warning that we need to protect this fragile environment. Even those who have not visited the area will enjoy the rich imagery, the poetry, and the diverse and well-chosen black-and-white photographs.

To those who enjoy this book I would recommend the three other books in the series: *Chiricahua Mountains* (<http://egj.lib.uidaho.edu/egj20/hook2.html>), reviewed in the Spring 2004 issue of *Electronic Green Journal*; *The Black Rock Desert* (<http://egj.lib.uidaho.edu/egj18/uguz1.html>), and *Cedar Mesa* (<http://egj.lib.uidaho.edu/egj18/metzger1.html>), both reviewed in the Earth Day 2003 issue of *Electronic Green Journal*.

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Robert D. Hook <rdhook@uidaho.edu>, Reference Librarian, University of Idaho Library, Moscow, Idaho 83844-2350 USA. TEL: 1 208-885-6066.