

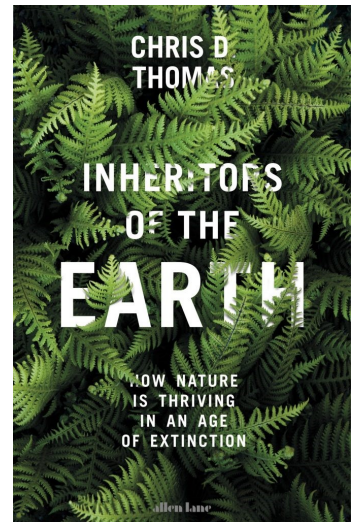
Inheritors of the Earth by Chris D Thomas

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Occasionally, a book comes along that changes your world view. This is one. I read it with my eyes open wide in wonder, as Chris D Thomas challenged all that I 'knew' about native, hybrid and alien species, conservation and biodiversity. Chris's breathless enthusiasm in the early chapters drew me into the book, which then progressed at a more readable pace. Chris has an entertaining turn of phrase, which makes it a very enjoyable read, while his knowledge of the subject matter shines through.

There were occasions where I felt that he got a little caught up on the pedantry of whether or not something was a new species, but those moments were significantly outweighed by the sheer joy of reading the rest of it and the feeling of liberation from the 'native species' straightjacket.

Is Chris D Thomas a heretic or a prophet? I'll leave that to you to decide.



“We can think of the Anthropocene epoch as a fresh start for life on Earth and not only as a passing of the old guard. This is liberating.”

Summary / key points

Dynamic populations of flora and fauna are the norm. Conservationists often get hung up on 'native', 'alien' and 'hybrid' species, but the concept of 'native' species relies on taking one point in time and considering that as the ideal. Who decides what that point in time is, and therefore what is 'good' and what is 'bad'?

Biodiversity is decreasing across the earth, but not in individual places and regions once you've considered domestic and farmed animals, and garden and agricultural plants as well as 'wild' ones.

In his two hectares of land (~5.5 acres) in the middle of an agricultural landscape, he estimates that a third of all British species can be observed – you don't need a lot of space to support and create biodiversity.

Climate change is causing animals to move poleward at ~17 km a decade – an equivalent of just over 4.5 metres a day. Not everything can keep up with this pace of change – we might need to help some things to move.

After each great extinction event, there has been a great genesis event. Are we on the cusp of the sixth great genesis event?

We should regret the losses, but not focus on them exclusively. We should also applaud the gains – the triumph of nature to adjust to altered conditions.

Hybridization is not necessarily a bad thing – it's one way in which new species are formed.

Our conservation philosophy needs to be based on natural change, with humans centre stage. After all, we are a part of nature. It's important to save existing species, but it's just as legitimate to maximise diversity gains.

We do, however, need to live within our planetary bounds.

Action notes—what changes might you make, armed with this new learning?

Author notes

Chris D Thomas is a Fellow of the Royal Society and a professor at York University, specialising in ecology, evolution and the conservation of biodiversity in the Anthropocene.