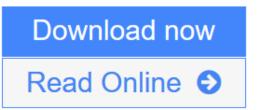


The Last Tortoise: A Tale of Extinction in Our Lifetime

Craig B. Stanford



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Tortoises may be the first family of higher animals to become extinct in the coming decades. They are losing the survival race because of what distinguishes them, in particular their slow, steady pace of life and reproduction.

The Last Tortoise offers an introduction to these remarkable animals and the extraordinary adaptations that have allowed them to successfully populate a diverse range of habitats—from deserts to islands to tropical forests. The shields that protect their shoulders and ribs have helped them evade predators. They are also safeguarded by their extreme longevity and long period of fertility. Craig Stanford details how human predation has overcome these evolutionary advantages, extinguishing several species and threatening the remaining forty-five.

At the center of this beautifully written work is Stanford's own research in the Mascarene and Galapagos Islands, where the plight of giant tortoise populations illustrates the threat faced by all tortoises. He addresses unique survival problems, from genetic issues to the costs and benefits of different reproductive strategies. Though the picture Stanford draws is bleak, he offers reason for hope in the face of seemingly inevitable tragedy. Like many intractable environmental problems, extinction is not manifest destiny. Focusing on tortoise nurseries and breeding facilities, the substitution of proxy species for extinct tortoises, and the introduction of species to new environments, Stanford's work makes a persuasive case for the future of the tortoise in all its rich diversity.



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