

Explore writers engaging with nature, environment

By Carey Sweet

Celebrating and protecting the Earth has long been an important theme for authors, and the topic has been a cornerstone for the Bay Area Book Festival since its founding. In the festival's ongoing commitment to showcase the brilliant voices of writers engaging with nature and the environment, the line-up for 2023 welcomes prominent contributors to genres spanning fiction, creative nonfiction, poetry, history, memoirs, children's books and more.

Schedule your festival experience around some of these stand-out sessions: **"The Beauty and Urgency of Nature Writing"** (11 a.m. May 6)

Three talents come together in united themes of this magical world we live in. In their inventive volume, Tom Comitta ("The Nature Book") invites readers to really pay attention to lyrical nature writing, lacing together stunning examples from 300 English-language novels into a narrative honoring flora, fauna, weather and geology. By combining excerpts from great writers of the ages through their own artistic vision, Comitta creates what one critic has

called, "A magnum opus about the planet."

"I'm interested in what this session might reveal about how we relate to the natural world, for both our virtues and imaginative limits," they said. "My own nature writing is a hybrid study and story of how authors have beheld, distorted and spoken through nature — animals, plants, landforms, weather patterns — since people started writing novels."

Fellow author Erica Berry ("Wolfish: Wolf, Self, and the Stories We Tell About Fear") penned a fascinating combination of memoir, criticism, science and history to understand our myths about wolves. In a years-long journey, she tracks one legendary wolf, OR-7, from the Willowa Mountains of Oregon. In the layered tale, Berry nimbly details her own coming-of-age as she moves away from home and wrestles with inherited beliefs about fear, danger, femininity and the body.

Animals are also the focus for Talia Lakshmi Kolluri ("What We Fed to the Manticore") with a collection of nine stories each told from the point of view of a different animal. We engage in perspectives of man-

eating tigers or a hound tasked with guarding one of the world's last remaining white rhinos, all exploring themes of environmentalism, conservation, identity, belonging, loss and family. A manticore, by the way, is a legendary animal with the head of a man, the body of a lion and the tail of a dragon or scorpion.

"Finding Nature, Saving Time" (11 a.m. May 7)

Time is precious, and also frightening for many people — there is too little, too much, and it can be too confusing. New York Times bestselling author Jenny Odell ("Saving Time: Discovering a Life Beyond the Clock"), explores the idea that the clock we live by was built for profit, not people, telling us time is money and often leading us to existential dread. She argues that embracing a new concept of time can open us up to bold, hopeful possibilities by imagining a real life, identity and source of meaning.

The pandemic, meanwhile, struck author Maddalena Bearzi hard, confronting her with struggles of hopelessness and a forced, new way of life away from her beloved work studying marine animals. In "Stranded: Finding Nature in Un-

certain Times," she shares how she rechanneled her energies into observing her squirrels, possums, wasps and coyotes in her neighborhood. This helped her slow down, calm down, find new daily joy and courage.

"Memoir: The Meaning of Home" (11:30 a.m. May 7)

"I'm a writer interested in the ways that people become entangled with places," author Kathryn Savage said. "Home is a vast and dynamic concept to me, one that relates to family and also to ecologies."

In her "Groundglass: An Essay," home is set atop a polluted aquifer in Minnesota, beside trains that haul fracked crude oil, as Savage confronts the transgressions of U.S. Superfund sites. The horror is personal to her: she grew up near such a site,

and her father died from cancer.

Joining the stage is National Book Critics Circle Criticism finalist Camille Dungy ("Soil: The Story of a Black Mother's Garden"). Here, she relates the puzzling-maddening restrictions she found on planting a garden in the predominantly white community of Fort Collins, Colo., and how it became a seven-year odyssey to finally be able to raise the plants, herbs, vegetables and flowers she loves.

Lawyer and essayist Vanessa A. Bee also presents "Home Bound: An Uprooted Daughter's Reflections on Belonging," chronicling her extraordinary upbringing and yearning for a secure home. From her birth in Cameroon, Africa, to her adoption by

her aunt and her aunt's white French husband, to experiencing housing insecurity in Europe and her eventual immigration to the U.S., she finally settled in Reno, Nev., as a teenager, right around the financial crisis and the collapse of the housing market.

"Parable of the Sower Turns 30" (2:30 p.m. May 7)

2023 marks the 30th anniversary of Octavia Butler's novel "Parable of the Sower," a compelling post-apocalyptic fiction novel on climate change and social inequality. In this session, poets Camille Dungy and Ashia Ajani, as well as novelist Aya de Leon, discuss the power of Butler's prophetic vision and how her insight brings greater meaning to their own works on climate and racial justice.

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HIDDEN HISTORIES

Dorothee Elmiger (OUT OF THE SUGAR FACTORY)
& Jori Lewis (SLAVES FOR PEANUTS) in conversation.

Moderated by
Ariana Proehl

