

The Nature of Spring

Jim Crumley

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Forthright and poetic, *The Nature of Spring* belongs to a quartet of Scottish nature writer Jim Crumley's books.

Heading into the Highlands and islands in "the backward spring of 2018," Crumley pursued customary signs and creatures of the season despite his creeping suspicion that all was not right in this time of "global climate chaos." Past the first day of meteorological spring, a late storm dropped eighteen inches of snow: "it got cold again ... and that troubled this watcher of nature." And flooding and late migration meant that Crumley's totem for the start of the season (the return of sand martins to a local bay) failed him for the first time in thirty years. These moments were a source of constant "disquiet" as he moved on to indulge his love of mountains and "island addiction" across the northern UK.

The book's undercurrents of anxiety do not detract from Crumley's joy over getting to know species and individual animals through prolonged observation. Such "moments of enchantment" are plentiful: he encountered badgers, eagles, ravens, and stoats. In one peaceable surprise, he watched a pine marten and a fox touch noses, then carry on their separate ways.

A spirit of pilgrimage infuses Crumley's work, with traditional religious destinations like Iona and Lindisfarne also providing communion with nature. He imagines connections crossing time, too: "The trees I hold dearest are those that remember wolves." Crumley references poets and nature writers in his epigraphs, but also contributes verses of his own. Here and in prose, alliteration and vibrant imagery reign: "April is often a poor thing in Shetland, grey-faced and hollow-cheeked, withered by winter and flayed by ... ocean winds."

The Nature of Spring celebrates the season with lyricism, but also sounds an environmental alarm.

REBECCA FOSTER (January / February 2023)

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