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Desert Wetlands, by Lucian Niemeyer, with text by Thomas Lowe Fleischner

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Jake Gittes, an investigative reporter played by Jack Nicholson, asks the crooked water and real estate developer Noah Cross,⁶² "Why are you doing it? How much better can you eat? What can you buy that you can't already afford?" Cross replies right to the point: "The future, Mr. Gittes, the future!"⁶³ These writers and their subjects are blazing a way to a different kind of future. It is a future based upon transparency, cultural and environmental integration, and hope. We can all hope that this future brings a better understanding of multiple goals and achievements than the single minded constrictions and tragedies of the stories related in these books.

REVIEWS

Desert Wetlands. By Lucian Niemeyer, with text by Thomas Lowe Fleischner. University of New Mexico Press, 2005. Pp. 148. \$19.95 cloth.

It is not hard to imagine the initial reaction that many people might have upon first encountering the title of this book. Lucian Niemeyer certainly seemed to anticipate this with the very first sentence in the book's preface: "The term 'desert wetlands' seems like an oxymoron." The title may indeed elicit some amusement or confusion at first, especially for readers not familiar with the American Southwest and adjacent parts of Mexico. Even a cursory examination of this book, however, will quickly instill in the reader an appreciation for the extent and variety of desert wetlands, as well as for their ecological value and their sheer beauty.

One reason that only a cursory examination of the book might achieve this level of appreciation is because of Niemeyer's beautiful photography. There is hardly a page in the entire book where one's attention is not first drawn to one or more color photos depicting desert wetland scenes or the wildlife and plants that can be found in them. The bulk of the photos are from the Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge along the Middle Rio Grande River in New Mexico, but there are also photos from all four major deserts in the American Southwest and from every other state in the region. Like several other books by Niemeyer – a well-known professional photographer – *Desert Wetlands* could easily be considered a coffee table book, with its beautiful photography on virtually every page and its 9" x 12" format.

While many buyers of this book may look no further than its photos, it is my hope that most will also take the time to read the four accompanying chapters by Niemeyer's collaborator, Thomas Lowe

62. Played by John Huston.

63. CHINATOWN (written by Robert Towne, directed by Roman Polanski, Paramount Pictures 1974).

Fleischner. Dr. Fleischner is an Environmental Studies faculty member at Prescott College and has an obvious passion for desert environments (and natural history in general). His chapters are “easy reads,” offering an enjoyable mix of personal experiences, “Desert Wetland Ecology 101” lessons, and profiles of specific wetlands. Reading Fleischner’s text certainly whetted my appetite to get out and see more of these wetlands for myself – though perhaps not with the extreme thirst and flash floods that he has encountered!

For the reader who is interested in learning even more about desert wetlands, a valuable feature of Fleischner’s text is that he supports his statements with accompanying notes, which in turn are linked to a list of references. Many of the references provided are excellent entrees into the scientific literature on desert wetland ecology. While quite unobtrusive, the notes and references are a very valuable addition to this book for those readers with a deeper interest in learning about desert wetlands.

In general, Fleischer’s text complements Niemyer’s photos well. One case where I found a bit of a disconnect, however, is in the last chapter (“The Human Touch”), part of which is devoted to cataloguing some of the many forms of harm that people have inflicted on desert wetlands. While it might have detracted from the overall aesthetic appeal, more photos of degraded desert wetlands might have been a useful addition to this book. Such photos could have had an impact on those readers who will dig no deeper into this book than the photos and their captions. It might have also made the book a more powerful tool for the education of busy but influential people, such as political leaders.

Perhaps the greatest strength of *Desert Wetlands* is that it can be appreciated on at least three different levels. The casual reader may do no more than look at the photos and perhaps read the captions, but still learn much about desert wetlands. Other readers may be inspired to get out and experience these wetlands personally after reading about Fleischner’s adventures. Finally, scientists or natural resource managers may use this book as an initial point of entry into the scientific literature on desert wetland ecology. There is clearly much to recommend about this book, and I hope it will find its way onto the bookshelves of all three types of readers. Desert wetlands face even more threats in the future than they have faced to date, and the more people who know about and appreciate these wetlands, the more likely it is that we will be able to successfully protect and restore them.

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