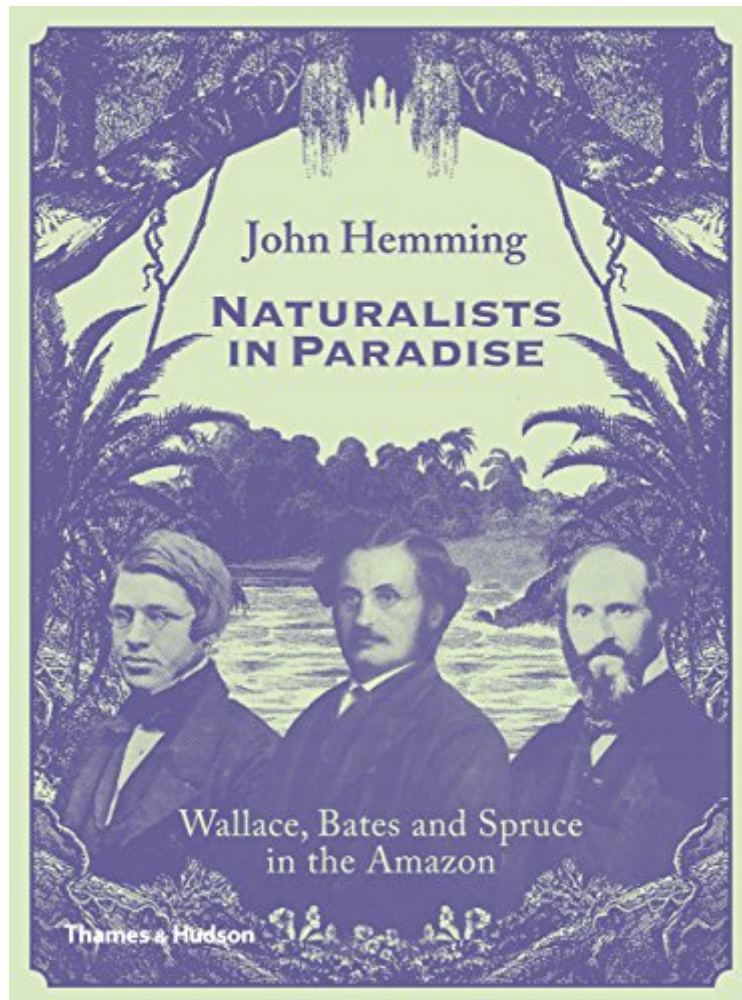




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Naturalists In Paradise: Wallace, Bates And Spruce In The



Synopsis

Alfred Russel Wallace, Henry Walter Bates and Richard Spruce were English naturalists who went to the Amazon 150 years ago. This book is the first to combine all three young men's experiences of the Amazon, drawing heavily on their own letters and books. All three explored an unknown river and had many thrilling adventures: violent attacks of malaria, fearful rapids, murder attempts, encounters with newly contacted indigenous peoples, shipwrecks, and many other hardships. In addition to their huge contributions to knowledge of the Amazon environment, each is particularly famous for one discovery. Wallace is acknowledged as a co-discoverer, along with Charles Darwin, of the theory of evolution. Bates discovered protective mimicry among insects, a phenomenon named after him. Spruce transported the quinine-bearing Cinchona tree, the most important medicinal plant of the nineteenth century, to India, where it saved countless lives from malaria.

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Customer Reviews

Should be read by everyone interested in the Amazon, tropical travel, field biology and the theory of evolution. Check out my detailed review in the Washington Post:

http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2015/05/14/ca79319a-d49e-11e4-ab77-9646eea6a4c7_story.html

This book is truly outstanding. This author has a fantastic way with words. Let me explain. I have had the good fortune to have been in this area on two different occasions----both as a tourist---about 25 and 30 years ago so as I read this book, I visualize myself as the three men in the story. The time of this book was about year 1850 and I was fascinated by the authors vivid descriptions such as tile on a houses roof as I wasn't sure if tile was even invented at that time but I guess it was. Also, the part about hiring Indians to paddle the canoes and the first thing that I thought about was our own capitalistic system in which the wealthier people today do similar things. I also noted remarks about different classes and races of people in those days as well as a good deal of intermarriage which takes place today. I have to comment on the foods that were eaten especially Brazilian nuts as I learned some time ago that Brazilian nuts are supposed to be one of the most nutritious foods that we can possibly eat today. Although I am not especially interested in insects and butterflies---this author makes this part so descriptive and interesting that it is hard to put the book down. This Author John Hemming in my opinion has an absolute winner.

superb, I loved this book. I read Tree of Rivers also.

Excellent book!

If any book is going to take you down a river of discovery, it's "Naturalists in Paradise; Wallace, Bates and Spruce in the Amazon," by explorer John Hemming, former director of the Royal Geographical Society. When I first opened this book, I felt a little trepidation. I was intrigued by the topic of Victorian naturalists on the Amazon, but at first glance, the book seemed as dense as jungle undergrowth. But like an explorer on the Amazon, I plunged forward on this journey and ended up pleasantly surprised. I didn't need a machete to get through it after all. Yes, an editor's red pen should have split a few hundred paragraphs into shorter ones, but I found the writing quite good. Hemming, a world authority on the Amazon, clearly loves these three naturalists, Alfred Russel Wallace, Henry Walter Bates and Richard Spruce. As I got into the book, I began to understand each as human beings with distinct personalities, strengths and foibles. As the men explored the Amazon and some of its many tributaries, I followed them on the book's map. The book describes their adventures and discoveries without bogging the lay reader down with scientific data. Hemming is very good at looking at the broader picture and the context of the time they lived in. If you are interested in this topic, you will finish this book with new insight. I had to

come to terms with the fact that collecting and studying specimens during that time usually meant killing the creature or cutting down the magnificent tree. I think the book could have addressed this issue better for most readers who do not have the scientist's pragmatic perspective. The only moment was when the book quoted Spruce: "It was long before I could overcome a feeling of compunction at having to destroy a magnificent tree merely for the sake of gathering its flowers." Hemming went on to write, "He finally overcame his qualms about this vandalism by reasoning that it was in the interest of science." To help readers understand that point, the book needed words like those of my amateur naturalist brother: "These earlier naturalists were never ever less intended than the most ecologically sensitive and life-intended naturalists of the 21st century. For all the sacrifice of these individual specimens, we now have the knowledge to fight for the survival of the thousands of yet unknown species as well as the inevitable survival of our own species."

Well written, fascinating.

While I thought it was full of interesting information, I found it boring after a while. I will try again to continue reading it after a few weeks.

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