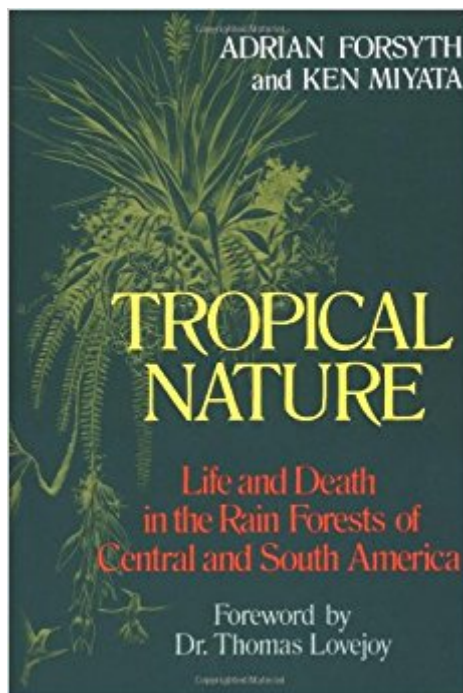




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Tropical Nature: Life And Death In The Rain Forests Of Central And South America



Synopsis

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Customer Reviews

E. O. Wilson *Tropical Nature* is superior by virtue of its freshness and authority. It is an account of the extraordinary richness of the tropical forests by two gifted young biologists who have recently experienced it and are experts on their subject. They write with the crispness of journalists sending dispatches from the field. Ernst Mayr Combines excellent science, often based on original observations, with a warm sympathy for creatures big and small. A worthy successor to the writings of the great naturalists of the American tropics. I know of no better introduction to tropical biology. *Newsweek* *Tropical Nature*...seeks to provoke curiosity about the forests -- not just provide facts about them -- and succeeds splendidly....*Tropical Nature* evokes the magic and wonder of a world completely contained within itself. *Smithsonian* It invites an appreciation of biology as few other books do and does so with extraordinary grace and humor. *Philadelphia Inquirer* ...one of the best natural-history books in recent years. Lyrical, richly detailed and delightful to read. *Scientific American* In 17 chapters, each a brief essay on tropical nature observed, these two young field biologists have made a model of contemporary natural history, cheerfully speculative, concerned as much with large pattern as with diversity, chemically informed, thoroughly ecological and Darwinian to the core.

Adrian Forsyth holds a Ph.D. in biology from Harvard University. He won the Canadian National

Magazine Award for Science Writing in 1982 and 1983, the first author to win the award twice.

This was just the sort of book I was looking for. First, here is what the book is not: This book is not a field guide. I am not going to seek out and document individual species when I visit Costa Rica. If you are, get a field guide. But, I am just going to look around. This book is not a scientific dissertation. Since this is not my field, I would not remember the details a week after I read a scientific dissertation. But, this book is very useful for someone, like me, who just wants a basic understanding, in order to appreciate the rain forest when visiting. It describes how things work in the tropical rain forests of South and Central America. It gives many useful examples of interactions among plants and animals to make the authors' points. Reading it really gave me a feel for the forest as a system of interconnected parts. I noticed only a couple weaknesses. First, not their fault, it was written decades ago. The basic workings of the rainforest have existed for much longer, but I kept wondering how our understanding has improved since the book was written. Second, it was not rigorously edited. For example, in the Chapter 1, it lists the diameter of the Earth at Minneapolis as 17000 miles. There is nowhere on Earth where the diameter is 17000 miles. There are latitudes where the circumference of the daily travel via the Earth's rotation is 17000 miles, but not the diameter. Then, in Chapter 3, one place Gary Hartshorn's name is spelled correctly, and incorrectly elsewhere. These are trivial mistakes, and I know what the author meant. But, it made me wonder about the facts that I could not verify on my own. Still, these weaknesses should not stop you from reading this book. If you want a basic appreciation about how tropical rain forests work, then this is the book for you.

Tropical Nature: Life and Death in the Rain Forests of Central and South America by Adrian Forsyth and Ken Miyata is a book that can be enjoyed by many different kinds of people: those who are highly versed in science and those who only took seventh grade Biology, those who have been to the tropical rain forest and those who have only dreamt of it, literature lovers or the occasional reader. It reads like a collection of short stories or essays about the different components of the rain forest, other than one long continuous piece. Which is very handy, as one can pick it up and read it where they left off weeks ago and not be concerned about missing plot or losing where they left off. Each chapter can be used as a stand-alone piece. The beauty of *Tropical Nature* is that it transports the reader into the rain forest, chapter by chapter and describes many different facets in vivid detail. The authors' language is very matter of fact, yet delights all of the senses with its strong language and attention to detail. A favorite passage of mine that describes this detail and

imagery is from page 186, "The interior of a tropical rainforest is almost always still. In the blackness of night it takes on an existence of its own, charged with mystery and pulsing with the beat of unseen life. Standing in the middle of tropical rainforest on a moonless night without a flashlight on is an experience that is undeniably organic, but it always makes me feel a bit claustrophobic after a few minutes. This passage takes me away to a place far away where you can almost feel the night breeze on your face and the soil beneath your feet, as I am sure it has done for you. The authors' language is also very personable and reads almost journal-like, which gives it a bit of a more realistic effect in my opinion. Many "sciencey" words are used, but also explained very well, although it is useful to have a dictionary or computer available to look up words that the author may find obvious but are not so obvious for those who are not biologists. It is an ecology book, but also one that can be used by the layman. It is very clear to understand but also gives great detail about the different components about the tropical rain forest without sounding like an ecology textbook. Again, it reads more like a journal of the authors' thoughts mixed in with their vast knowledge of science and ecology. One great aspect of the book is that it contains an index in the back so you are able to look back on specific details easily. It would be very useful to have if you were to be in an ecology or environmental studies class on the tropical rainforest for this reason, among many others. Tropical Nature is a great companion to many different college classes such as geography, ecology, biology, or environmental studies due to its many different themes. Some of the themes covered include feedback loops, food webs, reproduction, weather and climate, biology of plants and animals, climate regions of the world, human/environment interaction, and ecosystems among many others. Tropical Nature truly makes the reader want to go to the rainforest and experience it first hand. The book also contains a field guide with tips and tricks the authors recommend for the readers' adventure into the rain forest. Although I have been to a rainforest in the past, I have always been on a trail or path, and not "off the beaten path" as the authors were. Tropical Nature left me wanting to see more for my self. Although, I did get a small twinge of fear due to its vast overwhelming size and possibility of the unknown as described by the authors. The book also contains a great amount of humor about many different areas of the rainforest. Humor is one of the methods the authors have used to keep the material fresh and interesting to many demographics, which I believe is one of the main reasons the book is so readable. Many readers, including my self, have spent time laughing over the chapter where the author explains how the dung beetles are a big part of the ecosystem. If you have read the book, I'm sure you'll chuckle at the mere mention

of it, and if you haven't just wait for chapter 2! However, the humor is always stated in a very matter-of-fact way, not in a way that reads like a stand up comedy routine or a novel. The humor is always mixed in with a lot of very scientific info, which is one of the many ways Tropical Nature is so easily read and easy for many different populations to read. Overall, I would personally highly recommend Tropical Nature to anyone with an interest in the rain forest, specifically in the Central and South American region, as it provides much insight to an adult reader or any level or background. Bravo!

Among books that aim to express to readers the wonders of the rain forest, this one stands out. In 17 chapters that touch upon different aspects of the rain forest, the authors transmit their own passion for the rain forest and the unique intricacies that make rain forests some of the most precious places on earth. The book is not written as one coherent whole, but rather as 17 individual chapters or essays. Below is a brief sample of topics:- the strategy of dung scarabs to capture important proteins- the symbiotic relationship of sloths with the trees they prefer- the mimicry some insects have developed to elude their main predators, birds- the reason why some birds have developed migratory patterns to temperate climates- the reason why some frogs developed a parental care strategy and even marsupial pouches- the reason why some trees are hollow- how parasited species can benefit even in the most unlikely scenarios- why some plants developed hallucinogenic substances These are just a few of the topics covered in the book. It is written in a pop science format, so that an interested reader will easily understand and appreciate these and many more concepts. The authors carefully explain the relationships, often comparing the rain forest experience with those of temperate forests. The authors also focus on the possible evolutionary principles involved in adaptations presented. This is the very best introductory book on the subject. It is designed to excite the reader into learning more and even visiting the rain forest. In the mold of Stephen Jay Gould and Richard Dawkins, Miyata and Forsyth write a masterpiece that will make the reader feel smarter after reading it.

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