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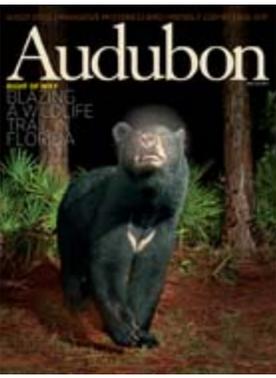
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Reviews

EDITORS' CHOICE

Moby-Dick: The True Story by 28,000 Birds
 Top List of 50 and 100 Books, Oceanographers, Environmentalists, and Poets, Including the Author, Who Went to Search for Them
 By Douglas Holm
 Viking, 400 pages, \$27.95

FOOTPRINTS Some of the best books take us to their subject's small or mundane things and, through them, connect readers to the world at large. In *Moby-Dick*, journalist and former English teacher Douglas Holm traces the ocean migrations of thousands of birds back to the 19th-century ship in the North Pacific. Inspired by the incident by a student essay, Holm embarks on a year-long, often surprising quest to unravel the mystery of bird-migration patterns starting from Washington to Phoenixville. With each sailing, the results are human insights, new strands in the web of science and the global economy. Along the way, he encounters Chinese toy manufacturers, Arctic sea ice researchers, and the "Study of Arctic Birds" and goes sailing to the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, a "jungle of debris" of trash the size of Texas. Following the story's dark undertones, Holm learns that pilots' footprints mark industrial scars from the coast's surface. Broken down by the elements, synthetic polymers pollute the food chain. In another twist, toxic oil-related incidents that threaten seabirds—hundreds of birds perished were found in a single bird's stomach. Though fiction could have easily sunk this year, Holm plays the course with humor and curiosity.—*Michael Engelbert*

Let Them Eat Slop!: The Tragical Disappearance of the Eskimoes of the Sea
 By Kennedy Warren
 Island Press, 300 pages, \$25.95

LET THEM EAT SLOP! Stripes are among the world's most popular animals. But every time you slip one of these plump creatures into that colorful sauce you may be contributing to the starvation of one of the planet's most important and least appreciated ecosystems. Marginalized areas of wetland reeds...

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ENVIRONMENT

ESSAY
Making the Grade
 A new book argues that it's time to stop teaching environmentalism as a partisan issue and start teaching it as an important value.
 By Michelle Nijhara

The Future of Environmental Education (And How We Can Fix It)
 By Charles Taylor and David T. Bluman
 University of California Press, 247 pages, \$34.95

Most of us with an affinity for the natural world are, in one way or another, products of environmental education. I remember a third-grade lesson on assignment to spend an hour outside, alone, with no books or toys to pass the time. Obviously, I grabbed a stick and started poking around in a pile of wet leaves. Before I knew it I was covered with mud, and the hour was up.

As an environmental journalist, I now spend much of my time poking around in nature, and my career choices can be traced back, in part, to that unexpectedly interesting hour in my backyard. Many of the scientists and activists I interview have similar stories of inspiring teachers, life-changing camping expeditions and museum trips, or just memorable farm and garden chores.

But no matter how powerful these early experiences on environmental education for shaping their influence. The only ones for inspiring habits and other meaningful philosophy are, authors Charles Taylor and David T. Bluman argue, in a rapid and decided change in our behavior. One important way to accomplish this shift is through education—an education task that, to date, has failed. In their new book, *The Future of Environmental Education (And How We Can Fix It)*, Taylor and Bluman offer a thoughtful, vigorous critique of environmental education as we know it today, and hands ideas for its improvement.

In many cases, it's an optional subject. Often viewed with suspicion by parents, teachers, and administrators, it is often ignored or wedged into a few spare hours in science or gym classes. Even California, an often at the forefront of environmental policy making, does not require that its students learn about such basic concepts as biodiversity loss and energy consumption.

We all breathe air, drink water, and eat food grown in soil, and we would like our descendants to be able to do the same. So how did the environment fall so far down our list of educational priorities?

Taylor, the executive director of the Center for Constructive Teaching and Learning, a biology professor at the University of California-Los Angeles, says that one basic problem is political polarization: Envi-

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Essay

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Making the Grade

A new book argues that it's time to stop teaching environmentalism as a partisan issue and start teaching it as an important value.

By Michelle Nijhuis

The Failure of Environmental Education (And How We Can Fix It)

By Charles Saylan and Daniel T. Blumstein
University of California Press, 247 pages, \$24.95

Most of us with an affinity for the natural world are, in one way or another, products of environmental education. I remember a third-grade homework assignment to spend an hour outside, alone, with no books or toys to pass the time. Dubiously, I grabbed a stick and started poking around in a pile of wet leaves. Before I knew it I was covered with mud, and the hour was up.

As an environmental journalist, I now spend much of my time poking around in nature, and my career choices can be traced back, in part, to that unexpectedly interesting hour in my backyard. Many of the scientists and activists I interview have similar stories: of inspiring teachers, life-changing camping expeditions and museum trips, or just memorable farm and garden chores.

But no matter how powerful these early experiences are, environmental degradation far outpaces their influence. The only cure for disappearing habitat and other worsening planetary ills, authors Charles Saylan and Daniel T. Blumstein argue, is a rapid and decided change in our behavior. One important way to accomplish that shift is through education—an enormous task that, to date, has failed. In their new book, *The Failure of Environmental Education (And How We Can Fix It)*, Saylan and Blumstein offer a thoughtful, vigorous critique of environmental education as we know it today, and hatch ideas for its improvement.

In many cases, it's an optional subject. Often viewed with suspicion by parents, teachers, and administrators, it is either ignored or wedged into a few spare hours in science or gym classes. Even California, so often at the forefront of environmental policy making, does not require that its students learn about such basic concepts as biodiversity loss and energy consumption.

We all breathe air, drink water, and eat food grown in soil, and we would like our descendants to be able to do the same. So how did the environment fall so far down our list of educational priorities?

Saylan, the executive director of the Ocean Conservation Society, and Blumstein, a biology professor at the University of California-Los Angeles, say that one basic problem is political polarization: Environmentalism is widely considered a political label rather than an obligation shared by all citizens. Its politicization, say Saylan and Blumstein, began in earnest with

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the 1962 publication of *Silent Spring* and the vitriolic industry attacks on its claims. In the decades that followed, as activists battled industry laws and regulations, both sides contributed to the widening ideological divide. The cause came to be seen not as a common interest of all but as the special interest of a few.

Saylan and Blumstein say it's time to restore the true meaning. "Environmentalism is not an option like choosing one's religion or political affiliation," they write. "It is a responsibility and fundamental aspect of cohesive society."

While schools should not prescribe politics, and many aspects of moral education are and should be left to families, the authors point out that educators don't hesitate to teach broadly held values such as respect for law and order and the importance of voting. So, too, should schools teach respect for the life-support system known as the natural world, and for its inherent limits.

Messing around in wet leaves is not enough. Everyone must also understand essential scientific concepts such as the complexity of ecological relationships. And that's not all. "Without our appreciation of beauty, the dormant poetry in our surroundings goes unnoticed," they write. "Students, and indeed all citizens, need the capacity to see intangible value in things: forests simply for the sake of the forest; the expanse of wilderness simply because it is alive, primal, and fiercely beautiful."

Easier said than done, of course. Saylan and Blumstein emphasize that this far-reaching job extends beyond underpaid, standardized-test-constrained educators to parents and communities. They recommend top-down reforms, such as adding new standards into curriculum, but in the end most of their solutions are both humbler and more ambitious: Students should learn the theory and practice of environmental citizenship in large and small ways throughout their school days, and the rest of their daily lives. Teachers and parents can and should push for institutional changes while finding ways to engage students in the wonder of the world and the magnitude of the problems it faces.

Saylan and Blumstein point to innovative projects such as Food from the 'Hood, which began as a Los Angeles school garden and eventually became a student-run company that donated a quarter of its produce to the needy and provided more than \$250,000 in student scholarships. Students at other Los Angeles schools have spoken at city councils in support of plastic-bag bans, organized and managed neighborhood gardens, and helped community members save energy and money by weatherizing their homes. Such experiences, Saylan and Blumstein say, teach that environmental responsibility requires broad knowledge, diverse skills, and a healthy sense of adventure.

Their solutions, they concede, may sound utopian, and the scope and ambition of their proposals could intimidate even the most energetic teacher or parent. Nonetheless, their vision is inspiring: environmental education freed from partisan squabbling, and made creative, flexible, and powerful enough to reach citizens of all abilities and interests. This former muddly third grader likes the sounds of that.

Michele Nijhuis wrote "Balance of Power," in the March-April 2010 issue.

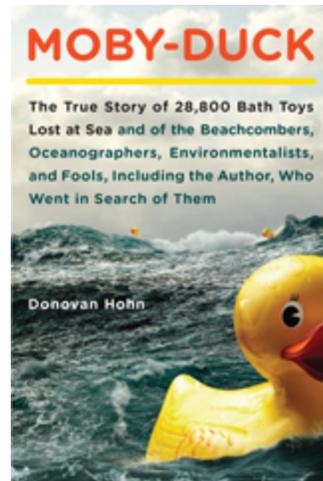
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EDITORS' CHOICE

[Moby-Duck: The True Story of 28,800 Bath Toys Lost at Sea and of the Beachcombers, Oceanographers, Environmentalists, and Fools, Including the Author, Who Went in Search of Them](#)

By Donovan Hohn

Viking, 416 pages, \$27.95



Some of the best books take as their subject small or mundane things and, through them, connect readers to the world at large. In *Moby-Duck*, journalist and former English teacher Donovan Hohn traces the oceanic migrations of thousands of bath toys washed off a container ship in the North Pacific. Alerted to the incident by a student essay, Hohn embarks on a hemisphere-spanning quest to unravel the mystery of bleached castaways littering beaches from Washington to Massachusetts. With each outing, the erudite duckie hunter untangles new strands in the web of science and the global economy. Along the way, he encounters Chinese toy manufacturers, Arctic sea ice researchers, and the "Ahab of plastic hunters," and goes snorkeling in the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, a "purgatorial eddy" of trash the size of Texas. Following the story's dark undercurrents, Hohn learns that plastic flotsam binds industrial toxins from the ocean's surface. Broken down by the elements, synthetic polymers pollute the food chain. In an ironic twist, icons of childhood innocence thus threaten albatrosses—hundreds of plastic pieces were found in a single bird's stomach. Though fatalism could have easily sunk this yarn, Hohn stays the course with humor and curiosity.—*Michael Engelhard*

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