

The Art of Pausing

(Amazon review 2/11/13)

One of the secrets of being a successful naturalist, as Eric Dinerstein observes in his splendid new book, is “how to practice what Buddhist teachers call the sacred art of pausing.” In “the Kingdom of Rarities,” Dr. Dinerstein offers the lucky reader some of the reflections and insights he has gained in 40 years of pausing in some of the most spectacular places on earth.

Turns out that criss-crossing the continents with a renown naturalist and conservation scientist as he searches for the most elusive and rarest species on the planet slams, early on, into an irony. The most abundant and (so far) successful species on the planet constitute only 25% of life on earth. Rare species—the ones hanging onto life by the slenderest of threads—constitute the remaining 75%. Rarity, in other words, is commonplace; the condition of being commonplace is what is rare. And therein lies a cautionary tale that the author gently, and with great erudition, unfolds for the reader.

This is a book that can be read on several levels: as a tour guide to exotic species and places; as an ecology textbook that is eminently readable and accessible to the lay reader; and as a philosophical and moral musing on the relationship between one of the most abundant and destructive species of all—homo sapiens—and the rest of life on the planet that sustains us. Whichever level you choose to read it on, you will be rewarded for having done so.

Tagging along with Dr. D, you will journey to lost worlds and other hidden places—from the steamy depths of the Amazon to the lofty peaks of Bhutan—where, thanks to the author’s evocative prose, you will vicariously experience, as he did, “the thrill of a first sighting: a rare species you have waited your entire life to see on its own terms, in its own place.”

Along the way, you will learn much about conservation biology: But don't worry... this author knows much about how to translate scientific vocabulary into words that resonate with the rest of us.

Read this book and be grateful that Dr. Dinerstein took the time to pause in all the right places and reflect on lessons that we all need to know to bequeath a better world to our children.