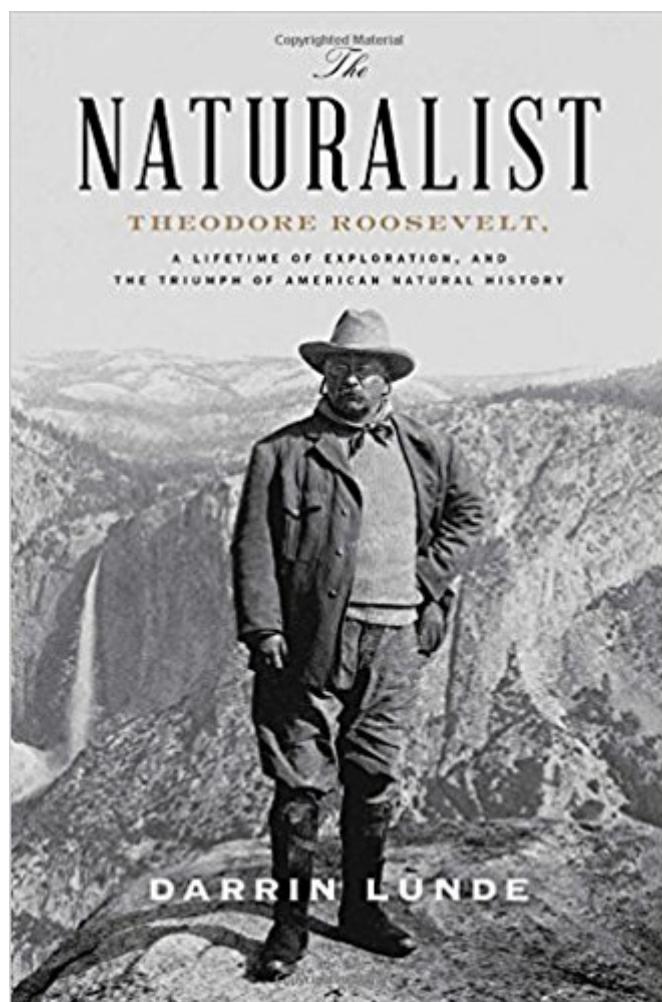


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The Naturalist: Theodore Roosevelt, A Lifetime Of Exploration, And The Triumph Of American Natural History



Synopsis

A captivating new account of how Theodore Roosevelt's lifelong passion for the natural world set the stage for America's wildlife conservation movement and determined his legacy as a founding father of today's museum naturalism. No U.S. president is more popularly associated with nature and wildlife than is Theodore Roosevelt, "prodigious hunter, tireless adventurer, and ardent conservationist. We think of him as a larger-than-life original, yet in *The Naturalist*, Darrin Lunde has firmly situated Roosevelt's indomitable curiosity about the natural world in the tradition of museum naturalism. As a child, Roosevelt actively modeled himself on the men (including John James Audubon and Spencer F. Baird) who pioneered this key branch of biology by developing a taxonomy of the natural world, basing their work on the experiential study of nature. The impact that these scientists and their trailblazing methods had on Roosevelt shaped not only his audacious personality but his entire career, informing his work as a statesman and ultimately affecting generations of Americans' relationship to this country's wilderness. Drawing on Roosevelt's diaries and travel journals as well as Lunde's own role as a leading figure in museum naturalism today, *The Naturalist* reads Roosevelt through the lens of his love for nature. From his teenage collections of birds and small mammals to his time at Harvard and political rise, Roosevelt's fascination with wildlife and exploration culminated in his triumphant expedition to Africa, a trip which he himself considered to be the apex of his varied life. With narrative verve, Lunde brings his singular experience to bear on our twenty-sixth president's life and constructs a perceptively researched and insightful history that tracks Roosevelt's maturation from exuberant boyhood hunter to vital champion of serious scientific inquiry.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I usually enjoy all things Roosevelt, and Theodore Roosevelt is a fascinating man. But I had a very difficult time reading *The Naturalist: Theodore Roosevelt and the Rise of American Natural History* by Darrin Lunde. Roosevelt described himself as a "hunter-naturalist," meaning he applied the skills of a hunter toward being a better naturalist. I found the two categories hard to reconcile in this Vine book selection. Theodore Roosevelt's (TR) career as a naturalist began when he was 8 years old. He saw a dead harbor seal in the window of a New York City grocery store and became fascinated. He had read about how naturalists kept animal specimens to study them, and now he had a chance to practice naturalism himself. Although the store would only give young TR the skull, it became the start of "The Roosevelt Museum of Natural History." Soon, he was collecting mice, shrews, and birds, where he learned their Latin names, their history, and he began using taxidermy to preserve his finds. Some of his exploits are comical. He paid friends and family to collect mice for him. When housekeepers revolted, he had to move his ever-expanding collection out of his bedroom. And when someone discarded some mice he kept in his dresser, TR called it a "loss to science." But TR was a hunter and the older he became, the bigger the game he hunted. And this is where *The Naturalist* lost me. I found the sections about natural history fascinating. But I thought the hunting sections were tedious and disturbing. It took me a good three weeks to read *The Naturalist* because I started losing interest. TR called those opposed to hunting "mushy sentimentalists," and I imagine I fall into this category.

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