



Under the Sea Wind

Rachel Carson

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For the centennial of the birth of *Silent Spring* author Rachel Carson, a new edition of her groundbreaking paean to the sea

Celebrating the mystery and beauty of birds and sea creatures in their natural habitat, *Under the Sea-Wind*—Rachel Carson's first book and her personal favorite—is the early masterwork of one of America's greatest nature writers. Evoking the special mystery and beauty of the shore and the open sea—its limitless vistas and twilight depths—Carson's astonishingly intimate, unforgettable portrait captures the delicate negotiations of an ingeniously calibrated ecology.

Under the Sea Wind Details

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From Reader Review Under the Sea Wind for online ebook

Paulfozz says

A lyrical exploration of the wildlife of the eastern United States over the space of a year, mixing prose and science in a way reminiscent of the later books by Richard Fortey. Rachel incorporates elements of children's books in her way of naming animals and following their individual lives, yet this is just one aspect weaving through a poetic yet scientifically rigorous description of these coastal waters and of the abyss looming offshore. Taking the perspective of the animals themselves allows the reader to immerse themselves into the waters, to ride the winds to the arctic with the flocks of migrating birds and to dive deep into the black depths with the young eels. The sense of connection with the wild is strong within these pages.

Robin says

This is Rachel Carson's first book (1941), and her personal favorite. In it she tells charming nature stories, poetically spoken yet full of scientific fact about ocean animals and the interrelatedness of life in ocean, estuary, and river. The characters are often individual mackerel, arctic owls, eels, etc. that are seen in the context of their entire ecosystem (a word originally coined by Carson). She looks at the changes in this ecosystem throughout seasons and lifecycles, from the viewpoint of her animal characters. She often names these characters based upon parts of their scientific names.

The action takes place from North Carolina to Maine, on the Eastern US seaboard and in its associated watersheds. This book will especially appeal to anyone who has spent time near these waters. With sensitively rendered and scientifically correct illustrations by Bob Hines, this book is suitable for reading to children. However, I think it is even more useful as adult bedtime reading for those who enjoy dreaming of the vastness of the ocean and the variety of life therein.

Carla says

4.5/5 what a delightful journey! Magnificently written. I flew with Rynchops the black skimmer, Blackfoot and Silverbar, the two sanderlings, Ookpik the owl, Kigavik the gyrfalcon, and I lived for a few minutes their day to day, their struggles, their needs, their calls. Through Scomber the mackerel, Aurelia the moon jelly, Anguilla the eel, I was allowed to have a glimpse of the magic world of the shore, the open sea, and the sea bottom, of the cycles of life and death, of the unimaginable complexity of the interplay of life in the water. The beauty of nature, in which every-thing is a irreplaceable piece of the puzzle.

Laura Little says

Before David Attenborough and nature television, there was Rachel Carson. What's so phenomenal about this 1941 book was that it was her first, published when she was in her mid-30s.

It can be challenging to read what we are so accustomed to seeing visually. However, Carson's narration is spectacular, taking the reader through ecosystems with the animals themselves as characters. I would say that Caron's writing actually eclipses nature film: it allows to push deeper beyond the exciting, shimmering tilt of a school of fish to contemplate the entirety of Nature's magical production, past, present and future.

An illustrative passage: "Here in the red clay, in the darkness and stillness, lies all that remains of ancient races of sharks that lived, perhaps, before there were whales in the sea; before the giant ferns flourished on the earth or ever the coal measures were laid down. All of the living flesh of these sharks was returned to the sea millions of years before, to be used over and over again in the fashioning of other creatures, but here and there a tooth still lies in the red-clay ooze of the deep sea, coated with a deposit of iron from a distant sun."

Larry says

this is a natural classic; should be read by everyone who loves nature

Claire McAlpine says

The book started out as an assignment she completed in 1936, when she was an unemployed zoologist and freelance writer for the U.S. Bureau of Fisheries. Asked to write an introduction to a brochure on marine life, she submitted an essay entitled "The World of Waters" neatly typed by her mother, as all her manuscripts would be.

The next day Carson sat in Higgins's Washington D.C. office waiting for his verdict. The government ichthyologist knew at once that it was unsuitable. What he was reading was a piece of literature. Carson never forgot the conversation: 'My chief...handed it back with a twinkle in his eye. 'I don't think it will do,' he said. 'Better try again. But send this one to the Atlantic Monthly.'

The essay was a narrative account of the countless sea creatures that cohabit in and underwater and introduced her two most enduring and renowned themes: the ecological relationships of ocean life that have been in existence for millenia and the material immortality that embraces even the tiniest organism. It was the essay that spawned a classic in nature literature.

Under the Sea-Wind is structured in three parts, and in each part, we view the sea and sea life from the point of view of one of its inhabitants.

In Part One, Edge of the Sea, written for the life of the shore, and inspired by a stretch of North Carolina sea-coast, we meet a female sanderling she names Silverbar, it is Spring and the great Spring migration of shore birds is at its height and concludes with the end of summer where the movements of birds, fish, shrimp and other water creatures heralds the changing of the seasons.

She describes the terror of the shore birds as they hide in the beach grass from the noisy, boisterous migrating flocks that briefly occupy their territory; the terrible snow storm that will freeze hundreds of egg

embryos, where only the fittest and strongest survive; the way the birds lure a fox away from their nests and the day the parents finally abandon their young, their job complete.

Part Two The Gull's Way, is dedicated to the open sea, a parallel time period in the open ocean and here we encounter Scomber the mackerel, following his journey from birth through infancy and youth in a quiet New England harbour, only to join a school that follows its instinct into the great sea where numerous predators await. As the fish move from one location to the next, trying to outwit predators, including man, the sea becomes the scene of a thriller and Scomber the mackerel, our fugitive!

Part Three River and Sea is written in the deepest, darkest, fathoms, we follow Anguilla, the eel from the far tributaries of a coastal river pool, downstream to the gently sloping depths of the sea, 'the steep descent of the continental slopes and finally the abyss'.

After 10 years of uneventful river habitation, the eels are drawn by instinct downriver returning to their place of birth, a deep abyss near the Sargasso Sea where they will spawn and die. It is the most remarkable journey, as is that of the newborn spawn originating from two continents, who float side by side and drift towards those same coastal rivers their parents swam from, a voyage of years and over time the two species will separate and veer towards their continent, the US or Europe.

Rachel Carson writes about the sea, the sand, the birds, fish and the smallest of creatures and organisms in a way that makes us realise how little we observe of what is occurring around us, though we may stand, swim, float or fish in the midst of it. For the sea, its shore and the air above thrum like a thriving city of predator and prey of all sizes and character, constantly fluctuating, its citizens ever alert to when it is prudent to move and when it is necessary to be still.

Original, enthralling, it opens our eyes to much that we do not see or understand, I am in awe of shore birds, mackerel, eels, the sea, streams, rivers, ponds and the interconnectedness of them all.

My complete review here at Word by Word.

Richard says

Although famous today for *Silent Spring*, Rachel Carson had already made her name decades earlier. During the 1930s, as a young zoologist specialising in marine ecology, she helped pay the bills with a series of essays which appeared in newspapers such as the *Boston Globe* and attracted widespread praise. These led, in turn, to several books about the ocean, of which *Under the Sea-Wind* was the first.

It reads almost like a nature documentary, a narrative description (illustrated with pencil sketches by Howard Frech) of the wildlife of the western Atlantic and adjacent coastline. More nonfiction than fiction, it has no plot - unless you count the tumultuous births, lives and deaths of the natural world itself as the plot. It is, though, filled with characters: Silverbar the sandpiper, Scomber the mackerel, Anguilla the eel, and what Carson gives us is an utterly realistic impression of both their lives - what it's actually *like* to be a shore bird or fish - and of the ecology of it all, how it all works, its interconnectedness (a more familiar idea nowadays than it was back in the 1930s). For me, one thing which came across particularly vividly was the small fry - copepods, shelled protozoa, the minuscule larvae of jellyfish and crabs - usually lumped together as 'plankton'; it's like peering down a microscope tube at a rich, bustling little world of jewel-like entities, a world exquisite and deadly in equal measure.

Of course, this is a glimpse of the rivers and seas as they were back in the late 1930s, i.e. somewhere along

the scale between the original pre-human superabundance and today's polluted and almost fishless wastes; reading this, I found myself hoping that Carson can't see from beyond the grave what has been done to the oceans she loved.

And that is what comes across here most clearly of all: how much she loved the sea and everything that lives in it - it shows in every sentence, page after brilliant page. One reason the prose is so good is that every line was read out loud, for its rhythm, as she went (I don't really use audiobooks, but I can imagine this being a stunning listen). It also changed my picture of the author: from here on I'll think of Rachel Carson, only second as a scientist and environmental inspiration, first and foremost as a world-class author.

Judith Shelton says

Rachel Carson shows us and explains a fascinating underwater world.

Rachel Carson was the rare author with the ability to make me care deeply for the fate of a young Mackerel, or be a axed by the life journey of an ell.

I found it best to read this book over several days, a few chapters at a time. By doing this, the book remained interesting and fun to learn new things, rather than overwhelming with too much information .
A readable and informative book.

David says

Rachael Carson. Having read none of her books and being (somewhat) environmentally conscious, I thought this wold be a diatribe against big oil big agra, big business, etc and such.

Instead I found myself engrossed above and below the sea, exploring this world through the beautiful imagery of Carson's words, the undersea portrayed through the eyes of a young mackerel, or the long East Coast during annual migration to the Arctic as a bird. The balance of nature and the worries about predators was portrayed through these characters.

I didn't want this book to end, reading the well thumbed glossary at the end completely though to savor more of her writing.

?Kimari? says

If you liked this book, you might also enjoy:

- ★ A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There
- ★ Winter World: The Ingenuity of Animal Survival
- ★ Summer World: A Season of Bounty
- ★ At the Water's Edge
- ★ The Book of Barely Imagined Beings: A 21st Century Bestiary
- ★ The Forest Unseen: A Year's Watch in Nature

Chrissie says

Having recently read *Silent Spring*, I wanted more of the author's fantastic writing.

Nature writing at its best in vivid, lyrical prose. She writes about ocean and shore life so you feel you are there. The reader follows birds, fish, crustaceans and even eel! You follow an interlude in these creatures' respective lives. It is utterly amazing the extent to which Carson makes the reader feel part of their aquatic existence. Violent storms, dense fog and lulling, lapping seas under blue skies. Predators and prey, the cycle of life to death to food and new life.

Carson assigns names to the creatures. Often she uses the scientific names of species as character names. It is a great technique and coupled with her engaging writing you follow each one with rapt interest. I thought this would be childish but it wasn't. The vocabulary is too advanced and the scientific details too plentiful for the lines to feel childish. Everybody, even expert naturalists, will learn something new.

I was continually drawn to searching the web to view the animals. The original book is illustrated. I listened to the audiobook narrated by C.M. Hébert. It was very good. It is slowly read, and it should be! This allows the listener to marvel at the beauty of the prose. Some of the lines are exciting. I listened with trepidation as the mackerel (Scomber) was about to be netted. No, that just couldn't happen! Even the glossary at the end captivates.

My only reservation in recommending this book is that it fits best those who appreciated nature writing

Barbara Rhine says

What can I say? I've read a lot of books in my life, and never anything like this one. Carson takes a stretch of the Atlantic coast and ocean, spreads it from the Arctic to Virginia, and, after informing us that her only purpose in doing this is to make sense for humans, tells the stories of its inhabitants as if she were writing a novel. The characters include Rynchops, a black skimmer; Blackfoot and Silverbar, a mating pair of sanderlings; Pandion, a fish hawk, or osprey; Mugil, a millet; White Tip, an eagle; Scomber, a mackerel, and Anguilla, an eel whose story leads the reader all the way to the literal Abyss. Every one of these beings, surrounded by multitudes of others, eludes countless dangers and accomplishes extraordinary physical feats. And it is all a True Story, in that it is based in the science of what actually occurs during mating, hatching, fledging, migrating (whether by sky or ocean), giving birth, existing during various seasons and in various temperatures, and eventually passing back into inchoate matter. The volume is slim, yet the prose is appropriately dense for such a complex undertaking, and the whole thing is well worth the reader's effort. One of the most important books I have ever read, as it takes us out of the center for once, and describes our human existence within its actual web of life.

Skip Stoddard says

An incredibly scientific and detailed description of the life cycles and behaviors of a number of creatures that inhabit the water and air along our coastal zones. The main characters, a black skimmer (a shore bird), a mackerel, and an eel, are imbued with human thoughts and emotions that pull the reader in to their world. A fascinating, well written introduction to ecology.

Mark says

Unbelievably beautiful. Its another of those books which demand to be read out loud. An extraordinary description of the life of rivers and seas. A prose love poem, you might say, to mother nature. If you love being inspired, then read this one.

Brian says

The island lay in shadows only a little deeper than those that were swiftly stealing across the sound from the east. On its western shore the wet sand of the narrow beach caught the same reflection of palely gleaming sky that laid a bright path across the water from island beach to horizon. Both water and sand were the color of steel overlaid with the sheen of silver, so that it was hard to say where water ended and land began.

That's just beautiful, right? This is the opening paragraph in a 200 page work that continues in a similar tone - a naturalist's objective view of a subject matter both readily familiar and wholly loved. Carson created this work over a ten year span of studying coastal marine life from North Carolina up to the Arctics; she anthropomorphizes the life span of a mackerel and an eel (giving the character names, even) to pinpoint the beauty and the violence of life. The narrative feels reminiscent of everything Attenborough produced for the last 50 years.

As I was finishing this book I was reflecting on how much of Carson's writing I found familiar - and then it dawned on me just how much of the world does *not* live close to the coast; how many people have never witnessed anything she describes first-hand. To them this book must feel like reading a piece of science fiction describing another world.

Stinson Beach, California

7th book read of 500 Great Books by Women

