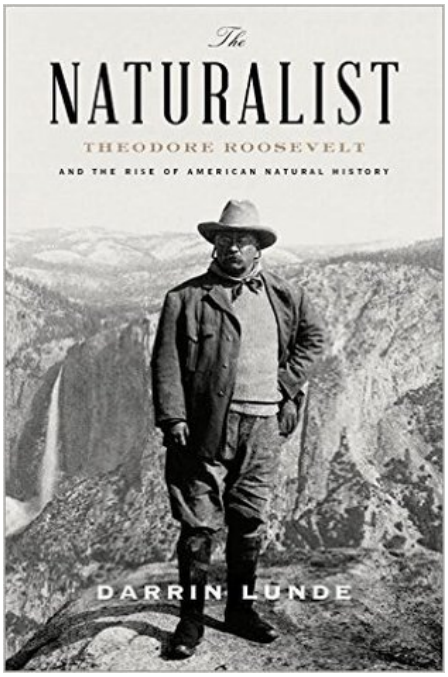

The Naturalist: Theodore Roosevelt and His Adventures in the Wilderness

Darrin Lunde

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The surprising story of intrepid naturalist Theodore Roosevelt and how his lifelong passion for the natural world set the stage for America's wildlife conservation movement.

Perhaps no American president is more associated with nature and wildlife than Theodore Roosevelt, a prodigious hunter and adventurer and an ardent conservationist. We think of Roosevelt as an original, yet in *The Naturalist*, Darrin Lunde shows how from his earliest days Roosevelt actively modeled himself in the proud tradition of museum naturalists—the men who pioneered a key branch of American biology through their desire to collect animal specimens and develop a taxonomy of the natural world. The influence these men would have on Roosevelt would shape not just his personality but his career, informing his work as a politician and statesman and ultimately affecting generations of Americans' relationship to this country's wilderness. Pulling from Roosevelt's diaries and expedition journals, Lunde constructs a brilliantly researched, singularly insightful history that reveals the roots of Roosevelt’s enduring naturalist legacy through the group little-known men whose work and lives defined his own.

The Naturalist: Theodore Roosevelt and His Adventures in the Wilderness Details

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From Reader Review The Naturalist: Theodore Roosevelt and His Adventures in the Wilderness for online ebook

Alyssa Lane says

I found this book very boring. It went into way too much detail about every kind of animal Teddy shot and killed and how he would gut and skin it and preserve it and about what a weird sickly kid he was, etc etc. I don’t know what I was expecting, probably more about his legacy and naturalist policies later in his life (and maybe the book gets to the eventually, I don’t know because I’m giving up at about 25/30%). Anyways I just couldn’t get into it, I was zoning out the whole time.

Kayla Tornello says

It was really interesting to learn about Theodore Roosevelt's passion for naturalism. He certainly had some great adventures! I think that the author did a good job of providing a balanced view of the scientific and hunting aspects of naturalism. However, I think that this book is almost too focused at times. For instance, I found it rather strange that the book ends without mentioning Roosevelt's death at all. It also made no mention whatsoever of his South American expedition in 1913.

I received this book as a Goodreads First-Read. Yay!

Jennifer says

In "The Naturalist," author Darrin Lunde, a specialist at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History, provides a comprehensive look into the experiences and ethics that shaped former US President Teddy Roosevelt's interest in conservation, naturalism, and wilderness protection. While other books have explored a more holistic view of Roosevelt the man and Roosevelt the presidency, Lunde's sole focus is to give the reader an understanding of Roosevelt as a "hunter-naturalist."

Roosevelt as a naturalist (and others from the era, like John Audubon) can make modern-day conservationists squirm. The ethos of their time was collect (e.g. kill) animals for scientific study, and to compile a "catalog" of known species. Though we may cringe at the means, "virtually everything we know about the morphology, geographic distribution, and ancestral relationships of animals is derived from the vast collections of specimens housed in museums." And we have Teddy Roosevelt to thank, not only for personally providing many specimens, but for establishing the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History.

Lunde provides a detailed (at times, too detailed) history of Roosevelt's fascination with nature and the outdoors, which began in childhood. Beyond simply a hunter, Roosevelt knew an incredible amount about the science of naturalism, and generally prepared his own specimens (readers will get a short course on taxidermy in this book!) He also covers Roosevelt's leadership in establishing Yellowstone as the U.S.'s first national park, and other land preservation efforts.

While the topic is very interesting the book lagged in places. Rather than following a narrative non-fiction

model, Lunde's book often comes across as a recitation of facts, which led to my disinterest. Some topics (descriptions of particular hunts and a continuing explanation of the hunter-naturalist mindset) were way too drawn out. Other topics, such as Roosevelt's impact on land preservation, felt short-changed.

I enjoyed this, but would hesitate to recommend to those without a strong interest in Roosevelt and/or early natural history.

3 stars

Thank you to NetGalley and Crown Publishing for a galley of this book in exchange for an honest review.

Beth Cato says

Lunde is a Supervisory Museum Specialist within the Smithsonian's Natural History Museum, and here he brings his expertise to the complicated character of Theodore Roosevelt and the development of natural history study in the United States. I have read a great deal about Roosevelt in the past year, and I felt Lunde tackled his contradictory nature in a thoughtful way. It can be hard to understand how Roosevelt, a man who professed to love animals, was also an adept killer of these animals. Roosevelt's idea of conservation is different from our modern approach--when he learned a species was nearing extinction, he wanted to hunt it, collect it, before it was totally gone. However, this wasn't done in an entirely wanton way, either; he didn't kill en masse, he didn't waste what was killed, and he contributed vast amounts of skins and skeletons to the Smithsonian and other institutions so they could be used for science and public education.

Lunde goes into detail about how animals are skinned and the hides preserved; I found this fascinating, though some readers may be squeamish. I enjoyed learning about the background behind the antebellum nature movement, too--"muscular" Christianity and how hunting fit into that ideal of manhood. However, I felt the book was uneven in significant ways. I wanted to learn more about the establishment of national parks and refuge areas, and Roosevelt's presidency was largely glossed over because he was unable to hunt through most of the time. When the famous "teddy bear" incident is related, to my surprise, Lunde never mentioned that teddy bears as stuffed animals came about because of it. It's a tangential connection to the natural history, sure, but it's still a connection and one of Roosevelt's everyday legacies.

I was especially surprised at how much of the book detailed on Roosevelt's African safari. It takes up some 70 pages (of my advanced reader copy) out of a 260-pages book. Certainly, it showed how he contributed a vast amount of material to the Smithsonian (in a way that was personally relevant to the author's field of study) but it also felt out of proportion with the rest of Roosevelt's life.

M. Sarki says

https://msarki.tumblr.com/post/161653...

Perceived as a swash-buckling president, a rough rider, hunter, and preservationist dressed in a buckskin suit, Teddy Roosevelt has, in my lifetime, maintained his larger-than-life persona and for good reason. This book is the first study I have been subjected to regarding the man, and I could not have been more surprised over how much I did like him early on in my reading as I learned of his exploits, trials, and personal loss.

Roosevelt like many others did not escape a lifetime of personal tragedy. He endured more than his share. And his evolvement as hunter to protector is of course as unsettling as it is amazing. Roosevelt lived in a vastly different time than we can comprehend fairly today. Financial and societal privilege afforded him many opportunities that most of us have only read about. But unlike others born into this privilege Roosevelt used his to further an agenda for good and to mark his time in history as significant and admirable. Theodore Roosevelt overcame poor health, a weak body, a childhood of city privilege and elitist pressures, to become a naturalist of the first rank. Focussing on the naturalist and human side of his subject Darrin Lunde provides his reader with a most-rewarding portrait of one of our country's larger-than-life individuals who ever walked the earth.

After his evolvement as a naturalist and his two terms as president of the United States, Roosevelt seemed to change. And the last quarter of the book disturbs me to no small degree. What had previously come in the opening three quarters was a fascinating study of a man engaged with principal and courage. But beginning with the eagerly anticipated and extravagant African safari at the end of his presidency this endearing portrait of Roosevelt became a bit disgusting as he seemed to posture and demonstrate a pretentiousness absent in his early years. Cloaked behind a Smithsonian facade of scientific collection marched a loud and obnoxious cavalcade of pomp and bulge. For example, his sanctioned and personal killing of so many lions appeared to be wasteful, cruel, and extreme. Each subsequent page to follow felt uncomfortable. My disgusting reading about this particular safari was growing by the page and it became more difficult to remain enamored with the man who did so much to protect our lands. Though he did preserve a mass of wilderness for us, he failed in many respects to save the creatures inhabiting these spaces. Roosevelt was a hunter first who protected his sport through conservation. But, in fact, he was a killer of trophy wild animals who, with bad eyesight and poor skills, maimed and made suffer the most beautiful ones roaming the wild among us.

…Scouting around the first day, they saw seventy or eighty buffalo grazing in the open about a hundred yards from the edge of the swamp. It was too dark to shoot, but, heading out again early the next morning, Roosevelt and his party let fly a hail of ammunition to bring down three of the massive bulls.…It was a real chore for him to write in the field, and he joked that it was his way of paying for his fun.

What confounds me is the thinking that must go on in the head of any blood sport hunter. These men must have ignored the fact they were killing a creature that belonged on the planet just as much, or more, than they did. A wild creature of feeling, free to roam the plains being massacred by a privileged as well as massive and pretentious army hiding behind a cover of science, their rabid blood lust and joy celebrated on these killing fields. Conservation's legacy handed down by Mr. Roosevelt is sadly tarnished by this horrid and destructive behavior not only by him but also by the hand of his son, Kermit.

…his Scribner's accounts almost gave the impression that he was trying to provoke a reaction from the anti-hunting factions, as he documented his kills—botched shots and all—in unashamed detail…"I felt proud indeed as I stood by the immense bulk of the slain monster and put my hand on the ivory," said Roosevelt, and then everyone began the work of skinning …

During this African safari Roosevelt and his companions killed or trapped approximately 11,400 animals, from insects and moles to hippopotamuses and elephants. In this biography Darrin Lunde has provided facts and story enough to honor Theodore Roosevelt as one of the most important naturalists who ever lived. And due to countless excesses he did help our evolving natural history museums to thrive. But at the cost of so many innocent and free lives, it saddens me.

Kathy Heare Watts says

An insight into one of the most adventurous Presidents in American history. His love of nature and adventures did not stop him from being an avid hunter too.

I won an uncorrected proof advanced reading copy of this book during a Goodreads giveaway. I am under no obligation to leave a review or rating and do so voluntarily. I am paying it forward by passing this book along to a friend or family member who I think will enjoy it too.

Hannah West says

Loved this book! I learned about a whole new side of President Theodore Roosevelt. While well known for what he did for our National Parks, I had only heard a little about his hunting pursuits. This book went into detail on what shaped Roosevelt’s love for animals, hunting, and taxidermy as a child. The author used the term “museum naturalist” and defined Roosevelt as such. I appreciated the epilogue which addressed the fact that today, many would consider a hunter like Roosevelt as a threat to nature and not a naturalist because the definition of the word has changed over time. As someone who sees the naturalist in many hunters and taxidermists today I can certainly see it in Theodore Roosevelt.

Linda says

I received a copy of The Naturalist by Darrin Lunde for an honest review. Thank you to NetGalley and to Darrin Lunde for the opportunity.

I gravitate towards all things Theodore Roosevelt like a thirsty sailor after an endless diet of salt tack. Teddy's life was a robust adventure early on from his youth until his last breath. Darrin Lunde's intent was to present Roosevelt in the light of his naturalistic journey and the impact it had on his personal life and that of the country.

Theodore Roosevelt grew up in Manhattan within a well-to-do family. Manhattan certainly doesn't conjur up an environment for the pursuits of nature. However, it was his philanthropist father who encouraged Teddy's intense interest in nature and allowed his incessant collecting of specimens and his relentless documentations. Teddy possessed an abundance of examples within his "cabinet of curiosities". Roosevelt was a sickly child who fought constantly to overcome the limits that his asthma put upon him. One would find it hard to believe that the brawny and energetic Theodore Roosevelt was anything but that.

Roosevelt surrounded himself with the works of David Livingstone, Benjamin Franklin, James Audubon, and even P.T. Barnum who boasted over 850,000 specimens. What is at the core of this book is Lunde's description of what was presented as "naturalism" at this point in history. Chemical preservation and taxidermy were still a mystery and knowledge was gained under the observations made with a microscope by white-coated laboratory experiments. Such drawings and the like were kept by the box loads at The Smithsonian.

Lunde points out that Roosevelt brought a more "hands-on" approach to naturalism. He found that his pursuits in naturalistic academia were limited at the university and Roosevelt switched lanes toward a law

degree. But later, in keeping with his naturalistic intent, Roosevelt took to the plains of the Midwest and the West sleeping on the ground and observing the plight of the bison. He followed the Pacific Railroad Survey plotting transcontinental routes while collecting specimens along the way.

But there is almost a duality here to Roosevelt. I wish, in some ways, that Lunde would have pursued this even more than he did. Roosevelt had a hunger for adventure as a hunter and at the same time he adhered to the preservation of nature and the seemingly endless fascination for the land areas of the United States, Africa, and South America. In some respects, Roosevelt was a walking dichotomy. His large mammal preservations fill The American Museum of Natural History. He adhered to bringing nature to the people when people lacked opportunity to nature. A different time and a different philosophy.

This book was well-researched by Lunde and he brings every effort to make it an interesting read while providing some lively scenarios into Roosevelt's life. No other President has made more inroads into the preservation of American nature and land areas than Roosevelt himself. And for that, Teddy, we are most grateful.

Eddie Callaway says

Wonderful read!

Full review here.

Feisty Harriet says

I wish the author would just be okay with the fact that Teddy Roosevelt did not begin his political, military, or scientific career as an actual naturalist, but it was something that he grew in to as he aged and as the wild places of the American West were trampled. Trying to justify his excessive sport-hunting as scientific is ridiculous, he killed FAR more animals that he would ever need for study, and he did it for fun. Also, Roosevelt's personal brand of machismo and it's direct tie to Christianity is insufferable and certainly lent itself to his career as a hunter and a soldier, also his Daddy issues. Lunde seems to have a huge historic crush on Roosevelt and his book comes across as written through rose-colored glasses/ignoring some pretty basic personality flaws in Roosevelt, the book would have been much better had they been acknowledged more openly and more consistently.

Glen says

I won an ARC of this book in a goodreads drawing.

This is a biography of Teddy Roosevelt seen through the prism of his career as a naturalist. It traces his interest as an asthma stricken youth, through his African expedition. The book also traces he history of natural science from the earliest beginnings as cabinets of curiosities to the grand museums of today.
A good biography of TR with a different twist. Very satisfying.

Phil says

This book is about many different subjects: natural history museums, collecting specimens in the field, the definition of a naturalist, the birth of the conservation movement, establishment of wildlife refuges, legislating protections for the most vulnerable species and the ethics of hunting. The author handles all of the subjects very well as they swirl around a single lone figure, Theodore Roosevelt.

I have read several books on Roosevelt's life and have enjoyed reading every one of them. All have mentioned in attachment to nature but none has delved into that connection as this current work did.

For Roosevelt, it started very early. His interest in animals stemmed from a trip to the city open-air market where someone had brought in a dead seal for display. Roosevelt was captivated and credits it with changing his life.

Sliding his hand along the seal's glossy-smooth pelt and peering deeply into the clouding eyes, he was overwhelmed with interest. Its eyes were so big, and they fringed with delicate eyelashes just like his own. Curious onlookers stood back, only a rave few leaning in for a closer look, but the little boy remained transfixed. It was probably a harbor seal, still fairly common in New York Harbor. So transfixed was the boy by this exotic creature that he raced home for a notebook and ruler, returning moments later to measure the carcass and jot down a few notes on its color and appearance. The eight-year-old boy then wrote a detailed natural history of seals based entirely on the one dead animal.

"Theodore Roosevelt's life changed forever in that encounter, for it marked, as he later noted, 'the first day' of his career as a naturalist. Recalling the event in his autobiography decades later, Roosevelt wrote that the seal filled him with 'every possible feeling of romance and adventure.' It was so unlike anything he had ever seen before. Touching that seal, he would have felt the stiffness of its long, graceful whiskers, and, gently lifting up its lips, he would have seen the gleaming white teeth. The ears were just tiny holes, barely noticeable in its dens fur. Squeezing the front flippers, he would have felt that they were just like greatly enlarged hands, the individual finger bones completely encased in the flesh of the flipper with tiny claws extending from the tip. Feeling the seal's body with his own hands, he could appreciate all the similarities to his own basic anatomy, but he wanted to get closer—to take the animal home, perhaps to dissect or stuff it. He had read about how naturalists kept animal specimens to study them, and now he had a chance to practice naturalism himself." (9-10)

The American Museum of Natural History was actually founded in the living room of his home when he was a boy. He immediately came up with the idea of establishing the Roosevelt Museum of Natural History enlisting his siblings and two cousins on the board of directors which, of course, he was the chairman.

"All that is known of Theodore's earliest days as a nascent museum curator comes from a brief history recorded on just a few pages of handwritten notes. Roosevelt's 'Record of the Roosevelt Museum' begins very officially; 'At the commencement of the year 1867 Mr. T. Roosevelt started the Museum with twelve specimen….' Housed in Theodore's bedroom, the 'museum' soon grew to include hundreds of prizes; mice, shrews, and birds. The only organizing principle for the museum's collection was to accumulate as many specimens as possible. The Roosevelt children worked furiously to add to the pile, though it wasn't just the younger family members who were expected to contribute to the eager curator's trove.

“Writing to his parents while they were visiting Georgia in the spring of 1868, a nine-year-old Teddy stressed that he expected them to collect a few specimens from their exotic southern locality; ‘In your letter you write to me to tell me how many curiosities and living things you have got for me,’ he prodded his mother. Writing his father, he was even more direct, goading him to cut off the tail of a ‘tiger-cat’ belonging to a friend, adding that it would be on prominent display at his museum. Even the family nurse was enlisted, as one breathless letter to her reveals: ‘I have one request to make of you. Press plenty of plants and leaves and get a good many seeds for me, and some beetles and butterflies, get feathers and wood too. Get as many live things as you can.’” (16)

As he grew older into his adolescent his desired to be a naturalist only increased. He learned taxidermy from one of the leading taxidermist in the United States, John Bell.

He became quite adept at the task and began filling the Roosevelt Museum with stuffed birds, small animals and such that he himself had prepared.

On a trip to Egypt with the family, he spent the entire trip shooting and preparing specimens.

“Dead quail in hand, it was business as usual for Theodore back at the hotel. He had become so fixated on collecting birds that his sister Corinne complained that whenever he entered the room, she unfailing heard the words ‘bird’ and ‘skin.’ Even his younger brother, Elliott, who was normally mild mannered and accommodating, revolted at sharing a room with someone who frequently filled the washbasin with the guts of the animals he was dissecting.” (55)

“Theodore never shot more than one or two birds a day. Sitting under the cloth canopy on the deck of the ‘Aboo Erdan,’ he skinned and stuffed while the curious boatmen stared over his shoulder. It’s time-consuming to make a bird study skin, and Roosevelt made sure he never collected more birds than he could prepare in a single day. As soon as he shot a specimen, he had to carefully clean any blood off the feathers and quickly stuff a wad of cotton down the bird’s throat to prevent any more body fluids from leaking out and spoiling the plumage. Theodore had only a few minutes to record the color of the eyes before they faded forever. Next he took a series of standard measurement, described the habitat where he shot each bird, and then tagged each with his ROOSEVELT MUSEUM labels so he could cross-reference it to his field notes. As he knew from his readings and his own practical experience, decomposition sets in quickly in tropical climates, and he worked especially fast to preserve all his birds before they spoiled.” (57)

The author goes into great detail about natural-history museums and the purpose behind all the collecting of specimens and the important work of the collectors. For Roosevelt it was both sport and science but it was the science that really mattered. He learned all the scientific names of the fauna he collected and kept meticulous records of where he found the specimen, its habitat, observations he made, etc.

He attended Harvard graduating magna cum laude but hating the four years he spent there, disgusted with the emphasis on laboratory work over field work (field work was actually held in great disdain). Realizing he could never make a living for a family as a naturalist he gave up his dream of becoming one, closed his museum and donating the hundreds and hundreds of specimens he had collected over the years to various natural history museums.

Eventually stepping into the public arena of politics he begins his career from the state assembly to New York City Police Commission, Assistant Secretary of the Navy, and after his success during the short Spanish-American War, Governor of New York.

In politics he never satisfied the reformers in his party and the staunch and staid members of his party found him a loose cannon so they decided to get rid of him by making him McKinley's vice-president which would bring an end to his political career. Fate, of course, would intervene and foil their plan.

The whole time Roosevelt was moving through the political morass, he never stopped being interested in naturalism. He wrote several books that any naturalist would admire and began to collect the friendships of several renowned naturalists in various fields.

Then as president, brought the power he possessed to give help and aid to scientific discovery.

Roosevelt surrounded himself with naturalists, kept up on the details of their research, and worked hard to cultivate their friendship. What he enjoyed most about his job as president was the chance to help along the work of other scientists, and throughout the years in office he nurtured his personal friendship with every leading naturalist of his time—George Bird Grinnell, writer John Burroughs, zoologist William T. Hornday, ornithologist Frank Chapman, British explorer Frederick Courtney Selous, taxidermist Carl Akeley, field naturalist Edgar A Mearns, and, of course, Clinton Hart Merriam. As an honorary member of their ranks, he felt comfortable with them in a way few other politicians would. He entertained more naturalists in the White House than did any other president, and they were amazed by his erudition. 'Very few people are aware of Roosevelt's knowledge of mammals and their skulls," explained Merriam, who kept about five thousand mammal skulls in his home for ready reference and was perhaps the best person to judge whether or not someone was an expert in such subjects. 'One evening at my house he astonished everyone—including several eminent naturalists—by picking up skull after skull and mentioning the scientific names of the genus to which each belonged. Although occupying the highest office, Roosevelt still felt the pull of the comparatively less glamorous fields of science and natural history—from the country's highest office, a part of him longed to be a naturalist.

"Roosevelt was vocal about the need for scientists and naturalists to write with scientific accuracy and readability. 'There is no use in having a book scientific in its accuracy if no one will read it, and it is worse than no use to have a book that is readable and at the same time false. He was generous with other naturalists, quick to praise any work that met his high standards….but more than merely offering praise of a completed work, Roosevelt was equally renowned for goading naturalists to write, as he believed this was the best way to advance this particular scientific discourse." (163-164)

"Selous published "African Nature Note and Reminiscences" five years later, with a dedication to Theodore Roosevelt, 'not only because it is entirely owing to his inspiration and kindly encouragement that it was ever written but also because both in private and public life he always won the sincere admiration and esteem of the author." (164)
He also acted in the area of conservation, first by getting legislation passed (Lacey Act) that protected the wildlife in Yellowstone National Park which before its passage was being decimated by poachers and 'market hunters.' The act ended up protecting all wildlife in all the national parks and wildlife refuges.

The final chapter of the book covers the trip he took to Africa with his son, Kermit after he had finished the presidency. Initially it was a trip to shoot big-game animals as well as study them and the other wildlife but soon the plan took on another entire nature of its own.

Roosevelt came up with a far more ambitious plan, and one that took into consideration his earliest boyhood passions as a museum collector—to turn his hunting trip into a full-scale natural-history expedition. He wished to have along a team of naturalists to study the non-game fauna while he and Kermit collected big mammals for museum exhibits." (187)

Roosevelt wrote to Charles Doolittle Walcott, the administrator of the Smithsonian Institute:

“As you know, I am not in the least a game butcher. I like to do a certain amount of hunting, but my real and main interest is the interest of faunal naturalist. Now, it seems to me that this opens up the best chance for the National Museum to get a fine collection, not only of the big game beasts, but of the smaller animals and birds of Africa; and looking at it dispassionately, it seems to me that the chance ought not to be neglected. I will make arrangements in connection with publishing a book which will enable me to pay for the expenses of myself and my son. But what I would like to do would be to get one or two professional field taxidermists, field naturalists, to go with us, who should prepare and send back the specimens we collect. The collection which would thus go to the National Museum would be of unique value.” (188)

“Eager not to fall behind, Walcott took up Roosevelt’s offer and agreed to pay for the preparation and transport of specimens.” (189)

“Under the aegis of the Smithsonian Institute, Roosevelt’s proposed safari had been transformed from a hunting trip to a serious natural-history expedition promising lasting scientific significance.” (189)

“Roosevelt took the preservation of each animal seriously. He insisted on saving the skull and, in many cases, the whole skeleton, of virtually every animal he shot. More than mere trophies, he knew that these were ‘absolutely necessary for the determination of the species’ and they would make valuable addition to the Smithsonian’s collection. All these bones had to be ‘roughed out’ in the field, meaning Heller and his team had to cut off as much of the muscle as possible before drying the skeleton for transportation. Later, back at the museum, technicians would clean off the last bits of dried flesh still adhering to bone. Since saving all the skins required that the porters carry tons of fine-grained salt for preservation, Roosevelt admitted that this was an expensive process. The salt’s sheer weight added considerably to the cost of transport, but it was absolutely essential to the expedition’s effort to build the Smithsonian African collection.

“The salt method used was essentially one that had been perfected by Carl Akeley, the salt working by drawing moisture out of the hides and halting the decay that caused the hairs to slip out. Immediately after skinning, the hide needed to be scraped clean of any adhering tissue and fat to expose the under layer of skin where the roots of the hairs were embedded. This layer needed to be thoroughly rubbed with salt, and, stretching portions of the hide taut over a makeshift wooden table, Heller and his men spent hours scraping down each one. A layer of fine salt was poured on and rubbed into every square inch of the hide. This had to be done by hand, the salt also stinging every nick and cut on the work-roughened hands of the men. The skins were then rolled and packed into tightly sealed tins or barrels for transport to Nairobi, where they were stored in a warehouse before being shipped to the Smithsonian. The salt was only a temporary preservative, however, and once in the United States, these skins had to be tanned and turned into leather before they could be installed in the museum’s collections or mounted for taxidermy displays. It was heavy, mess, tedious work, and Heller grew so tired of skinning and scraping rhinoceros that he jokingly complained of suffering from an acute case of ‘rhinoceritis.’” (215-216)

Of course, the killing of elephants, lions, rhinos, giraffes, hippos, etc. brought a great deal of criticism to Roosevelt’s doorstep. He did not hesitate to give answer:

Civilized man now usually passes his life under conditions which eliminate the intensity of terror felt by his ancestors when death by violence was their normal end….It is only in nightmares that the average dweller in civilized countries now undergoes the hideous horror which was the regular and frequent portion of his ages vanished forefathers, and which is still an every-day incident in the lives of the most wild creatures….In

these wilds the game dreaded the lion and the other flesh-eating beasts rather than man….The game is ever on alert against the greatest of foes, and every herd, almost every individual, is an imminent and deadly peril every few days or nights….But no sooner is the danger over than the animals resume their feeding, or love making, or their fighting among themselves….Death by violence, death by cold, death by starvation—these are the normal endings of the stately and beautiful creatures of the wilderness." (226)

"Ever since writing 'Hunting Trips of a Ranchman.' Roosevelt had been perfecting his narrative style, incorporating nuggets of natural history into his descriptions of stalking game. For all his graphic descriptions of misplaced shots and animals running off wounded, Roosevelt recorded equally lengthy passages on the normal daily lives of these same animals. He made careful notes on the sizes of herds, their apparent breeding seasons, and even their gaits." (236)

"Roosevelt's hunting was the driving force behind the expedition." (237)

"For Roosevelt, it was not so much the individual lives of animals that mattered as the survival of the species. At the very least he wanted people to have the chance to see good specimens preserved forever in a museum. That was his brand of naturalism." (243)

So, an entire wing of the Smithsonian Institute found itself filled with the specimens collected for it by a president of the United States.

"Together, 'African Game Trails' and 'Life Histories of African Game Animals" embody the two pillars upholding Roosevelt the naturalist—someone who loved both the science and the adventure of being a good naturalist." (251)

Roosevelt's own words about the African hunt:

"In Africa, however, we really did some good work in natural history. Many of my observations were set forth in my book 'African Game Trails;' and I have always felt that the book which Edmund Heller and I jointly wrote, the 'Life Histories of African Game Animals,' was a serious and worthwhile contribution to science. Here again, this contribution, so far as I was concerned, consisted chiefly in seeing, and recording, and interpreting facts which were really obvious, but to which observers hitherto had been blind, or which they had misinterpreted partly because sportsmen seemed incapable of seeing anything except a trophy, partly because stay-at-home systematics never saw anything at all except skins and skulls which enabled them to give Latin names to new 'species' or 'subspecies/' partly because collectors had collected birds in precisely the spirit in which other collectors assembled postage stamps." (253-254

This is a fine piece of history about a remarkable man and the mark he left on a nation.

Mark Luongo says

One of the aspects of TR's life I've always enjoyed is his activism in the fields of natural history, conservation and hunting. This book focuses on his life a a "naturalist" from his childhood to his great African safari of the early 20th Century. He would be the first to describe himself as a "hunter-naturalist" and started out collecting specimens for his boyhood museum, "The Roosevelt Museum of Natural History." Later as an adult, the specimens would be taken for the benefit of the American Museum of Natural History

(his father was a founder and important influence in encouraging TR to embrace the outdoors)) and the Smithsonian Institution.
Always subjected to criticism for what to many seemed "senseless slaughter", Roosevelt came to represent the necessity in understanding species, their habits and habitat as means to protect them for future generations. This becomes evident in his creation of the Boone & Crockett Club as well as his efforts as President in creating numerous national parks and wildlife refuges across the United States.
Interesting to note that TR wasn't a crack shot even as a young man. Later in life he lost the sight in one eye which I'm sure didn't help when he was afield.

Leah Rachel von Essen says

I wouldn’t usually have read The Naturalist Theodore Roosevelt: A Lifetime of Exploration, and the Triumph of American Natural History by Darrin Lunde. I requested by accident, but I enjoy non-fiction, and I’ve always enjoyed reading about Theodore Roosevelt’s interesting relationship to nature: his concept of masculinity, and his desire both to hunt and conserve. This book was hard to read in places as someone who doesn’t enjoy reading about taxidermy and hunting, but had its many merits. Roosevelt grew up wanting to be a naturalist, and Lunde writes his early years well, describing the early science of naturalists and how Roosevelt set out to be one, and how it set him up to later examine the relationship between hunting and nature. Lunde examines that complication interestingly in that time as well as his time in Africa: the desire to capture a buffalo specimen or a white rhino family for museums before they were all gone, as well as to encourage other men to not hunt cruelly or without restraint precisely by glorifying the honorable hunt.

But Lunde’s book is lacking in a lot of ways. He gives a lot of attention to the ways that Roosevelt’s interaction with nature supported him in dark times as well as showed his happiness in life, how he was considered a great man by many guides and men who met him. But he gives almost no attention to his presidency, which spans a single chapter of the book. Roosevelt protected approximately 230 million acres of public land, created the United States Forest Service (USFS), and established 150 national forests, 51 federal bird reserves, 4 national game preserves, 5 national parks, and 18 national monuments while he was president. Lunde skims over the political sphere at the beginning of Roosevelt’s presidency and discusses how he encouraged naturalists to write, and how he got himself into controversy over his hunting, and yet never talks at length about his extensive protection of public land. It’s an astounding thing to leave out in a book that’s about Roosevelt’s relationship to conservation, to the naturalists, and to wildlife in America and beyond. Similarly, Lunde barely talks about Roosevelt’s legacy and the way things have changed. He ends the book after Roosevelt returns from Africa. He notes the texts Roosevelt published from the trip, and the ways that it’s difficult for us today to conceive of the relationship these naturalists had with nature, both hunting and preserving as well as fighting for conservation. But he doesn’t describe what happened between then and today, what changed. He doesn’t note that the Badlands would later host a national park in Roosevelt’s name.

I wasn’t a history major. I know perhaps more American history than some, but I’m hardly an expert—even with that, I started googling, confused, two chapters to the end of this book. Was that all he was going to say about the national parks? It turns out, yes. The book promises to examine Roosevelt as naturalist as well as how Roosevelt helped to change America’s relationship with its own wilderness, and yet it barely touches the latter. It’s a strange and inexplicable set of oversights.

Andrew says

I received an advance reader's copy from the publisher through Netgalley.

This book provides a detailed background into the influences that formed Theodore Roosevelt's lifelong interest in animals. The author is a present-day naturalist who works at the Smithsonian, so he has a unique interest in Roosevelt's life and the circumstances behind the founding of today's great natural history museums.

Roosevelt's view of animal life was certainly interesting - he enjoyed wildlife in a time when a large part of science included killing and cataloging species before humans destroyed habitats and drove species to extinction (particularly in the American west and Africa). The author explains how men like Audubon, Peale and others established naturalism and then Roosevelt made it his own. (P.T. Barnum even makes an appearance but on the opposite side.)

I was surprised that the book goes into a lot of detail on the hunting and preserving of animals (killing, cleaning, preserving the skins, shipping, etc.) but not much on Roosevelt's actions to set aside public lands. I can see how the author writes about his passion, but it I expected a more balanced story. (And isn't that a picture of Roosevelt at Yosemite on the cover? Yosemite isn't even referenced in the ARC.)

I enjoyed this book but the focus on wildlife collection wore on me before the end. A more apt title could have been *Theodore Roosevelt's Passion for Collecting and Understanding Animals* - not a bad topic but more descriptive of the text.
