

Award-winning science writer to speak at Wesleyan April 20

Award-winning science writer David Quammen will appear at N.C. Wesleyan College on April 20 as part of the Visiting Writer Series.

Quammen recently published *The Song of the Dodo: Island Biogeography in an Age of Extinction*, an enlightening and entertaining tour of islands around the world as well as the subject of island biogeography.

Based on eight years of research around the world, *The Song of the Dodos* is a blend of science, adventure, travel, history, and even detective work.

"Not only is this book compulsively readable — a masterpiece, maybe *the* masterpiece of science journalism, it also matters deeply," writes Bill McKibben in *Audubon Magazine*. "It tells how we came to understand the biological dynamic of the planet just in time to watch it start to collapse."

As Quammen explains, island biogeography is the science concerned with where animals and plants are, and where they are not. It is, he happily reports, "full of cheap thrills. Many of the world's gaudiest life forms, both plant and animal, occur on islands. There are giants, dwarfs, crossover artists, nonconformists of every sort."

Beginning with one of the pioneers of island biogeography, Alfred Russel Wallace, in the mid-1800's, Quammen presents the historical background of the field, a story with elements of bravery, genius, and the occasional mishaps.

Drawing on travels which took him to such places as Madagascar, New Guinea, Krakatau,

Mauritius, the Galapagos, Guam, Tasmania, the Central Amazon, and Komodo, Quammen captures the subject in all its color and variety.

He recounts his own memorable encounters with Komodo dragons who pile onto a goat carcass "like NFL linemen attacking a fumble;" giant tortoises, "jumbled against one another like a bad freeway accident among Volkswagens;" and dueling iguanas — "This nonsense can go on for as much as five hours, but who are we to judge? It's no crazier than a Tennessee roadhouse on a Saturday night."

He calls the voice of the indri, the largest of all surviving lemurs, as "a cross between the call of a humpback whale and a saxophone riff by Charlie Parker." He also introduces an equally eccentric menagerie of human scientists met along the way.

A book filled with landscape, wonder and ideas, *The Song of the Dodo* is a ringing wake-up call to our age of extinctions. Above all, Quammen injects an immediacy into abstract issues about extinction and the future of Earth's species.

Whether writing of the last dodo or the near-extinction of the Tasmanian aborigines, Quammen speaks movingly of individual losses.

"The song of the dodo has been silent for three centuries, but the song of the indri still rings in the forests of Madagascar," he says. "My purpose in writing this book was to allow you to hear it, and to entice you to care."

David Quammen is a two-time recipient of the National Magazine Award for his science essays

and other work in *Outside* magazine. He wrote a natural science column in *Outside* from 1981-1995. His work has also appeared in *Harper's*, *Esquire*, *Rolling Stone*, *Audubon*, and other magazines.

His previous books include two collections of essays, *Natural Acts*, which received the Pacific Northwest Booksellers Award, and *The Fight of the Iguana*, as well as an historical espionage novel, *The Soul of Viktor Tronko*.

Quammen was born in 1948 and has earned degrees from Yale and Oxford. He is the recipient of a Rhodes Scholarship and a Guggenheim Fellowship. He lives in Montana with his wife Kris Ellingsen, an artist and musician.

The time and place of Quammen's Wesleyan lecture was not available at press time.



SCIENCE JOURNALIST DAVID QUAMMEN

TRUTH PART II *Truth and Relativism*

Monday, April 15

3:30 p.m., Chapel

David Jones

"Truth, Relativism, and the American Way"

Fred Grissom

"On Having, and Not Having, the Truth"

Ken Finney

"The Truth, for Christ's Sake"

Monday, April 22

7:30 p.m., Chapel

Mary Lou Steed

"The Culture Wars"

Monday, April 29

3:30 p.m., Chapel

Concluding Panel

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