

COOL CREATURES, HOT PLANET: EXPLORING THE SEVEN CONTINENTS

Deciding how to classify Martyr Essen's book, *Cool Creatures, Hot Planet: Exploring the Seven Continents*, creates a dilemma. But one thing is for sure—his maiden voyage as an author is an inspiration to wanna-be travelers and nature lovers. It's also a great read!

Essen, joined by his wife, Deb, takes his readers around the world for up-close encounters with wild and exotic plants and animals, 20,000-year-old glaciers, and 800-year-old castles. Part field guide for unusual wildlife and part travel guide for budget-savvy world travelers, the 460-page book also includes a heaping helping of political commentary about issues ranging from global warming to the U.S. invasion of Iraq.

Rich in detail and humor and featuring scores of his own incredible photos, this first-person account tells how the workaholic, 40-something Essen confronted his mid-life crisis head-on by journeying to all seven continents in a period of four years.

An avid photographer and closet herpetologist, Essen often sought out dangerous and deadly creatures on his trips. But this book is far from a macho travelogue. Essen occasionally had to confront his fears, such as his fear of heights, when he and Deb attempted to climb partway up the Matterhorn in Switzerland, and his fear water, when Deb convinced him to go snorkeling in Belize. Each time, Essen shares his insecurities using self-deprecating humor that will have readers chuckling yet relating to his plight.

Their adventure above the Arctic Circle in Canada brought them face to face with the great Porcupine caribou migration, and their expedition to Antarctica brought them up-close to penguins, elephant seals, and humpback whales.

Their journey to the Amazon rainforest in Peru allowed the snake-smitten Essen to hold and photograph a variety of snakes—including an anaconda—as well as numerous other seldom-seen creepy-crawly creatures.

Down under in Australia, the daring duo met exotic marsupials, lizards, and frogs large and small. And in Zimbabwe, they encountered crocodiles, kudus, zebras, lions, warthogs, elephants, and a ten-foot-long rock python. One of the couple's numerous brushes with death came on the Zambezi River when a giant hippo bit through their canoe and lifted them high into the air!

Throughout their travels, the Essens received questions from people in foreign countries about the war in Iraq, and informing them that many Americans did not support the war became a secondary quest to their adventures.

Cool Creatures, Hot Planet is meticulously researched and well-written. It's must-read for anyone curious about far-flung locales, exotic wildlife, or foreign cultures.

Before embarking on his intercontinental journeys, Essen had taken only five week-long vacations over a twenty-year career as a business owner. Let's hope his mid-life travel bug bite leads him to more adventure, and let's hope *Cool Creatures, Hot Planet* is just the first of many books he'll write.

—Rod Daniel, Corvallis, Montana