

Book Review: *The Forgotten Pollinators* (Stephen L. Buchmann and Gary Paul Nabhan, Island Press)

If Rachel Carson were alive today, her reaction to Steve Buchmann's and Gary Nabhan's *The Forgotten Pollinators* would undoubtedly be, "I told you so."

The title role in the book is played by the millions of species of insects, birds, and small mammals which every second of every day collect and carry pollen between flowering plants. It is this ongoing transfer of sexual material which makes plant reproduction possible and, by extension, the foundation of most terrestrial ecosystems.

Buchmann and Nabhan eloquently and convincingly argue that without the pollinators not only would most wilderness areas vanish, but also most of the agricultural systems on which we depend. Despite this fact, in case study after case study the authors document an Armageddon being waged against these crucial creatures. In the conflict many pollinators are being targeted directly, others are dying from "friendly fire" as we strive to eradicate so-called "agricultural pests," and millions are dying as we, driven by unfettered greed and self-interested ignorance, destroy their habitat for the purposes of logging, agriculture, and development. As Buchmann and Nabhan quietly (and frighteningly) suggest, what might survive of our food production capacity because of our war on the pollinators may only be the ultra-technological, soil-less green house factories. But can six billion humans live on hot house tomatoes? Absolutely not!

But the magic of *The Forgotten Pollinators* is that it is not simply a dark litany of the destruction being waged by human societies on the global environment. As the authors take us around the world on a quest to understand the ecological significance of the bees, moths, butterflies, bats, and hummingbirds, a deeper understanding unfolds about the complexity and wonder about the nature of life on Planet Earth. This understanding is at once awe inspiring and humbling. It is also very welcome.

From *The Forgotten Pollinators*, "The message is clear: the fields and orchards that sustain our food supply should never become too far removed from wildlands, or their yields will suffer. The remaining wildlands and the animals that inhabit them are playing an increasingly important role in maintaining the stability of the world's food supply ... We cannot let wildness become too remote from the lives of pollinators, or from our own lives. The risk is too high ..."

Published in *Wildlife Watch*, Fall 1996, International Wildlife Coalition