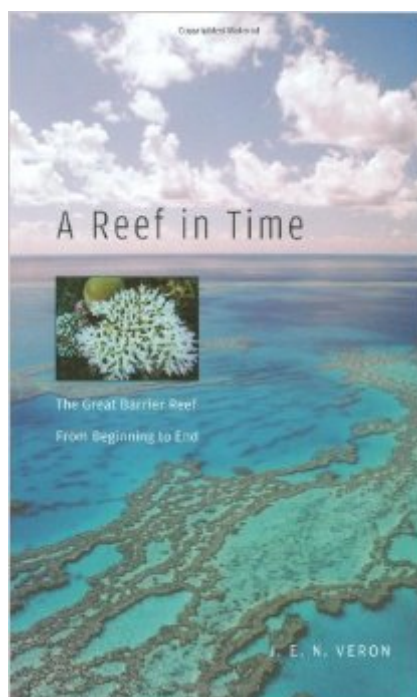


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A Reef In Time: The Great Barrier Reef From Beginning To End



Synopsis

Like many coral specialists fifteen years ago, J. E. N. Veron thought Australia's Great Barrier Reef was impervious to climate change. "Owned by a prosperous country and accorded the protection it deserves, it would surely not go the way of the rain forest or the parklands of Africa, but would endure forever. That is what I thought once, but I think it no longer." This book is Veron's Silent Spring for the world's coral reefs. Veron presents the geological history of the reef, the biology of coral reef ecosystems, and a primer on what we know about climate change. He concludes that the Great Barrier Reef and, indeed, most coral reefs will be dead from mass bleaching and irreversible acidification within the coming century unless greenhouse gas emissions are curbed. If we don't have the political will to confront the plight of the world's reefs, he argues, current processes already in motion will become unstoppable, bringing on a mass extinction the world has not seen for 65 million years. Our species has cracked its own genetic code and sent representatives of its kind to the moon--we can certainly save the world's reefs if we want to. But to achieve this goal, we must devote scientific expertise and political muscle to the development of green technologies that will dramatically reduce greenhouse emissions and reverse acidification of the oceans.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This book was awesome and proved very informative and I would highly recommend it, however the last couple of pages are where the author gives you their personal opinion (I do believe they earned

their right to do so) and it is a bit of downer. Their personal outlook on the future of the coral reefs is rather bleak and suggests that within my generation's lifetime if not their own the reefs will disappear for the extension of the human race's existence. This however, arguably, makes the book of greater importance, because if people don't know then they will never be able to care.

In "A Reef in Time: The Great Barrier Reef from Beginning to End" the highly respected coral reef expert J. E. N. Veron describes both the history of reefs in general and the Great Barrier Reef in particular. Certainly this book is not exactly uplifting because it outlines the future end of the reef, not in space, but in time. This end is to a large part premature and almost certainly to be brought on by human activity. As Veron notes reefs have come and gone throughout the history of the earth, appearing in the Devonian, Permian and Triassic, only to be destroyed in mass extinction events. New and different reefs returned, but not until after hundreds of thousands to millions of years. On both sides of the Rio Grande Valley, where I now live, are immense remains of middle Permian reefs, all of which disappeared in that mother of all extinction events which marks the Permian-Triassic boundary. The reefs now stand over 4000 feet above sea level, a monument to impermanence. Such would eventually be the fate of the monumental Great Barrier Reef, but in tens of thousands of years at least. The activities of humans (in causing global warming, direct damage to reefs and acidification of the oceans) may now cause the same destruction in hundreds of years or less. What is to be done? Veron thinks that there is some cause for hope, but I am unsure that that such hope is warranted. In this I would like to be wrong. However I see no political will on the part of either governments or populations to curb their activities in time before tipping points are reached that commit us to a major disruption of the planet. In essence we in the United States have wasted nearly eight years that we really did not have because of an administration that preferred wishful thinking to reality. Still I cannot just blame the United States as even the European Union will not reach its own goals and China and India, among others, are hurrying to reach the same levels of greenhouse gas emissions as the developed world. Veron has written a thoughtful and well documented book that will certainly educate the reader in the current knowledge of reefs and the likely result of our current predicament. I recommend it, but be aware that you may find it depressing, despite Veron's attempts to be upbeat.

Excellent overview of the Great Barrier Reef's history. The text flows, is extremely easy to read, and the chapters and headings are set out logically. Much of the background involves controversial theories (e.g. reasons for major extinctions), and these, among others, are discussed thoroughly

and with sufficient maps, given the relatively short length and overall scope of the book. The important points (carbon dioxide and ocean acidification) are drilled home repeatedly without a loss of their impact. It is clear that the target audience for this book is for newcomers to the fields of coral research or paleontology. The only major flaw I see in the book are the many identical diagrams and photographs from previous publications by Dr. Veron, but, for those who pick up this book with no prior knowledge, this same information must be novel and informative. Even for those who have a background in the above fields, there is enough new information in this book to satisfy, and a few veritable gems of insight and observation. This book has a few ideas which people may or may not agree with Dr. Veron, but it is well-researched and well-argued. The overriding message presented in the final chapters is certainly the focus of the book, and in the end, the other details which may or may not be correct rightly take a back seat. Overall a recommended read.

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