



In Search of the Canary Tree: The Story of a Scientist, a Cypress, and a Changing World

Lauren E. Oakes

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The surprisingly hopeful story of one woman's search for resiliency in a warming world

Several years ago, ecologist Lauren E. Oakes set out from California for Alaska's old-growth forests to hunt for a dying tree: the yellow-cedar. With climate change as the culprit, the death of this species meant loss for many Alaskans. Oakes and her research team wanted to chronicle how plants and people could cope with their rapidly changing world. Amidst the standing dead, she discovered the resiliency of forgotten forests, flourishing again in the wake of destruction, and a diverse community of people who persevered to create new relationships with the emerging environment. Eloquent, insightful, and deeply heartening, *In Search of the Canary Tree* is a case for hope in a warming world.

In Search of the Canary Tree: The Story of a Scientist, a Cypress, and a Changing World Details

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From Reader Review In Search of the Canary Tree: The Story of a Scientist, a Cypress, and a Changing World for online ebook

Olive (abookolive) says

Check out my review on Open Letters Review: <https://openlettersreview.com/open-le...>

Leigh says

A different kind of science book which also feels like a memoir. Excellent audio book. The story itself, and the energy with which the narrator reads it, drew me right in and kept my attention all the way. Lauren's physical and emotional journey takes her through the dieback of yellow cypress trees in Alaska, and later on, the death of her father. It is a heartening that although Lauren found reason for discouragement regarding the effect of climate change on cypress trees, she also found multiple reasons for hope in both nature and human behavior.

Kirsten Cutler says

An informative and fascinating narrative about the die-off of Yellow Cedar trees in Southern Alaska that acknowledges previous studies which established the cause to be climate change but then significantly explores the impact of the loss of this tree species, postulates what kind of changes this die-off might generate, and ultimately offers her extensive study and knowledgeable conclusions to provide a data-rich window into the issues of global climate change.

Koen says

Am i starting the year off with a five-star book? Having just finished the second half of the book in one sitting and still processing i think i am. I think this 250 page book is a true gem.

Considering it's length there is really a lot too this book and Oakes' thoughtful narrative touches on many levels.

For her PHD Oakes studied the yellow-cedar tree in Alaska. A species particular about where it will grow, a species coveted for it's fine wood, a species intricately connected to the native people of Alaska and a species dying in large numbers due to climate change.

I guess you could say it's a four part book. Oakes talks about finding her subject and preparing and designing her research. Then there's the fieldwork, gathering data on the ground. Not an easy feat in the rugged and inhospitable landscape of Alaska. In addition to the ecological data Oakes also researches people's relationships with the dying trees by interviewing many Alaskans with different connections to the yellow-cedars. And then there's the realizations and conclusions.

One of the things that resonated most with me; Oakes talks about the difficulties of being an environmental scientist, how do you cope researching, with such intensity, something so devastating in a way. Changing environments, dying forests, loss of species. I never really thought about that but yeah, that can't be easy! Especially with all the things not being done to slow climate change.

Oakes does an fantastic job of conveying those thoughts and feelings. But amazingly, through the years, also shifts, turns, molds this is into a surprisingly positive and inspiring message.

But there's much more. This is a deeply personal science book. Emotional and inspiring. A small gem, I loved it!

Mary says

Ever heard why they used to keep canary in a cold mine? Cause when the tiny canary died, you knew there was lethal gas in the mine that would kill the miners if they didn't flee.

Oakes uses this reference in her title. Oakes's book is about more than just the decline and die off of the Alaskan Yellow Cedar. The focus is on what the changes to this species and others portend for us.

Oakes' research and journey to her Stanford Ph.d is the first part of this book, but she goes on to consider what these changes mean personally to individuals. The message is: spread the word climate change is here now, be sad about what we have lost, make changes so we don't lose more, and be hopeful because species can and do adapt to new conditions.

David Wineberg says

In Search of the Canary Tree refers to the phrase "canary in the coal mine" – the harbinger of disaster. It is the story of a Stanford graduate student who found herself totally immersed in the fast-disappearing yellow-cedar of Alaska's southeast coast. She was fishing for a doctoral thesis topic, and the tree came into ever tighter focus. So the delightfully named Lauren Oakes went after the yellow-cedar from every conceivable angle. She obtained grants, went and checked it out, and spent the next six years gathering data herself and with small teams in the forests. She was rigorous and thorough, to make her thesis unassailable. And yet, this book is deeply personal and cathartic.

That she would put herself through such intense and pressured research is remarkable enough. But there are two more aspects she mixes in. In the midst of it all her father died unexpectedly, in his late 60s, and she had to postpone dealing with it and her grief because grants and seasons won't wait. It clearly affected her and how she looked at the trees, the people and life: through a very different lens because of it. The other thing is her frustration at trying to put a positive light on the rapid disappearance of this huge, not to mention magnificent and useful tree, and how it fits in with all the other looming degradation and destruction from climate change. Because that's what's killing off the trees. They used to depend on Arctic snow cover to protect their roots from freezing. But with little and sometimes no snow any more, the roots are destroyed by the wild temperature swings, the frosts and thaws of spring.

The book details Oakes' microscopic and intensely thorough planning and execution of all aspects of the research, from temperature monitoring to interviewing the locals about how the yellow-cedar fits into their lives. Because trees affect people like no other plants. Especially grand old ones. They are official property markers in England, sacred sites all over the world, and the basis of fond memories for countless millions. People get emotionally attached to trees. So this is also a very emotional account.

For me, the high point came in chapter 6, halfway through the book, where Oakes interviews locals about their relationship and attitude (if any) towards the yellow-cedar. One resident, scientist Greg Streveler, who she knew from her first tour, absolutely dumbfounded her. He had moved to the forest to enjoy it and his life. She could not pin him down to describe civilization and climate change as hopeless, though everything he said reinforced that thought. Yet neither would he allow himself the fantasy of being at all hopeful in thinking he or any one person could change the trajectory. To Oakes, this is a contradiction, but Streveler looks at it differently: Someone installing solar panels is nice. Someone buying a more fuel efficient car is nice. Someone recycling the trash is nice. But it is not going to stop the trainwreck. The sad truth is, the process is accelerating, despite individual efforts, he said. It is simply out of control. I think the reason it stood out was that it was the first time I have seen exactly my take on this in print. It's my attitude, opinion and position too. And it turns out a lot of scientists struggle to get up in the morning because of it.

Streveler knows that Man's uncontrollable instinct is to kill that which is big and old, favoring the young and less significant that aren't yet worthwhile targets. Whether it is cutting down a two thousand year old Giant Sequoia to establish a dancefloor on its stump, draining the Ogallala Reservoir to feed cattle and grow Kentucky blue grass lawns, or hunting large mammals to extinction for trophies, Man looks at everything for its present personal utility, and not its right to exist.

But Streveler also knows Man cannot live in hopelessness. So he has found an attitude that ignores hopelessness without being in any way hopeful. He is living with and within nature, and that is satisfying to him. Oakes cannot relate.

Dr. Lauren Oakes got her Phd, and has kept going back to Alaska. She seems to be as much a part of it as the natives. She knows everyone in the forestry community. And they respect her. She continues to leverage her expertise in every medium available. But it is not clear she has succeeded in finding a positive way to attack or even present the problem with an optimistic bent. Though she really does try.

David Wineberg

?Kimari? says

You might also enjoy:

- ★ [Lab Girl \(highly recommended\)](#)
- ★ [The Hidden Life of Trees \(highly recommended\)](#)
- ★ [Kings of the Yukon](#)
- ★ [The Trees in My Forest](#)
- ★ [The Forest Unseen](#)
- ★ [The Songs of Trees: Stories from Nature's Great Connectors](#)
- ★ [American Canopy: Trees, Forests, and the Making of a Nation](#)

Elentarri says

NOTE: I received an Advanced Readers Copy of this book from NetGalley. This review is my honest opinion of the book.

In Search of the Canary Tree is not so much a popular science book about a specific topic, but rather the author's personal experiences while doing research for her PhD project in Alaska. In the author's own words: *"This book is about a species - a tree called Callitropsis nootkatensis, how I fell under its spell, and how it inspired my search for people and plants thriving amidst change. It chronicles my effort to answer what happens in the wake of yellow-cedar death, not only to uncover the future of these old-growth forests, but to share lessons that apply to people on other parts of the planet. It is a book about finding faith, not of any religious variety, but as a force that summons local solutions to a global problem, that helps me live joyfully and choose what matters most in seemingly dark times. If we start looking at the local picture and the ways in which we all depend on nature in various ways every day, solutions emerge. I witnessed this in Alaska".*

The book starts off slowly but picks up pace. The book is a nicely-written, accessible, personable, informative, and rather intimate view of what one scientist actually did for her research project, the people that influenced her, what her findings were and how this affected her personally.

If you are only looking for scientific information, this book is not for you. If you want a more personal relationship with the scientists behind the number crunching, then you may enjoy this book.

Mimi says

well-written and passionate story by a woman working on her PhD in ecology in Alaska among dying trees from climate change.

Andrew Calderwood says

This book is a great story about a woman who has a passion for science and a way with storytelling. Intriguing from the foundations of science aspect and personal enough to capture the reader. Tells an important message about the health of our planet and how we can live as one with the Earth.
