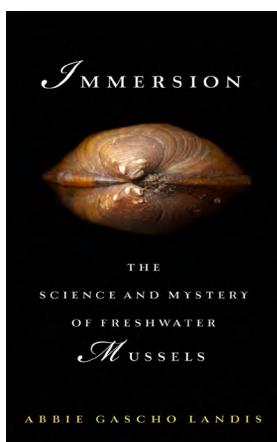


Immersion: The Science and Mystery of Freshwater Mussels

By Abbie Gascho Landis. 2017. Island Press. 256 pages, 34.50 CAD, Cloth or E-book.

Immersion is a book about freshwater mussels: what they are, how they live, why they matter, why so many of them are imperilled, and how we can change that. Best described as a popular science book, this is no sterile examination of freshwater bivalves. The writing is funny and charming, equal parts accurate, informative description, and

transportive narration. In addition to presenting a compelling argument for why freshwater mussels are fascinating creatures, *Immersion* explores tensions between water for crop irrigation and water to keep the river flowing, the *Endangered Species Act* versus corporate



interests, and mussel researchers versus the onslaught of pollution, habitat loss, and fragmented landscapes.

A self-professed freshwater mussel groupie, the author is a writer, veterinarian, and naturalist. She is also the wife of a freshwater mussel biologist and the mother of two creek-loving toddlers. Sourced from field and laboratory visits with experts as well as her own musseling experiences, the ten chapters are well organized and coherent, covering mussel reproduction, research, and restoration in engrossing detail. The selected bibliography provides further reading for the dedicated enthusiast, including peer-reviewed journal articles from the scientists whose work is featured in the text as well as news pieces and reference texts. Individual chapter sections vary in length but none are overlong or feel bloated. As each section is a logical and relatively self-contained parcel nested within the chapter's thematic whole, the structure of the book lends itself both to casual and to binge reading styles. The line drawings peppered throughout the book are few but effective, illustrating key details in harmony with the text. The author's prose is appropriately descriptive and I was

certainly not left wanting for illustrations to visualize the subject matter.

This book ignites a sudden and urgent impulse to grab a snorkel and run to the nearest riffle. If you live in northern latitudes, I recommend reading *Immersion* in the early warm weather months, so that you can satisfy that urge when mussels are active (and without the need for a polar bear dip). It is the quality of writing and depth of enthusiasm for the topic that sets this book apart from other similar popular science books. Instead of passively informing the reader about an interesting topic, the author and the researchers within the pages

carry you with them into their streams and laboratories. Like them, you may catch yourself proselytizing about mussel biology to friends and strangers alike.

This is not a book you will want to part with, instead revisiting it from time to time to refresh and revisit. If you are new to the world of freshwater mussels, this book is guaranteed to change the way you look at your local creeks, rivers, and streams. I can (and do) enthusiastically recommend this book to anyone with so much as a glimmer of interest in the natural world.

HEATHER A. CRAY
Waterloo, ON, Canada