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**REWILD YOURSELF:
23 SPELLBINDING WAYS TO MAKE NATURE MORE VISIBLE**
Simon BARNES,
London, Simon & Schuster, 2020, 198 S. ISBN: 9781471175428

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Simon Barnes is a nature writer and conservationist. His latest book builds upon this by examining the concept of ‘rewilding’ (meaning restoration of land to its natural, uncultivated state). This has been a topical notion in Western society for a decade; its extension to include the ‘self’ makes this book unique. The connection between the rewilding and the self has the potential to make lived reality more enjoyable. Barnes offers us twenty-three ‘spells’ and ‘magical ways’ of looking at and living within nature; the writer seeks to make us rethink and reimagine our relationship with nature’s ‘wildness’. Simple methods and observations are suggested, some using binoculars and rainproof trousers, and others requiring travelling. The author intends to return our consciousness to our ancestral ‘wild’ roots.

In brief, Barnes thinks it is important to ‘rewild’ oneself because modern urban life is all-consuming; we have lost, or are losing, our ‘wild side’ (in a natural context, not referring to wild drunken parties and hedonism). It is important to note that Barnes refers to the positive side of our untamed nature, not our negative side. Barnes says: *‘We’re not just losing the wild world. We’re forgetting it. We’re no longer noticing it. We’ve lost the habit of looking and seeing and listening and hearing’* (p. 2). To overcome this problem, we require the ‘smallest shake’ or the ‘gentlest nudge’. Indeed, *‘As you take on new techniques and a little new equipment, you will discover new creatures and, with them, areas of yourself that have been dormant. Once put to use, they wake up and start working again. You become wilder in your mind and in your heart’* (p. 3).

Barnes’s source material is based on his practical knowledge and printed literature. The book is thematically structured and well-organised, allowing readers to dip into relevant sections as necessary. The writing style is clear, and Barnes is very concise in his use of language, with well-crafted and engaging sentences. Chapter three introduces the natural world as an ‘adventure’ and a *‘magical new country’* (p. 22). Barnes says something simple but profound about birds and place and season; bird types tell us our location, for example, in the countryside or city or

by water, and when it is summer or winter (p. 23). Regarding the environment, the sea is '*bewildering, thrilling, and intoxicating*' (p. 25). While chapter four comments that some creatures, like Adders and Grass Snakes, are the '*invisible life of our island*' (p. 32). Some chapters ask us to undertake simple tasks to help change our physical, emotional, and mental relationship with nature; in chapter seven, Barnes speaks of 'sitting still' and learning to '*care and not to care*' (especially if no wild experience occurs), and to become '*less an observer of the wild world than a living part of it*' (p. 59). In this case, interestingly, wildness comes '*in the waiting. In the sitting*' (p. 60). Chapter eight picks up the water discussion by highlighting that snorkelling in a coral environment or clear sea will transport the swimmer '*in a single instant into the land of the most incredible wonders you will ever see*' (p. 62). On page 90, Barnes writes exquisitely: '*Looking at water, like looking at fire, is the thinking person's television*'. Chapter ten offers a shift in understanding nature's magic regarding pathways and tracks created by large and small animals across the landscape. The idea is to spot these routes and understand that animals seek the best way to and from food sources. Animal excretion and footprints help us spot the paths.

The soundscape is highlighted (in chapter 13); Barnes notes that the birds' dawn chorus '*is perhaps the single biggest wildlife miracle that we have in Britain*' (p. 106). The intention is to use the senses to remystify our lives and to bring our relationship with the natural world closer to how our distant ancestors experienced nature. Also mentioned is that scientific research shows that the sounds of nature calm and enrich us. As a species, we emphasise sight; however, sound is equally important. The discussion says that, at first, experiencing nature and being physically in it is necessary and revitalising. The next stage is naming and researching what we see, hear, and encounter. However, the main element of the rewilding venture is 'love' (p. 152) and finding pleasure in nature and sharing it with others (p. 94). Barnes seeks to help reduce the divide between humans and the non-human world; he sees nature as a continuum encompassing everything (p. 156). Should we

undertake Barnes's techniques, we can access the gifts of nature: '*these are given freely to those who ask than to those who demand. Ask, then, and receive both humbly and gratefully*' (p. 174).

The book is worthy and well-intentioned, so to find minor faults seems petty; however, the work needs an index and a (select) bibliography. Except for Barnes's time spent in Zambia, it is Western-centred in explaining how individuals interact with nature. In other lands, away from cities, many people live close to nature. Also, some nature themes are not mentioned, like men's groups that hug trees and discuss masculinity and sympathetic forms of male bonding. Similarly, no significant comment is made about nature represented as feminine. Finally, a few quotes here and there from Islamic, Hindu, and Native American traditions would broaden the discussion and add value to the content.

Rewild Yourself is helpful for established readers and thinkers of nature studies—it is original in its approach, offering practical ideas and techniques. However, the target audience for this book is people with busy everyday lives and little time for nature meditation (having said that, they perhaps are beginning to reevaluate how they perceive nature and the self due to stress management or meditative practices). Overall, the book is worth reading for its novel approach. Indeed, some of the descriptive writing is sublime. It is a practical and accessible study that makes one realise the universality of those moments when we experience nature in 'magical' and 'spellbinding ways', regardless of gender, ethnicity, disability, sexuality, and class.

Source:

Simon Barnes. (2020). *Rewild Yourself: 23 Spellbinding Ways To Make Nature More Visible*. London: Simon and Schuster.