

Review: The World of the Salt Marsh: Appreciating and Protecting the Tidal Marshes of the Southeastern Atlantic Coast

By Charles Seabrook

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Seabrook, Charles. *The World of the Salt Marsh: Appreciating and Protecting the Tidal Marshes of the Southeastern Atlantic Coast*. 2013. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, A Wormsloe Foundation Nature Book; Reprint edition. ISBN-10: 0820345334. ISBN-13: 9780820345338. 384pp. US \$19.95. paperback.

Science journalist Charles Seabrook makes an impassioned and impressive appeal in this book for the protection of the South Atlantic Bight, the central Atlantic coast from Cape Hatteras, NC to Cape Canaveral, FL. Seabrook, a reporter for the Atlantic Journal-Constitution for over 30 years, writes of a place that birthed and nurtured him as a child. It has now changed like many other former wild places in the country. He bemoans the loss which is also personal:

“I can never return to the place I knew as wild. Its verdant maritime forests have given way to subdivisions and shopping centers and horse farms. Because of pollution, oysters no longer can be taken from many of the creeks.” (p. 3-4)

Seabrook does a great job exploring the local coast for situations and people. He reveals some fascinating natural wonders of the area, but the coverage is also about the people, protectors, and scientists. One will find much about Eugene Odum, and John and Mildred Teal, who some might not hear a great deal about in other parts of the country.

The book is easy to digest and accessible. One is left being concerned about what may transpire in the future there. Eloquently, Seabrook recounts:

“But despite the magnificent fertility that amazed the scientists, despite the serenity that inspired the poet, there are those who destroy the marsh. They use it as a place to dump the caustic wastes of their industry; they drain it, dike it, dry it out, and turn it into factory sites and suburbs surrounded by asphalt and concrete. They mine the marsh for its minerals, leaving behind a landscape stripped of its ability to produce.” (p. 6)

The book provides a storyline, personal stories, history, and interpretation. It is a fine book that will provide the information for people to act responsibly and knowingly. The land is still a home for poets, defenders, and scientists, not just developers. It is still a beautiful place, but it is being worn down by overuse and development. Sea level rise from global warming is also looming in this tale of the Atlantic Coast. The book also provides recommendations, with Seabrook writing: “There is no shortage of recommendations and guidelines for protecting the coast.” (p. 326)

The book could have also made an outcry against exploitative use of marine life. The book will not impress vegetarians who may be disturbed by all the people who make their living taking or in some cases exploiting the marine resources, but such battles are often already lost. One cannot ask someone to starve or give up their livelihood, but consumers have been asked to pick and choose what fish they buy at a supermarket or eat at a restaurant as part of the sustainable seafood movement.

World of the Salt Marsh can be a “Silent Spring” of sorts for this area of the coast though. It succeeds in getting people to care about all the damage that is taking place there. The book would be useful to regionalists who want to know their home better. It also serves as an interesting model for those who want to write about ecosystems or natural places that were their home. The general reader will benefit from this book and is likely to want to protect this area. It may also inspire them to become defenders of other areas as well. It is also a good model for writers who wish to take on similar challenges.

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