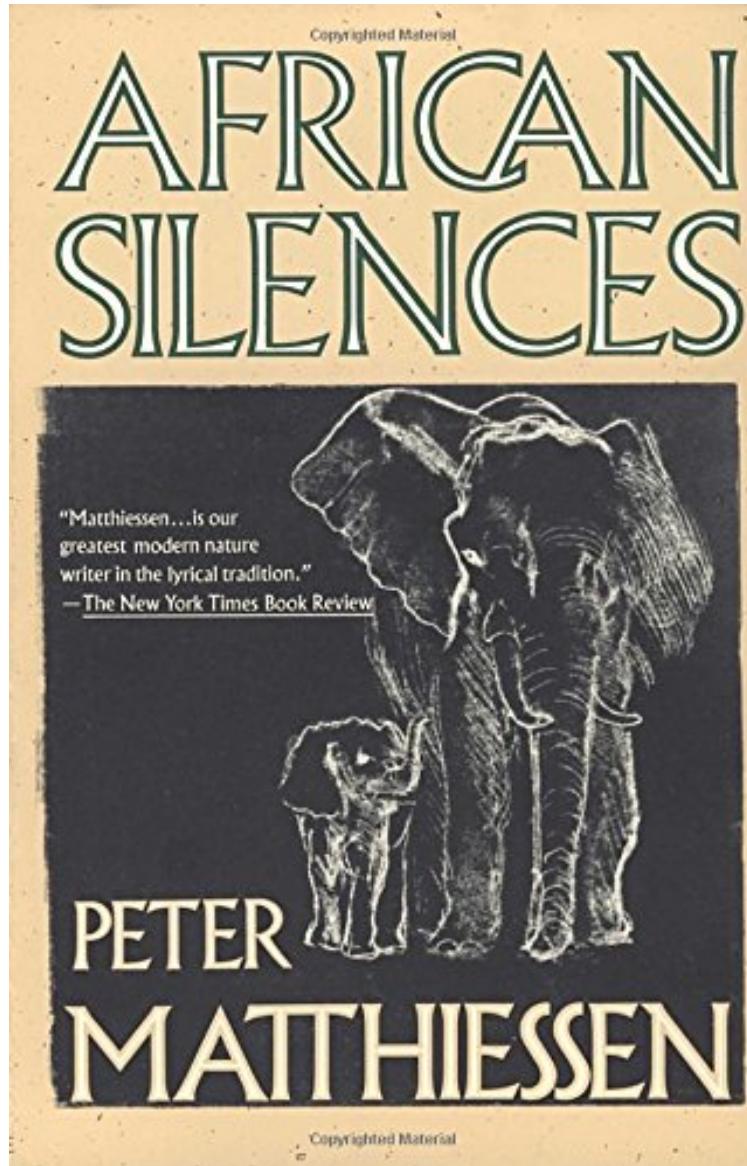


African Silences

Peter Matthiessen

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for years to come and reread.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Essential reading for anyone with a brain and a heart,By Jason BoxkRecounts the very sad impact of primitive and modern human construct upon the ancient land that is still Africa. Read and weep, and then create a voice for our better human selves.

African Silences is a powerful and sobering account of the cataclysmic depredation of the African landscape and its wildlife. In this critically acclaimed work Peter Matthiessen explores new terrain on a continent he has written about in two previous books, *A Tree Where Man Was Born* -- nominated for the National Book Award -- and *Sand Rivers*. Through his eyes we see elephants, white rhinos, gorillas, and other endangered creatures of the wild. We share the drama of the journeys themselves, including a hazardous crossing of the continent in a light plane. And along the way, we learn of the human lives oppressed by bankrupt political regimes and economies, and threatened by the slow ecological catastrophe to which they have only begun to awaken.

From Publishers WeeklyA superb vicarious experience of Africa that provides a dazzling, if dismaying, report on the state of the environment. Map. Copyright 1992 Reed Business Information, Inc.From Library JournalMatthiessen's previous travels in Africa have been largely confined to the East, described in *The Tree Where Man Was Born* (LJ 12/1/72) and *Sand Rivers* (LJ 3/1/81). In this account of three trips to Central and Western Africa, Matthiessen reports on the almost total devastation of wildlife in Senegal, Gambia, and the Ivory Coast and describes an expedition searching for the rare Congo peacock and gorillas in the Virunga Mountains of Zaire. Matthiessen's disgust for the government, ruined landscape, and many of the people he found in these countries makes for uncomfortable reading. Especially engrossing is his "African Silences" chapter in which he accompanied ecologist David (Jonah) Western to the Central African Republic, Gabon, and Zaire to survey populations of the forest elephant and visit the Mbuti Pygmies of the Ituri Forest. Matthiessen's delight in the Mbuti and his cautious optimism about the effects of the recent ban on ivory trafficking somewhat softens his otherwise grim message about the fate of the people and wildlife of Africa. Recommended for college and public libraries. Previewed in Prepub Alert, LJ 3/15/91.- Beth Clewis, J. Sargeant Reynolds Community Coll. Lib., Richmond, Va.Copyright 1991 Reed Business Information, Inc.From Kirkus sA journey through Equatorial Africa to study the fate of elephants and other wildlife produces a somber chronicle of irrevocable loss, relieved only by noted naturalist and novelist Matthiessen's lucid prose and concluding intimations of some redress. Matthiessen, a frequent traveler to Africa, began his investigation with a visit in the late 1970's to Senegal, Gambia, and the Ivory Coast, where the encroaching Sahel, unbridled hunting, and burgeoning populations had almost destroyed the elephant and wildlife population as well as the indigenous forest. As Matthiessen accompanied naturalists through the few preserves, often run-down and small, it became clear that the situation was even more grave than anticipated--"the animals are so scarce that they have no reality in daily life." It was a loss that went beyond conventional needs for preservation, for these animals have been the traditional totems and protectors of the clans. In 1986, Matthiessen returned to study the forest elephants of Gabon and Zaire, an area where "a great silence" descended after the depredations of the slave trade ended, allowing elephants to increase. But more recently, local wars and the enormous demand for ivory have ended this growth. In these equivalents of the rain forest, Matthiessen and his companions met pygmies, observed gorillas, and established that there are indeed two distinct kinds of elephants: forest and savannah, with a large intermediary hybrid group that wanders between the forest and grassland. The recent ban on ivory offers some hope of preserving the elephant, a species that, excepting fire and man, has "more impact on habitat than any force in Africa." There are the usual incidents and frustrating run-ins with local bureaucrats, but Matthiessen offers much more: a moving and never-sentimental evocation of loss to both man and beast, infused with sympathy and realism. Vintage Matthiessen. -- Copyright 1991, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.