Discovering mosses and mussels for natural inspiration

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Every once in a while, one discovers books on some aspect of the environment that are as much inspirational as they are about science. This review is about two such books.

**Robin Wall Kimmerer: *Gathering Moss: A Natural and Cultural History of Mosses*
Corvallis, OR: Oregon State University Press, 2003**

This book by Professor Robin Kimmerer from the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry (SUNY/ESF) is the winner of the John Burroughs Medal Award for Natural Writing. Professor Kimmerer is the Director of the Center for Native Peoples and the Environment at SUNY/ESF.

**Abbie Gascho Landis: *Immersion: The Science and Mystery of Freshwater Mussels*
Wash DC, Covelo and London: Island Press, 2017**

Abbie Landis is a writer, veterinarian and naturalist and was a finalist for the Constance Rooke Creative Nonfiction Award. Much of her experience with freshwater mussels is drawn for biological fieldwork with her husband.

Both writers utilize experiential narrative to draw readers into the lifestyle cycles of mosses and mussels. The engaging writing styles of both authors provide an inspirational connection to their respective subjects.

Kimmerer's book is really a series of essay-like chapters that address the ecology of mosses including growth, feeding, reproduction, and role of site conditions. There are also chapters about the indigenous uses of mosses as well as the threats to their survival in the forest. Many of the chapter narratives

relate to her field experiences in the Pacific Northwest and New York State's Adirondack Mountains.

Landis's book covers the ecology, biological functions, and desired site characteristics of freshwater mussels. Again much of the author's narrative is place-specific to the freshwater stream habitats of Alabama and the Mississippi River basin. She covers the historical uses of mussels followed by exploitation of mussels for food and products by nonindigenous populations. Also treated are the challenges for maintaining endangered mussel species as well as reintroduction of mussels.

Both authors utilize the fieldwork experiences such as snorkeling along a stream looking for mussels or climbing through thick forest underbrush looking for mosses—to engage the reader. Both authors utilize experiential family connections such as bringing their children as part of the fieldwork experience. The experiential narrative offers relief from what might otherwise, might be a drier scientific narrative. Lastly both authors provide inspirational natural connections. Both of these books left the reviewer with new respect for the ecological roles of both mosses and freshwater mussels.

These books could be utilized as specialized textbooks for their respective ecological subjects or as part of a natural history course. They could also serve as books to be used for creative nature writing at both the undergraduate and graduate college levels.

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