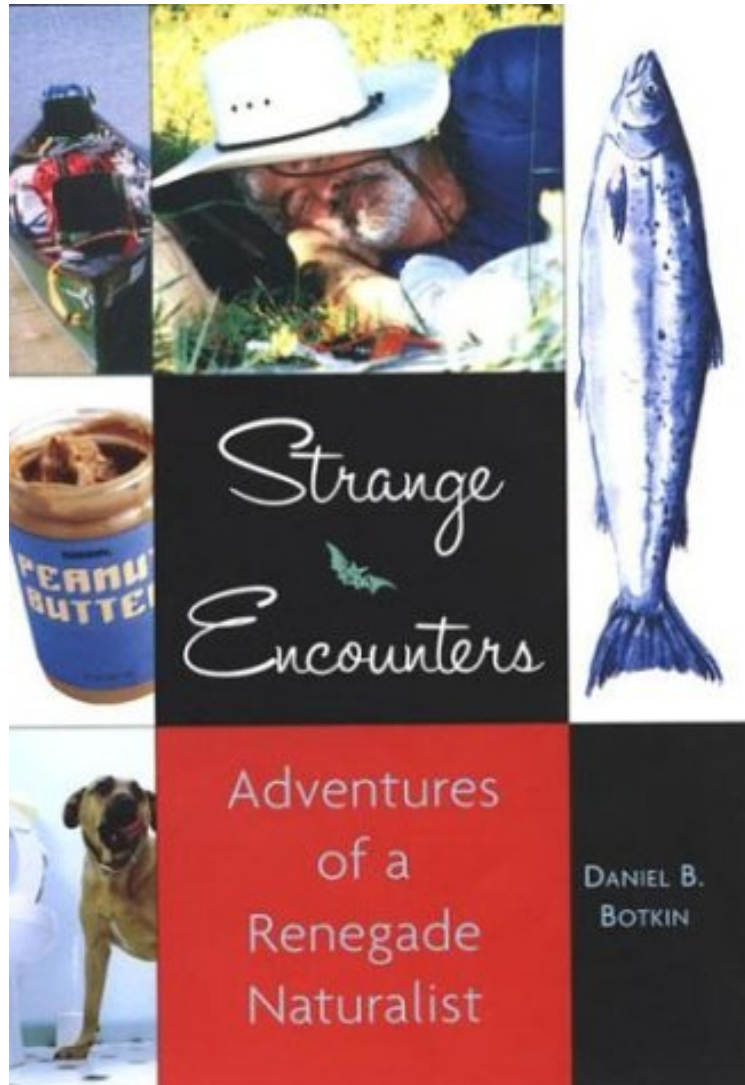


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Strange Encounters: Adventures of a Renegade Naturalist

Daniel B. Botkin

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Daniel B. Botkin : Strange Encounters: Adventures of a Renegade Naturalist before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Strange Encounters: Adventures of a Renegade Naturalist:

12 of 12 people found the following review helpful. a bit of a disappointment By John Anderson As a long standing fan of Botkin's excellent DISCORDANT HARMONIES I looked forward to diving into this autobiographical account of this remarkable naturalist's career thoughts. Alas, by about a third of the way through I found my attention drifting away kept asking myself "Yees... so what?" as essay piled on essay. Botkin has obviously done some really

interesting things has been to some odd and interesting places, but this book has far too much of the feel of satisfying a publisher's request of "why don't you root around in the attic see if you can throw something together on sabbatical" not enough of "so here's how my life informed my work my work informed my life". I passed the book along to one of my best undergrads, and she said almost the same thing without prompting. Several essays seem to be heading for some sort of exciting peak, but then they sort of fizzle out we are on to the next adventure without really understanding how to place what went before. This is too bad as I am confident that Botkin is capable of much much more. As an alternative, for folks interested in how the lives of ecologists affect their professional work I would suggest Dennis Chitty's excellent DO LEMMINGS COMMIT SUICIDE? 2 of 4 people found the following review helpful. A must read for students, scientists, and everyone else By Bob C. Daniel Botkin's new book continues his string of must read books that provide a valuable perspective on the environment. His wealth of experience in field work and academic science is nicely complemented in this book through his reflections on a number of scientific issues with which he has engaged over his career. From the engineering of New England mills to studying ocean life, Botkin's reflections on his work will keep you engaged throughout the book and leave you looking for more. Whether you are an aspiring or practicing naturalist, or just looking for a good read, this book is a great choice. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Good in Premise, but Lacking in Delivery By LeeHoFooks Until my sister bought this book for me for my birthday a few months ago, I had never heard of Daniel Botkin before. Though he holds a PhD in ecology, he received his BA in physics (rather than biology). He has contributed to fascinating projects all over the world, worked for NASA, taught at UC Santa Barbara, and been involved with various conservation programs. He also has a MA in literature and a keen interest in the Lewis and Clark Expedition and Henry David Thoreau. If there's anything he can be accused of, being uninteresting isn't it. So it's all the more unfortunate that this book is so weak. In bite-sized chapter after bite-sized chapter, Botkin starts to tell miscellaneous stories that just kind of trail off without a resolution or a clear point. Most chapters have to do with him being asked to answer certain questions, such as "how long do whales sleep?"; "how many leaves are on a tree?"; and "what happens, over time, to an irradiated forest?" The answers (respectively) are along the lines of: "We never found out," "we never found out," and "they cut our funding (so we never found out)." A few other chapters are philosophical musings on nature and how the American mythos of nature has changed over time. The answer seems to be "nature is... something..(?)" Perhaps the most disappointing waste of potential is when Botkin describes an idea he and some fellow scientists came up with to battle cancer. The idea is to take the opposite approach usually employed by a conservationist -- that is, to ruin cancer's environment and make it go extinct. Sounds fascinating, doesn't it? Well don't get too excited; this topic takes up the smallest portion of the book -- the epilogue. Botkin is an interesting man who's led an interesting life, been to some interesting places, had some interesting jobs, and has an interesting perspective for an ecologist (a field I'm very interested in). It's such a shame this book was so uninteresting! I see here on that he's written quite a few books. I'll probably eventually get around to giving him another shot, but I wouldn't recommend this one.

The warm, witty anecdotal adventures of a world-renowned scientist, spanning thirty years and dozens of countries. Most people only dream of having the life Daniel B. Botkin has led. He has studied whales and elephants, tramped over high mountain passes and through rain forests, worked with NASA, and spent substantial time walking in the footsteps of Lewis and Clark, and Henry David Thoreau. In *Strange Encounters*, Botkin does for the natural world what Richard Feynman did for physics and Oliver Sacks for human behavior. Whether rebuilding an old mill in New Hampshire while ruminating on notions of "progress," researching the most weight-efficient high-protein food for space travel, or working in a radioactive forest on an early Cold War research project, Botkin experiences the kind of adventures that illuminate the complex and ever-changing relationship between human beings and their environment.

From *Publishers Weekly* A skilled essayist as well as an ecologist, Botkin (*Discordant Harmonies: A New Ecology for the Twenty-First Century*) combines science, wit and a gift for characterization to craft these consistently engaging essays. Many deal with contradictions and uncertainties that may never be resolved by research alone. In "Winds of a Condor's Wings," he describes a 1980 project that he was engaged in as a member of a committee to advise the State of California how to save the condor, whose population had declined to only 22. Three sets of so-called experts were unable to agree on what factor was chiefly responsible for the condor's decline or whether captive breeding or reintroduction to the wild should be pursued to sustain the species. "The Ecology of Cancer" is a touching account of his late wife's illness and how the questions she raised about chemotherapy motivated Botkin to establish an experimental workshop, as a memorial to her, composed of both biologists and cancer researchers who are learning from one another. In another piece, "How Many Bowhead Whales Ever Lived on the Earth," Botkin recounts his collaboration with John Bockstoce, an anthropologist studying Yankee whaling, whose complex personality springs to life on the page. There are many humorous inclusions, like "Is It Okay to Let Your Dog Drink from the Toilet?" a witty reflection on a study about the good-guy bacteria in toilet bowls. In all, this is a refreshing, open-minded collection about nature, ecology and science. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc. About the Author Daniel B. Botkin is a research professor at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and the president of the Center for the

Study of the Environment. He has taught at George Mason University and Yale.