Penguins in the Desert
Eric Wagner

Most of us wouldn’t think to look for penguins in a hot desert, but every year along a windswept edge of coastal Patagonia, hundreds of thousands of Magellanic penguins gather to rear their young at Punta Tombo, Argentina. It is the largest penguin colony in the world outside of Antarctica, and for the past three decades, biologist Dee Boersma has followed them there.

Eric Wagner joined her team for six months in 2008, and in Penguins in the Desert, he chronicles that season in the remarkable lives of both the Magellanic penguins of Punta Tombo and the scientists who track their every move. For Boersma, the penguins are ecosystem sentinels. At the colony’s peak, more than a million birds bred there, but now less than half as many do. In confronting this fact, Boersma tackles some of the most urgent issues facing penguins and people today. What is the best way to manage our growing appetite for fish? How do we stop catastrophic oil spills from coating birds? How will we address the looming effects of climate change?

As Wagner spends more and more time with the penguins and the scientists in the field, other equally pressing questions come to mind. What is it like to be beaten by a penguin? Or bitten by one? How can a person be so dirty for so many months on end? In a tale that is as much about life in the field as it is about one of the most charismatic creatures on earth, Wagner brings humor, warmth, and hard-won insight as he tries to find the answer to what turns out to be the most pressing question of all: What does it mean to know an animal and to grapple with the consequences of that knowing?


ERIC WAGNER lives in Seattle with his family. He is the author of Once and Future River, and his essays and journalism have appeared in Orion, Audubon, Smithsonian, and High Country News, among other publications. He earned a PhD in biology from the University of Washington for his work on the Magellanic penguins at Punta Tombo, Argentina.

OF RELATED INTEREST

Among Penguins
A Bird Man in Antarctica
NOAH STRYCKER
The Troubled Life of Peter Burnett
Oregon Pioneer and First Governor of California
R. Gregory Nokes

Few people in the nineteenth-century American West could boast the achievements of Peter Burnett. He helped organize the first major wagon train to the Oregon Country. He served on Oregon’s first elected government and was Oregon’s first supreme court judge. He opened a wagon road from Oregon to California. He worked with the young John Sutter to develop the new city of Sacramento. Within a year of arriving in California, voters overwhelmingly elected him as the first US governor. He also won appointment to the California Supreme Court.

It was one heck of a resume. Yet with the exception of the wagon road to California, in none of these roles was Burnett considered successful or well remembered. Indeed, he resigned from many of his most important positions, including the governorship, where he was widely perceived a failure.

Burnett’s weakness was that he refused to take advice from others. He insisted on marching to his own drum, even when it led to some terrible decisions. A former slaveholder, he could never seem to get beyond his single-minded goal of banning blacks and other minorities from the West.

The Troubled Life of Peter Burnett is the first full-length biography of this complicated character. Historians, scholars, and general readers with an interest in Western history will welcome R. Gregory Nokes’ accessible and deeply researched account.

All Coyote’s Children
A Novel
Bette Lynch Husted

Jack and Annie Fallon had been living what seemed the ideal life with their son Riley, spending the school year in Portland, where Jack was a professor of Native American history, and summers at Jack’s family ranch in northeastern Oregon, on land surrounded by the Umatilla Indian Reservation. But a good way of life can disappear almost overnight, as the Umatilla, Cayuse, and Walla Walla peoples already know. Now the teenage Riley is in rehab, Jack has disappeared without a trace into the remote wilderness, and Annie is recovering from her own hospitalization following a mental health crisis.

Still fragile, a bereft Annie returns to the ranch, where she is befriended by Leona, a Umatilla-Cayuse neighbor. Leona, as it turns out, has a long connection to the family that even Jack never knew about. At the time of his disappearance, Jack had been grappling with his family’s legacy—with the conflicts and consequences of white settlement of native ground. Three generations before he was born, the family ranch was taken from the Umatilla reservation through the Allotment Act. Jack’s mother died when he was six, but his father’s stern presence still cast a shadow on the land.

“Survival is hard sometimes,” Leona says, but with her help, Annie is able to bring Riley home from rehab and begin the work of healing their small family, learning, season by season, how to go on living without Jack. Leona, Riley’s friends Alex and Mattie, and old neighbors Gus and Audrey become a larger family for Annie as they share the stories that connect them—long-silenced stories from both cultures that could solve the mystery of Jack’s disappearance.

In prose that is lyrical and clear-eyed, All Coyote’s Children weaves an unforgettable tale of cultures and families caught in the inescapable web of who they are and what they have inherited.


“The emotional intensity of All Coyote’s Children might be overwhelming, if the characters weren’t so humanly lovable. Their troubles, though great and deep, are seen in a larger perspective of society, history, landscape, that admits sympathy but not self-pity, and lets us share both their pain and their hope.”
—Ursula K. Le Guin

“Bette Husted’s All Coyote’s Children is that rare thing: a novel so real and heartbreaking, so compassionate and assured and meaningful, that I know the people on its pages will stay with me always—fully alive in my mind—as real as the Eastern Oregon landscape they inhabit. Husted’s open heart is in every line of this book. Though she does not veer away from the truth of cataclysmic events, there is humor and great kindness here, and the healing strength of community. I couldn’t have loved this book more.”
—Molly Gloss, author of The Hearts of Horses and The Jump-Off Creek

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

Above the Clearwater: Living on Stolen Land
BETTE LYNCH HUSTED
ISBN 978-0-87071-007-0 $19.95 Paperback

BETTE LYNCH HUSTED’S first collection of essays, Above the Clearwater: Living on Stolen Land (OSU Press), was a finalist for the Oregon Book Award and the WILLA Award in creative nonfiction. She is also the author of At This Distance: Poems and a second collection of essays, Lessons from the Borderlands. Her work has appeared in Fourth Genre, Prairie Schooner, Oregon Humanities, High Desert Journal, Northwest Review, and other journals. She lives in Pendleton, Oregon.
Homing Instincts
Dionisia Morales

As a native New Yorker who now calls Oregon home, Dionisia Morales knows how moving and resettling can spark an identity crisis relative to geography, family, and tradition. The essays collected in Homing Instincts explore how Morales's conception of home plays out in her daily life, as she navigates the gap between where she is and the stories she tells herself about where she belongs.

Although Morales migrated from one North American coast to another, the questions she raises are relevant to migrations of any scale and place, whether across town or around the world. What does it mean to be a newcomer? Who has the right to claim a sense of place? What is gained or lost when we try to fit in? In a world where people are migrating more than ever for social, economic, personal, and political reasons, these questions take on a new urgency.

A wife and mother as well as a professional writer and editor, Morales writes with grace and resolve about a broad range of topics, including pregnancy, people watching, rock climbing, and bee colony collapse. She channels a spirit of adventure and adaptability while acknowledging how certain habits and mindsets are indelibly ingrained and are—like it or not—forever part of where, what, and who we call home.

As issues of migration and social integration play out in national and international politics, Morales provides a personal lens through which readers can appreciate that at one time or another we have all been in the process of arriving. Homing Instincts is a remarkable debut from a gifted prose stylist. It will be warmly received by lovers of the essay form and anyone who has sought, or still seeks, a place to call home.

Words Marked by a Place
Local Histories in Central Oregon
Jarold Ramsey

Words Marked by a Place is a book of interconnected writings reflecting on the human and natural history of central Oregon. This chronological collection presents the reader with key episodes of central Oregon history, from nineteenth-century exploration to the railroading and homesteading era to the era of community-building and development that followed.

While telling these local stories, Jarold Ramsey explores alternative ways of engaging history in the act of writing, breaking new ground by discovering and exploring primary sources that bear on the region’s colorful but little-known past. Throughout the collection, he interrogates “local history” as a subject. What is local history? How is it related to mainstream academic history? What are legitimate ways of doing it? How do the details of what we call local history inform “history-at-large,” and vice-versa?

From the opening narrative concerning Lieutenant Henry Larcom Abbot’s “Railroad Survey” of the region in 1855 to the concluding account of Lieutenant Robert Cranston’s last months and dramatic death, when his “Airacobra” fighter plane crashed near Madras in 1944, Words Marked by a Place sheds new light on the ongoing story of central Oregon by illuminating forgotten corners of its past. Through both theory and example, it represents an important contribution to the history of the region and the endeavors of local historians, wherever they happen to work.


BY THE SAME AUTHOR

New Era
Reflections on the Human and Natural History of Central Oregon
Jarold Ramsey
Beginner’s Luck
Dispatches from the Klamath Mountains
Malcolm Terence

In the late 1960s, Malcolm Terence left his job as a reporter for the Los Angeles Times to look for adventure and may have found more than he bargained for. The era had triggered unprecedented social and political changes in America, tectonic shifts that challenged war and the social order that oppressed people along lines of class, gender, and race. One branch was a back-to-the-land movement, and Terence, who had just traveled for a year managing a rock band, strayed into Black Bear Ranch, a commune just starting in a remote corner of the Klamath Mountains near the California-Oregon border.

Black Bear Ranch still exists, but many of its early residents eventually returned to urban civilization. A few, Terence among them, stayed on in neighboring river towns. Some tried logging, others gold mining, and some tried growing marijuana, all with mixed success. The local mining and timber communities had a checkered opinion of their new hippie neighbors, as did the Native tribes, but it was the kind of place where people helped each other out, even if they didn’t always agree.

When wildfires grew large, Terence and other veterans of the commune joined the fire crews run by the US Forest Service. In between, the Black Bear expats built homesteads, planted gardens, delivered babies, and raised their children. They gradually overcame the skepticism of the locals and joined them in political battles against the use of herbicides in the forest and the Forest Service’s campaign to close all the mining claims. As in the best of organizing efforts, the organizers learned as much as they led.

Beginner’s Luck will appeal to anyone who experienced life on a commune in the 1960s–1970s or who wants to learn about this chapter in modern American history. Terence offers insight into environmental activism and the long history of conflict between resource exploitation and Native American rights without lecturing or pontificating. With wit, humor, and humility, his anecdotal essays chronicle a time and place where disparate people came together to form an unlikely community.

Kaiāulu
Gathering Tides
Mehana Blaich Vaughan

The tide is rising ahead of the early morning sun on the northeast coast of the Hawaiian island of Kaua‘i. Waves rush singing onto the outer reef where two throw net fishermen stalk the surge. An elderly woman with her silver hair in a kerchief makes her way toward shore, two octopuses tucked in her mesh bag. Within hours, two hundred tourists will snorkel, sunbathe, and teeter on the coral, few ever knowing that people fish here or that their catch sustains an entire kaiāulu (community) connected to this stretch of reef.

This coast is known as a playground for tourists and backdrop for Hollywood movies, but catch from small local reefs, and the sharing of this abundance, has sustained area families for centuries, helping them to thrive through tidal waves, hurricanes, an influx of new residents, and economic recessions. Yet fishing families are increasingly invisible and many have moved away, threatened by global commodification and loss of access to coastal lands that are now private retreats for star entertainers, investors, and dot-com millionaires.

Building on two decades of interviews with more than sixty Hawaiian elders, leaders, and fishermen and women, Kaiāulu shares their stories of enduring community efforts to perpetuate kuleana, often translated to mean “rights and responsibilities.” Community actions extend kuleana to include nurturing respectful relationships with resources, guarding and cultivating fishing spots, perpetuating collective harvests and sharing, maintaining connection to family lands, reasserting local governance rooted in ancestral values, and preparing future generations to carry on.

An important contribution to scholarship in the fields of natural resource management, geography, Indigenous Studies, and Hawaiian Studies, Kaiāulu is also a skillfully written and deeply personal tribute to a community based not on ownership, but reciprocity, responsibility, and caring for the places that shape and sustain us all.


MEHANA BLAICH VAUGHAN grew up where the districts of Halele‘a and Ko‘olau meet on the island of Kaua‘i. She is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Management, and the Sea Grant College Program and Hui ‘Āina Momona at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. Mehana’s research and teaching focus on community relationships with natural resources, particularly in indigenous settings, as well as place-based education. Her home is on Kaua‘i with her husband, mother, and three children. Kaiāulu is her first book.

OF RELATED INTEREST

Kanaka Hawai‘i Cartography
Hula, Navigation, and Oratory
RENEE PUALANI LOUIS
Speaking for the River
Confronting Pollution on the Willamette, 1920s–1970s

James V. Hillegas-Elting

Since the late 1960s, Oregon has been at the forefront of environmental protection in the United States. The state generally, and Portland in particular, continue to have strong “green” credentials well into the twenty-first century. Within this forty year period of progress, however, the health of the Willamette River has been a consistent blot on the record. Willamette River water pollution has not gone away—the problem has, in fact, gotten much more complex. James Hillegas-Elting’s book, Speaking for the River, provides a historical look at this dilemma.

Willamette River cleanup efforts between 1926 and 1975 centered on a struggle between abatement advocates and the two primary polluters in the watershed, the City of Portland and the pulp and paper industry. Beginning in 1926, clean streams advocates created ad hoc groups of public health experts, sanitary engineers, conservationists, sportsmen, and others to pressure Portland officials and industry representatives to cease polluting the river. By the late 1960s, these grassroots initiatives found political footholds at the state level. As governor between 1967 and 1975, Tom McCall took the issue of environmental protection personally, providing the charisma and leadership that was needed to finally make substantive progress toward cleaning the Willamette.

Speaking for the River is the first book to describe the historical roots of Willamette River pollution, providing important context for understanding the political, fiscal, and technological antecedents to the present-day conundrum. Hillegas-Elting’s contribution to the academic literature on environmental and urban history in Oregon will be welcomed by policy makers, environmentalists, and concerned citizens alike.

Undercurrents
From Oceanographer to University President
John V. Byrne

Undercurrents recounts the life and career of John Byrne, who started as a geologist at an oil company and retired as president of a major land grant university. He came to Oregon State in 1960 as a faculty member, later becoming department chair, dean, director of the Hatfield Marine Science Center, and vice president for Research and Graduate Studies. Along the way, he took leave from the university to serve the US government, first as a program director for oceanography at the National Science Foundation, and later as the administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, before returning to OSU in 1984 as its twelfth president.

As president of OSU, John Byrne used the lessons learned in industry and government to guide the university through a period of turbulence caused by severe state budget restrictions. During this period of economic contraction, OSU continued under Byrne’s leadership to grow in programs, facilities, and external funding. Byrne was one of the first to introduce Total Quality Management techniques to higher education. He emphasized the importance of international education and was a supporter of significant academic reform in higher education.

While focusing on his professional career, Byrne’s memoir also shares personal stories of a childhood and youth shaped by the Great Depression and World War II. Undercurrents demonstrates on every page the curiosity, intellect, and humanity that made John Byrne successful as a scientist, educator, and administrator. Anyone pursuing a career in science or academia, and anyone interested in the history and legacy of land grant universities will welcome this richly detailed and warmly written account of Byrne’s career.

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