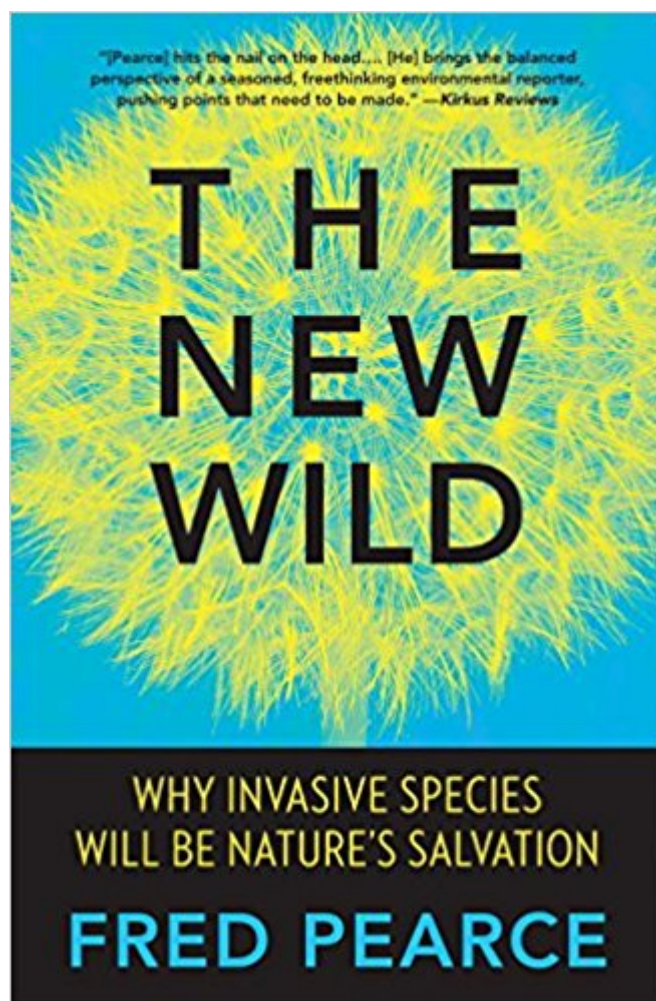


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# The New Wild: Why Invasive Species Will Be Nature's Salvation



## Synopsis

Named one of the best books of 2015 by *The Economist* A provocative exploration of the "new ecology" and why most of what we think we know about alien species is wrong. For a long time, veteran environmental journalist Fred Pearce thought in stark terms about invasive species: they were the evil interlopers spoiling pristine "natural" ecosystems. Most conservationists and environmentalists share this view. But what if the traditional view of ecology is wrong? What if true environmentalists should be applauding the invaders? In *The New Wild*, Pearce goes on a journey across six continents to rediscover what conservation in the twenty-first century should be about. Pearce explores ecosystems from remote Pacific islands to the United Kingdom, from San Francisco Bay to the Great Lakes, as he digs into questionable estimates of the cost of invader species and reveals the outdated intellectual sources of our ideas about the balance of nature. Pearce acknowledges that there are horror stories about alien species disrupting ecosystems, but most of the time, the tens of thousands of introduced species usually swiftly die out or settle down and become model eco-citizens. The case for keeping out alien species, he finds, looks increasingly flawed. As Pearce argues, mainstream environmentalists are right that we need a rewilding of the earth, but they are wrong if they imagine that we can achieve that by reengineering ecosystems. Humans have changed the planet too much, and nature never goes backward. But a growing group of scientists is taking a fresh look at how species interact in the wild. According to these new ecologists, we should applaud the dynamism of alien species and the novel ecosystems they create. In an era of climate change and widespread ecological damage, it is absolutely crucial that we find ways to help nature regenerate. Embracing the new ecology, Pearce shows us, is our best chance. To be an environmentalist in the twenty-first century means celebrating nature's wildness and capacity for change. From the Hardcover edition.

## Book Information

Paperback: 264 pages

Publisher: Beacon Press; Reprint edition (April 5, 2016)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0807039551

ISBN-13: 978-0807039557

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.8 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 13.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.9 out of 5 stars 45 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #374,734 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #101 in Books > Science & Math > Nature & Ecology > Endangered Species #388 in Books > Science & Math > Biological Sciences > Animals > Wildlife #388 in Books > Science & Math > Nature & Ecology > Natural History

## Customer Reviews

“Pearce hits the nail on the head | [He] brings the balanced perspective of a seasoned, freethinking environmental reporter, pushing points that need to be made.” —Kirkus Reviews  
Praise for *The New Wild* “Pearce shows that biodiversity actually increases more frequently than it decreases when newer wildlife marches in. Must reading for environmentalists of every stripe, and an optimistic report on the resilience of nature in a world of constantly shifting ecosystems.” —Booklist  
“Pragmatic conservation has to begin with undogmatic, realistic ecology, which shows that alien-invasive plants and animals almost always increase biodiversity—and therefore nature’s general health and robustness. Fred Pearce’s new wild suggests a matching new conservation.” —Stewart Brand, author of *Whole Earth Discipline* “I wholly agree with Fred Pearce’s argument for rewilding. Life, from the smallest bacterium to the whole living planet, is dynamic. Species do not belong in a planet-sized zoo. We should let Gaia evolve.” —James Lovelock, author of *The Vanishing Face of Gaia* and *A Rough Ride to the Future*  
Praise for *Fred Pearce The Land Grabbers* “Terrific” [Pearce has] produced a work of required reading for anyone concerned about global justice in the twenty-first century.” —Raj Patel, author of *The Value of Nothing*  
“When the Rivers Run Dry” —An enriching and farsighted work.” —Jai Singh, *San Francisco Chronicle*

Fred Pearce is an award-winning author and journalist based in London. He has reported on environmental, science, and development issues from eighty-five countries over the past twenty years. Environment consultant at *New Scientist* since 1992, he also writes regularly for the *Guardian* newspaper and Yale University’s prestigious e360 website. Pearce was voted UK Environment Journalist of the Year in 2001 and CGIAR agricultural research journalist of the year in 2002, and he won a lifetime achievement award from the Association of British Science Writers in 2011. His many books include *With Speed and Violence*, *Confessions of an Eco-Sinner*, *The Coming Population Crash*, and *The Land Grabbers*.

Fred Pearce's previous book, *The Coming Population Crash!*, gave me a new perspective on Malthus. This book is giving me a new perspective on "invasive species". The book is well-researched and loaded with detailed facts and first-hand experiences from his travels around the world. Although I am a serious environmentalist, I now have a more balanced view of realistic, versus idealistic approaches to conservation. This would be a good book to read to balance the exaggerated view of E.O. Wilson's Half Earth proposal. The point is that mankind has already disturbed earth's environments so that the ideal of a return to some primeval state is neither possible nor desirable. Still, this book has its own slant so it should not be the only book you read on the subject!

Excellent read. Well researched and well written. Not going to go down well with those who have trained themselves to see Nature as something to be controlled and cosseted, but a fresh, brave voice in our new world of ideological gardening. Hopefully it will open a few eyes to the ways in which Mother Nature solves problems that we're only too happy to create. Checked it out at the library a year ago and keep referring back to it so finally bought my own copy.

Excellent book that explores the impact of introduced species to new environments and discusses the positive aspects that these invasions can have on the environment. You can never restore the world to before humans arrived and book highlights the problems that restorative ecologists face and the damage their thinking is doing to an evolving world.

Fascinating look at a vast number of examples of how humanity has irreversibly changed the planet. And that maybe hope lies in letting nature do what it does best and survive in the new spaces we've created.

In tone, this is a highly biased book with an axe to grind. The intro has the classic characteristics of a polemic against invasion biology. Pearce wants to have it both ways. He claims that he is "not accusing environmentalists of being closet xenophobes", then later says that "Conservationists...are the ethnic cleansers of nature." Pearce claims to go beyond the simplistic notion of "good guys and bad guys", but uniformly maligns people who are concerned about invasive species. Sometimes he contradicts himself in consecutive sentences: "...true environmentalists should be applauding the invaders." (which is followed by) "I do not want to suggest that we should always welcome every alien species."

common technique in these polemics is to exaggerate the opinions and goals of those who do habitat restoration. Few of us land managers are "trying to keep out all foreign invaders", or setting our sights on the pristine or virgin, or seeking perfection. Nor do we say, in Pearce's caricature, that "Native is good and foreign is bad." Instead, we look at whether a given species is behaving invasively. That species may be native cattail or nonnative Phragmites. It's the behavior, not the place of origin, that matters. Plant species that behave invasively tend to be nonnative, given that in most cases the local wildlife have not evolved a taste for eating their leaves and thus do not discourage their rampancy. Herbivory, critical to limiting invasiveness, doesn't show up in Pearce's index, nor in any of the sections of the book I have read. Another technique used by Pearce is to portray views opposed to his as based on emotion rather than evidence, e.g. "fear of change", "hatred of the foreign", or sentimentally wanting to go backward. The author leaves readers ignorant of the difference between alien (place of origin) and invasive (behavior). He portrays himself flatteringly as bucking conformity, forgetting that there may be some wisdom in what the majority of ecologists have found to be true. Another technique used by apologists for invasive species is to ignore the rate of change. Pearce claims that the Everglades has always been in flux, and that therefore we should not be concerned about the comparatively radical pace of species introduction in recent times. Rate of change, as with the speed of a car accident, greatly influences the ecological disruption that ensues. It's taken awhile for me, in reading books, opeds, and articles that claim invasive species aren't really a problem, to notice just how odd it is to judge the destructiveness of invasive species by whether they have caused native species to go extinct. Pearce says, "There have been extinctions among the natives, but remarkably few." Are we really going to defend invasive species by saying they haven't killed every last one of this or that native? What I've seen in the field is that a native species may still exist somewhere, but has become so rare and isolated as to be functionally extinct. One last quote that I find highly disturbing: "That means we need to lose our dread of the alien and the novel. It means conservationists need to stop spending all their time backing loser species--the endangered and reclusive. They must start backing some winners. For winners are sorely needed if nature is to regroup and revive in the twenty first century--if the new wild is to prosper." Winners, losers, nature portrayed as down and out, needing to regroup and revive--doesn't this sound like Donald Trump's portrayal of America as down and out, as having lost its greatness, and needing to back a winner? I've seen a lot of what Pearce might call "loser native species" begin to thrive once deer browsing has been curtailed and the invasive species

competition has been diminished. More often than not, by protecting those species, we also protect habitats and a web of life of which that species is a part.

Native plant mania is everywhere now but you only need common sense to know that nature uses all the tools in her palette to build a thriving ecosystem and doesn't worry about where the species came from. We can't go back to what was before- even nature changes through the years. Fred Pearce is one of the first to acknowledge that we don't know everything about building ecosystems and that "invasive" species are not always bad, rather they often repair or complement existing ecosystems. If you are one of those people who go around worrying about this or that invasive species ruining the wilderness you need to read this book. Much of the supposed knowledge of how invasive species interact in a new environment is based on a few studies done decades ago and cited over and over. Some of those studies were small and flawed scientifically, yet we continue to use them to support the idea that invasive species are always bad. Pearce provides some studies and recent findings that seem to suggest that we are getting it wrong- invasive species usually are benign or even helpful in the new environment. A forest is a forest for example whether it is of trees that grew in the area long ago or of species new to the area. Other species generally adapt after a short period to a new species in the environment and adding new species only rarely cause the extinction of species already in an environment. Kudos to Fred Pearce for bucking the trend and presenting real information instead of going along with the "accepted" body of knowledge. I can hear the howling of the native species preservationists now. It's amazing how fanatic some of those crusaders against "invasive" species can be. I hope they read the book and re-think some of their positions. The book is an easy and entertaining read yet presents some great ideas and a new perspective on saving the wilderness.

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