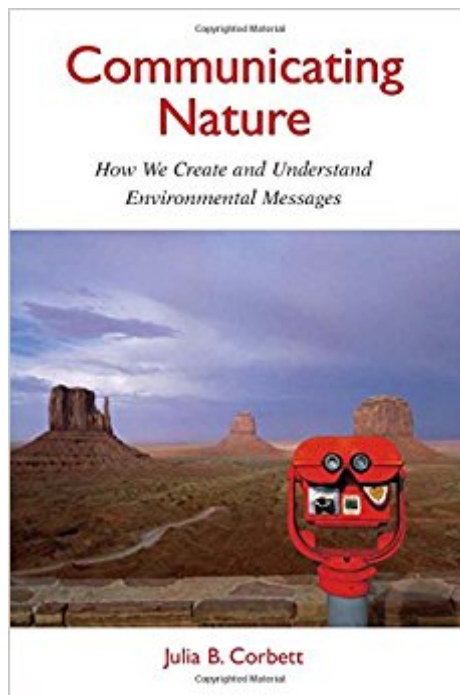




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# Communicating Nature: How We Create And Understand Environmental Messages



## Synopsis

A broader and more comprehensive understanding of how we communicate with each other about the natural world and our relationship to it is essential to solving environmental problems. How do individuals develop beliefs and ideologies about the environment? How do we express those beliefs through communication? How are we influenced by the messages of pop culture and social institutions? And how does all this communication become part of the larger social fabric of what we know as "the environment"? *Communicating Nature* explores and explains the multiple levels of everyday communication that come together to form our perceptions of the natural world. Author Julia Corbett considers all levels of communication, from communication at the individual level, to environmental messages transmitted by popular culture, to communication generated by social institutions including political and regulatory agencies, business and corporations, media outlets, and educational organizations. The book offers a fresh and engaging introductory look at a topic of broad interest, and is an important work for students of the environment, activists and environmental professionals interested in understanding the cultural context of human-nature interactions.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Corbett gives practical advice in this text for her students in environmental studies ... The author explores attitudes toward the environment from lawn care at home to ecotourism. Valuable for graduate and undergraduate students as well as the lay public and organizations concerned with the environment. Summing Up: Recommended." (CHOICE)"For those involved with the

communication of nature, this is an important book. No matter where your particular point of view fits into the spectrum of environmental ideology, understanding how your beliefs were formed and how they color your views of the natural world is important." (Science Books & Films)"â | theoretically sound and immediately practical. [Professor Corbett] has written an excellent textbook, filled with fun little gems of activities that will encourage students to complement the content knowledge [she] provides with their own personal experiences." (Tarla Rai Peterson Texas A&M University; editor of Green Talk in the White House)"This is a wonderful book for any student of the environment.... Julia Corbett provides a valuable text exploring issues ranging from the morality of zoos to our consumer society and the 'buyosphere.' Readers will come away with a new understanding of nature and culture." (Susan K. Jacobson University of Florida; author of Communication Skills for Conservation Professionals)"Communicating Nature is a timely and important book on a subject that has received relatively little critical attention. This book should be of great value to people interested in promoting and marketing more responsible and effective resource management and environmental conservation." (Stephen R. Kellert Yale University; author of Building for Life)"This focus on the role of communication "in its broadest sense" in the construction of environmental beliefs and behaviors will be a must-read for environmental communication students and practitioners." (Sharon Dunwoody University of Wisconsin-Madison)"Corbett's book is carefully researched and thoughtfully presented...her overall tone is unflinchingly objective...Communicating Nature is extremely successful at laying bare the messages that shape our attitudes." (Quarterly Review of Biology)"Traditionally, Nature's beauty has been in the eye of the beholder, when not in the way of the bulldozer. Now, Julia Corbett turns a scientist's eye to how we communicate with each other about the natural world. Her astute and deep analysis is greatly needed. â |." (Richard Louv author of Last Child in the Woods)

Julia Corbett is associate professor in the Department of Communication at the University of Utah, specializing in environmental communication. She has previously published articles in Journal of Communication and other communications journals, as well as Orion and Owl/Egret.

Corbett writes directly to undergraduate students in this engaging textbook. I like her emphasis on historical and cultural aspects that influence how Americans have developed a characteristic range of viewpoints on the meaning of "environment." This is a fine starting point for a discussion on environmental communication, though some students (and their instructors) might not find it challenging enough on a theoretical level. It has a chapter dedicated to animal issues, but not

enough discussion on risk or crisis communication.

I teach various university courses on environmental communication and this book serves as the cornerstone for all of them. I can best explain the value of the book through examples of how my students and I use it in the classroom. For example, in an honor's class last year, "Building a Local Environmental Campaign," we discussed the book for the first half of the semester. Although the focus of that class was consistent with the title (building a local campaign), the students came from various backgrounds unrelated to environmental studies or environmental communication. Corbett's book helped launch the class and introduce the students to ways we might think about environmental beliefs, experiences in childhood, media images, diametrically opposed ideologies, etc. The students especially enjoyed when we delved into how their childhood might have shaped their environmental attitudes and beliefs. They also enjoyed discussing the ideological typology offered by Corbett - which ranges from unrestrained use of the environment (for human benefit) to "transformative" ideologies that can, as that label suggests, transform how we think about our relationship with the environment. The students in that class used this book to think long and hard about how the public conceives of the environment and environmental organizations. They did this BEFORE they began working for local organizations. The students reported after the class that reading and discussing Corbett's book gave them some really interesting insights when they began advising their "clients" (which included the local Sierra Club) about new approaches to build support and educate the public. In another class I taught, "Environmental Communication," the students were primarily advertising and public relations students and the focus of the class was to study how organizations, governments, and the media communicate environmental messages. The book offered us case studies, which we could then research further, and it offered that wonderful aforementioned ideological typology, which students used to research where various U.S. and international cities and several corporations fall on that typology. It was great to hear the students deliver thoughtful, provocative presentations on topics ranging from ecotourism to Ikea. I don't think we would have gotten as far as we did that semester without Corbett's book to guide us. This fall semester I will use this book once again - this time with incoming freshman. The purpose of the class is to build the student's critical thinking and writing skills. This book will be the perfect starting point for introducing them to the complexity of environmental attitudes and politics and getting them started on some college-level research papers. My point I suppose is this: I can use this book again and again because it is flexible - it gives me a starting place from which I can launch into different lectures, projects, papers and supplementary readings. Each time I do this, I end up with a different

class. It is a joy to have this book in my repertoire. One final thought on the book is that it makes for some heated discussions at times, which always breathes life into a class. (My university is in Texas - and my students come from an array of Texas communities, including those for which oil is the economic and cultural lifeblood for the city and its people.) Each semester a few students bristle at Corbett's writing style, feeling that she is hostile to conservative environmental viewpoints or to capitalism. This offers a great opportunity to help the students develop their own views, replete with research and evidence, as a means of giving voice to whatever they feel Corbett failed to bring to the dialogue. If you can foster a respectful and open discussion, you will surely be rewarded - probably more so - when not everyone agrees with the ideas put forth in this book. Overall, the book is well-written, engages student of all backgrounds, and offers a starting point for thinking critically about and discussing complex environmental issues, attitudes and ideologies - all within the overarching framework of "communication."

Great book

Needed it for a class.

This book addresses the topic of how we formulate our beliefs about nature and how we in turn communicate about nature. The author talks about the various views on nature from the world being there for humans to plunder to the deep ecology view of the need for an ecocentric concept of the world instead of anthropocentrism. She then goes on to look at how our attitudes about the environment affect our recreational activities, our jobs, our consumer habits and our advertising. I was torn between giving this book four stars because it contains a lot of insightful material and two stars because I found a lot of flaws that made it hard to take the author seriously. I settled on three. Here are the issues: First, her discussion of Europeans and Native Americans is biased, two-dimensional and unbelievable. Her take is that nothing bad happened in America until the Europeans got here. While I agree that Europeans certainly wreaked havoc, Native Americans also affected their environment negatively. For instance, they started fires to clear areas and they overhunted certain animal species. It is an overly simplistic and misleading approach to ignore the evidence that points to Native Americans altering their surroundings to their benefit even if it was not at the scale of what the Europeans did. The second problem I had was the amount of typos and grammatical mistakes. My favorite occurs on page 54 of the paperback edition where she is discussing emotional engagement in terms of Eastern religions and she writes "To be truly aware of

nature, one must be good listener." Evidently, one does not need to have a good grammar checker or have a good editor to be truly aware of nature. I was willing to overlook these sorts of flaws though, as they are pretty common in books written by researchers. Even though this book is supposed to be about communication, the author still appears to mostly be a researcher. Now for the flaw that blew the book for me: I was reading the chapter entitled "Leisure in Nature as Commodity and Entertainment" where she brings movies into the discussion. When talking about one movie in particular, *The River Wild*, she states that Glenn Close plays a river guide in that film. It was Meryl Streep who played the river guide. I feel like Bill Murray in the movie *Scrooged* when he says to his brother James regarding the name of the boat on *Gilligan's Island* "It was the SS Minnow James". Well, it was Meryl Streep as anyone can see by going to [...]. Hopefully the author gets a fact checker to go with her proof reader for her next book.

Corbett writes directly to undergraduate students in this engaging textbook. I like her emphasis on historical and cultural aspects that influence how Americans have developed a characteristic range of viewpoints on the meaning of "environment." This is a fine starting point for a discussion on environmental communication, though some students (and their instructors) might not find it challenging enough on a theoretical level. It has a chapter dedicated to animal issues, but not enough discussion on risk or crisis communication.

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