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The Naturalist On The River S

THE NATURALIST
ON THE RIVER AMAZONS

Henry Walter Bates



Synopsis

Henry Walter Bates and his co-naturalist Alfred Russel Wallace embarked together in 1848 on an expedition to the forests of the in search of plants and animals that would help solve the problem of the origin of species. Wallace returned to England in 1852, but tragically lost his entire collection in a shipwreck. The Naturalist on the River s was published in 1863 and catalogs a wondrous range of natural life in vivid description and detail. But Bates' book is much more than a scientist's log, his remarkable dedication to the challenges of exploration and his deep appreciation of the beauty and rhythms of the world of river and rainforest shine through in his writing. Although he finally confessed that the contemplation of Nature alone is not sufficient to fill the human heart, his record of the time he passed in the Garden of Eden offers timely inspiration to our time. Stanfords Travel Classics feature some of the finest historical travel writing in the English language, with authors hailing from both sides of the Atlantic. Every title has been rest in a contemporary typeface and has been printed to a high quality production specification, to create a series that every lover of fine travel literature will want to collect and keep. --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

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Customer Reviews

Henry Walter Bates was an English naturalist and explorer who gave the first scientific account of mimicry in animals. He was most famous for his expedition to the with Alfred Russel Wallace in 1848. --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

I read the Kindle edition which is the edition from 1864. It came out five years after the publication of

Charles Darwin's "The Origin of Species" (I believe all the editions offered are very much the same; after all, this is public domain book.) It includes "An Appreciation" by Darwin and numerous typos and archaic geographical names; however I wasn't the slightest bit distracted. The lengthy narrative is a masterpiece of its kind coming from one of the great naturalists of the nineteenth century in the person of Henry Walter Bates who began this awesome adventure in 1848 with Alfred Russel Wallace. Wallace returned to England in 1852 but Bates stayed on another seven years as he sent over 14,000 specimens back to Europe, some 8,000 of them new to science, including plants, animals, many birds, and many, many insects. Bates does not limit his attention to flora and fauna. He gives the reader a vivid, colorful and detailed account of what it was like to live along the rivers of the among the various "Indian" tribes, the mulattos, the half breeds, the "negroes," free and slave, the whites and even some cannibals. He gives us some idea of the politics, the sociology, geography, and a riveting account of what it's like to face mosquitos, poisonous snakes, alligators, jaguars, biting insects, etc. in heavy, humid heat while tramping through the jungle in bare feet. Yes, he was often in bare feet. In navigating the rivers we learn what it's like to travel aboard small craft tossed about by sharp changes in wind and weather. Additionally, finding enough to eat was no small matter; and eating nothing but turtle flesh for weeks on end with just a smattering of fruits and nuts was more challenging than I would ever want to be challenged. But Bates didn't just endure this; he reveled in it. What a romantic age it was for the naturalist adventurer! It was like competing for the highest prizes since there was still so, so much to be discovered; and to be one of the great naturalists of that age was to be a most amazing and greatly admired person. Bates can claim his place alongside Darwin and Wallace and maybe even hold a bit of an edge in terms of hardships endured and species discovered. His indefatigable curiosity about plants, animals, people and their interactions is like no one I've ever read. I won't say that this book is better than Darwin's "The Voyage of the Beagle" published in 1839, but it belongs in the same league. No serious student of natural history, evolutionary biology, anthropology, or sociology, for that matter, should miss it. The difference between the way people lived along the in the middle of the nineteenth century and the way they live today alone is fascinating. The many hardships of everyday life that Bates endured along with the locals and endured them with such nonchalance amazed me. I thought at one time what a fine thing it would be to study ants in faraway places like the basin. To be honest after reading this book I know that even in

my best years I would not be able to do it. Bottom line: this is the best natural history book I've ever read, and I've read a few. --Dennis Littrell, author of "Understanding Evolution and Ourselves"

Bates spent many years along the , collecting natural history specimens of every living thing, especially insects. He gives fascinating accounts of the lives of the ants and other insects. But the interesting material in this book is not confined to the entomological, for he also describes the lives and habits of the many ethnic groups who inhabit the banks of the , and tells of their life styles and his interactions with them. While ready to generalize about the virtues and vices of the various groups to an extent that would be politically incorrect today, he seems to get along splendidly with all of them, and to face any unfavorable interactions with good humor. Throughout, he expresses his passion for the beauties of the tropical forest, and never seems greatly deterred by the numerous insect pests (mosquitoes, fire ants, gnats, etc.) which most of us would find unbearable. His stay on the was long enough that while his book starts with accounts of ascending the under the force of sail and paddle, it ends with travel by steamboat. This book will appeal especially to those interested in the natural history of tropical forests, but also to those who are interested in the human settlement of the .

Anything you want to know about the flora, fauna, human inhabitants, landscape, breakdown of population in towns and villages WITH racial proportions in the pop., plus endless stories of incidents while sailing in canoes and every other form of available water transport on the from Belem up to Manaus and beyond, around the middle of the 19th century, is in here. For a writer contemplating something set in the 19th C along the , it's a treasure-trove. As a look at the life of a modest but evidently highly intelligent, diplomatic and kindly tempered white man who managed his solitary voyages with an astonishing amount of co-operation and raising very little antagonism, it's a window on someone you'd almost like to know. As a picture of an that by the end of his voyages was already beginning to disappear, it's a painful reminder to anybody with an environmental consciousness of how much natural treasure we have already thrown away.

The old fashioned language is a bit of a struggle to get through some times, but once you get into the book it is a fascinating account of the (appropriate) when most people knew very little about it. I thoroughly enjoyed reading about the various species of butterflies, ants, snakes and the Orangs. People today might be slightly appalled at how Mr Bates shot pretty much anything that moved, but

many of those species weren't endangered in those days (or weren't known to be endangered) and besides, it was for Science! It was quite amusing to hear of his troubles preventing the locals (whom he described as the most lazy, indolent people on the face of the planet) from drinking the alcohol he used to preserve specimens. One thing that stood out to me is the way he would say "lighted up", whereas today we say "lit up." For some reason this small sign of how language has changed over the last century and a half always made me smile.

I just received this book in the mail and I am sure the narrative is amazing. I recently read the Penguin classic's Great Journey excerpt from this book and it left me wanting more. However, the issue I have with this edition is that the font is for people with microscope enhanced vision, that is it say, the font is absolutely tiny. I am in my 20s and do not have poor eye sight, but if I plan to read this edition of the book, I probably will develop problems. Fix the font and I will reorder this book, but for now I will have to return and order it from elsewhere else.

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