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Watching, from the Edge of Extinction

Beverly Peterson Stearns, Professor Stephen C. Stearns

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To those struggling on the frontlines to save endangered plants and animals, the crucial challenge is to confront the biological causes of those species' decline. But just as threatening to their survival are obstacles erected by human politics, greed, corruption, folly, and hypocrisy. In this mesmerizing book, Beverly and Stephen Stearns tell the stories of people who have worked directly with disappearing species in Europe, Africa, North America, and Oceania. They are stories of passion and commitment, of competence and selflessness. They are also stories that alarm, for even as unheralded heroes are working to reverse what often seems to be a species' inevitable march toward extinction, incompetent or self-interested parties are often working against them. The authors interviewed people who work with endangered species as diverse as Mediterranean monk seals, large blue butterflies, African wild dogs, native Hawaiian crows, Texas salamanders, and rare plants on Mauritius. These dedicated individuals, in discussing how they view their work, the problems they encounter, and their thoughts on the broader significance of extinction, reveal that the causes of extinction are unique to each species-sometimes subtle and complex, at other times obvious and simple. Yet an extinction always represents an irretrievable loss of evolutionary potential and a diminishing of the beauty, diversity, and value in our own lives. The dramatic lessons of this book shed new light on the problems of endangered species and offer hope that we may yet change the fate of those species that totter on the edge of extinction.

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