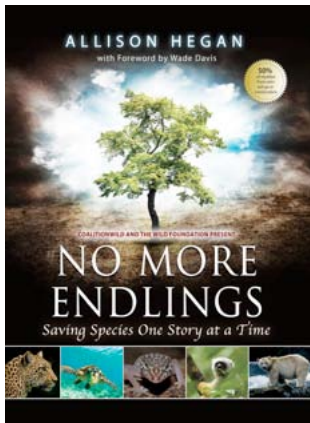


No More Endlings, Saving Species One Story at a Time

Allison Hegan, Editor (2015)

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No, there isn't a misprint in the title as printed above. An endling, apparently, is the last individual of a declining species or subspecies: when it dies, the taxon will be extinct. "Lonesome George" was a well-known herpetological example.

This is a most unusual book. The editor, Allison Hegan, has assembled 46 short accounts (they're mostly about 2000 words each) of animals, plants and in a few cases ecosystems, which are seriously declining or in danger of extinction. They're arranged geographically by continent. Each account follows a standardised but extremely original format. It starts with an anecdotal section dealing with some aspect of the subject, written in a popular vein. In my opinion, these sections are the best parts of the book. Have you ever tried, as an editor, to forge a unified set of texts from authors who come from a wide variety of backgrounds, have different standards and aspirations, and who write in very different ways? It's exceedingly hard to do, and Allison Hegan appears to have succeeded magnificently: there is a coherence about this book of a kind that is very rare in multi-authored works. Then there follows a short biography of the author(s) under the heading "Meet...". The formal classification is then given, followed by a more serious and factual account of the biology, threats and current efforts at conservation. Another novel feature is that each account also has a list of websites under the heading "To learn more and donate".

Reptiles and amphibians have eight entries: they are the barefoot banded gecko, *Coleonyx switaki*; the Antiguan racer snake, *Alsophis antiguae*; the Cuban iguana, *Cyclura nubila*; the hawksbill turtle, *Eretmochelys imbricata*; the Pebas stubfoot toad, *Atelopus spumarius*; the Mallorcan midwife toad, *Alytes muletensis*; the Malagasy rainbow frog, *Scaphiophryne gottlebi* and the false gharial, *Tomistoma schlegelii*. It would be easy to quibble about this list – barefoot banded geckos are not endangered over much of their range, for example, hawksbills are not the most endangered sea turtles and Cuban iguanas are not the most endangered iguanas – but that would be to miss the point. This is not a work of scholarship or for reference. It's propaganda – in the best sense of that word - written with passion and conviction in the clear hope that others will come to share the editor's and authors' belief that conservation is something that really matters. The whole thing is so well done that I'm sure it will succeed.

I haven't said anything about illustrations. That's because my review copy is an electronic one, and doesn't include them all. But the ones that I do have, like almost everything else about this volume, are very good indeed.

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