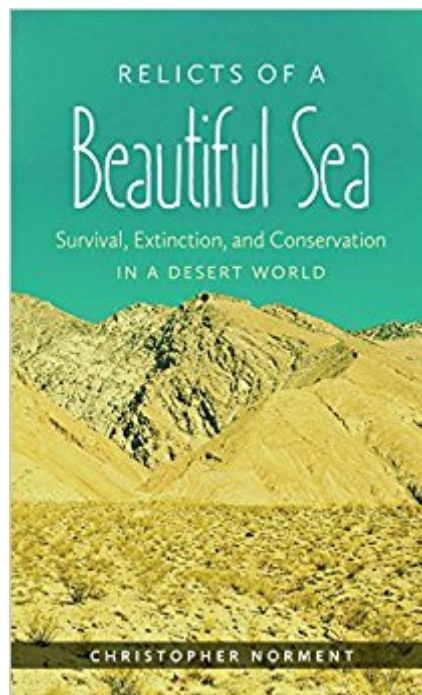




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# Relicts Of A Beautiful Sea: Survival, Extinction, And Conservation In A Desert World



## Synopsis

Along a tiny spring in a narrow canyon near Death Valley, seemingly against all odds, an Inyo Mountain slender salamander makes its home. "The desert," writes conservation biologist Christopher Norment, "is defined by the absence of water, and yet in the desert there is water enough, if you live properly." *Relicts of a Beautiful Sea* explores the existence of rare, unexpected, and sublime desert creatures such as the black toad and four pupfishes unique to the desert West. All are anomalies: amphibians and fish, dependent upon aquatic habitats, yet living in one of the driest places on earth, where precipitation averages less than four inches per year. In this climate of extremes, beset by conflicts over water rights, each species illustrates the work of natural selection and the importance of conservation. This is also a story of persistence--for as much as ten million years--amid the changing landscape of western North America. By telling the story of these creatures, Norment illustrates the beauty of evolution and explores ethical and practical issues of conservation: what is a four-inch-long salamander worth, hidden away in the heat-blasted canyons of the Inyo Mountains, and what would the cost of its extinction be? What is any lonely and besieged species worth, and why should we care?

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

An intriguing tapestry of scientific exploration and natural history that also takes turns as a eulogy, a love letter, a poem and ultimately a plea.--High Country NewsCreates a poetic-ecological argument for conservation on a global scale. . . . Highly recommended.--ChoiceYou don't typically find

intelligent passion like that in treatises with this kind of scientific gravamen, but they glitter throughout the length of *Relicts of a Beautiful Sea*. This is natural history of the finest order.--Open Letters  
A moving meditation on nature. . . . In examining small details in nature, Norment manages to effectively address larger existential issues.--Publishers Weekly  
For those who seek . . . a melange of science, literature and passion, *Relicts of a Beautiful Sea* offers sanctuary as rare as the survivors it illuminates.--Kansas Alumni Magazine  
The marvel of aquatic animal life in isolated, seemingly hostile desert surroundings of the Death Valley region is beautifully captured in this blend of natural history, the hard realities and occasional successes of conservation biology in the region, and personal reflections on nature and human foibles.--Copeia

This is a unique natural history story, authored by a working scientist who handily imparts facts and details while infusing the pages with a personal and emotional quality rarely seen in popular writings by scientists. Its playful contrast of hard realities, artistic impressions, and personal feelings sets it well apart from other books in the field.--T. DeLene Beeland, author of *The Secret World of Red Wolves*  
This is a personal odyssey to gather deep understanding of a strange, beautiful, and fragile quarter of America's wilderness. It is a book that argues with passion for the immense worth of human feeling in motivating both the acute search for insight and the determination to value and safeguard the unique species and habitats of the Earth.--Melanie Challenger, author of *On Extinction: How We Became Estranged from Nature*

This is a beautifully and sensitively written trip through an area of California that I know well. I love it when a scientist writes with a poet's sensitivity to the subject, and can craft the written word with elegance. I recommend it especially to those who love the deserts of southern California and western Nevada.

This book is so beautifully written, it brought tears to my eyes. Having just returned from the area around Death Valley, I could relate very well to most of the book. I too had fallen in love with the tiny pupfish. If you have not been to the Mojave, this book will probably encourage you to go. And if have been there, you may want to return.

Great synthesis of information about the focal species that is unavailable elsewhere. Easy and enjoyable read for a nonfiction book. Conservation biologists should have a look at it - especially those studying desert organisms.

This book combines science, history, and the personal experiences and perspective of the author in a beautifully written way.

Wonderful stories and writing. Prosaic nature writing by a scientist. I love this book.

I have read, and recommend, all of Christopher Norment's books, but Relicts of a Beautiful Sea is his best yet. Norment combines the patient insights of a scientist, the thoughtful questions of an investigative reporter, and the elegiac sensitivities of a man at home in the desert wilds—all in the service of some of the most isolated and endangered fish and amphibians in the arid basin and range country east of the Sierra Nevada. The book offers the best of what creative nonfiction can give: a thorough education in forgotten worlds in the companionable prose of a writer who, like John Donne, both thinks and feels very deeply.

This is a beautiful book. Not only does it cover the technical aspect of what is going on ecologically in the Death Valley area but Dr. Norment breathes the story to life with his words. I may be slightly biased by being taught by him in the past but I am being taught again by his novel on how to be a better environmentalist.

a lyrical exploration of why conservation matters, using the improbable existence of amphibians and fish in one of earth's driest deserts as examples. Norment writes poetically and clearly and it was over before I was ready.

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