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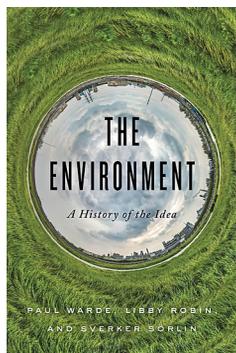
The Environment: A History of the Idea

By Paul Warde, Libby Robin, and Sverker Sörlin. 2018. Johns Hopkins University Press. 256 pages, 29.95 USD, Cloth.

Did you know that although the word “environment” has been used in the English language for over 200 years, our present concept of “the environment” only began to take shape about 70 years ago? In *The Environment: A History of the Idea*, authors Paul Warde, Libby Robin, and Sverker Sörlin have put together a fascinating work coalescing the history of our modern concept of the environment. Consisting of a brief prologue, seven chapters, and appended with a detailed notes section, brief bibliographic essay, and index, this book consists of an intellectual history of the relatively recent (post-World War II) environmental concept.

Each of the book’s seven chapters illustrates the historical development of various key components of our modern concept of “the environment”. Chapter 1 introduces foundational works from the early postwar era that contributed to the modern environmental concept, such as William Vogt’s (1948) *Road to Survival* (paid homage by the chapter name and mentioned/discussed numerous times within the book). Additionally, the first chapter sets forth the authors’ proposed “Four Dimensions of ‘Environment’” (p. 14) consisting of expertise, the future, trust in numbers, and scale/scalability. Chapters 2–7 summarize a variety of evolving concepts and scientific developments, such as computer modelling, post-world war resource conservation concerns, the birth of ecology, climate change, non-governmental organizations, international politics, the concept of the Anthropocene, and the newly emerging field of environmental humanities (to list but a few examples!). Additionally, these chapters detail the major and rapid evolution of the modern concept of the environment, particularly illustrated via summaries of the subjects of environmentally-focused conferences occurring after 1948.

Each chapter is relatively concise (approximately 25 pages in length) and provides a history of important, interrelated components crucial to the shaping



of modern environmental thinking. Although each chapter is largely its own piece, I found some portions of each to overlap at times in terms of content, often referring to other chapters within the book. This does not detract from the work as a whole, however, but illustrates how a number of distinct but interweaving concepts coalesce to form the modern concept of the environment. I found this book to largely avoid technical language, with references and technical notes appended into a considerable Notes section at the end of the book. This makes the book more accessible to the non-specialized reader but allows one to dive further into the material referenced if desired. While each chapter is a summary of historical context, the authors add to its value and interpretation by providing meaningful original commentary and analysis throughout the book.

Should you give it a read? Absolutely. Do not let the “history” in the title dissuade you from giving this book a try if you are not a history buff: this book is intended for a broad audience. The authors have followed their own suggestion by writing this work as a means of “framing a problem or concept as a narrative or story” (p. 178). I felt like much of the writing is presented in almost a ‘story-like’ narrative. In some parts, I almost felt as if I were listening to the authors discuss the content of the book over coffee. Overall, I found *The Environment: A History of the Idea* to be an accessible, enjoyable, and very informative read: I learned something new at the turn of nearly every page. Also, this work contains many references to other books (in addition to so much more) and as a result has introduced me to a number of titles which are now on my future reading list. I highly recommend *The Environment: A History of the Idea* to anyone with an interest in any aspect of environmental study. This would likely include most readers of *The Canadian Field-Naturalist*.

Literature Cited

Vogt, W. 1948. *Road to Survival*. Kessinger Publishing, LLC, Whitefish, Montana, USA.

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