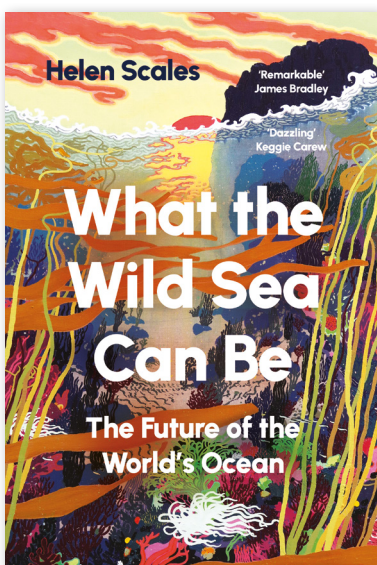


What the Wild Sea Can Be

The Future of the World's Ocean

by Helen Scales



PLOT SUMMARY

'No matter where we live, we are all ocean people', Helen Scales observes in her bracing yet hopeful exploration of the future of the ocean. Beginning with its fascinating deep history, Scales links past to present to show how prehistoric ocean ecology holds lessons for the ocean of today.

In elegant, evocative prose, she takes us into the realms of animals that epitomise current increasingly challenging conditions, from emperor penguins, to sharks and orcas. Yet, despite these threats, many hopeful signs remain, in the form of highly protected reserves, the regeneration of seagrass meadows and giant kelp forests, and efforts to protect coral reefs.

Offering innovative ideas for protecting coastlines and cleaning the toxic seas, Scales insists in *What the Wild Sea Can Be* we need more ethical and sustainable fisheries and must prevent the other existential threat of deep-sea mining. Inspiring us all to maintain a sense of awe and wonder at the majesty beneath the waves, she urges us to fight for the better future that still exists for the ocean.

WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR

In a prevailing atmosphere of eco-anxiety, Scales' *What the Wild Sea Can Be* presents hope. She reassures us that we are not at the point of oblivion just yet, and lays out clear methods for avoiding worst case scenarios, as well as celebrating the positive things that are already being done in the world.

However, Scales emphasises to the reader that, while it is entirely possible to maintain a positive view of the oceans' future, the situation is nuanced: 'A catastrophe isn't needed to steer evolution down new avenues and sculpt biodiversity in novel ways. A tangle of other elements is constantly in play, as more gradual and less immediately lethal environmental changes take place'.

“Urgent, spellbinding and gripping, showing the ways humans have accelerated climate change, and how we can fight for a better future.”

EMMA GANNON,
2025 JUDGE



It is this ‘tangle of elements’ that emerges as a theme from reading Scales’ book. What we learn is how sensitive ocean ecosystems are, and what happens when their delicate balances are upset. For instance, what happens when sharks or other apex predators are hunted or over-fished and are therefore not present to regulate the proliferation of other species; or what happens when humans directly intervene by moving species from one area to another, using the example of red king crabs. The removal of one perceived ‘problem’ very often seems to create much bigger problems, and human interventions should be very mindful of the complexity of their repercussions.

Scales teaches us that oceans are far too wonderfully complex to be able to ‘fix’ easily, but it is, nevertheless, still possible for our oceans to resist the most disastrous impacts of climate change.

What is clear in Scales’ book is her proactive belief in the future of the oceans, as well as a nuanced and realistic view of the tangled interconnectivity of human and natural solutions.

DISCUSSION POINTS

In *What the Wild Sea Can Be*, Scales asks the reader to consider ‘the underlying presumption that the ocean provides animals for humans to hunt and eat, and perhaps most importantly, make money from.’

Should we have this view, especially when we learn and understand the ocean’s fine balance as a haven for life, reading about the history of the oceans in the early chapters of Scales’ book?

How much do you think our capitalist world view has caused the damage we have done to the oceans via overfishing, hunting, pollution and the destruction of key ocean environments? How would things be different if humans considered themselves protective custodians of the oceans?

As well as adopting Scales’ suggested changes to the practices of managing fishing and ocean environments, do we all need to address this basic assumption that nature is there to serve us, and not the other way around?

QUESTIONS

‘For every hundred oceanic whitetip sharks that roamed the Pacific Ocean in the 1980s, fewer than five are alive today – that’s a 95% decline.’ How does this make you feel?

Were you aware that, post-Brexit, the UK government has decided to restart the commercial fishing of bluefin tuna? Is the UK’s non-attachment to EU regulations around fishing now good or bad? Why?

Have you experienced eco-anxiety? If so, has reading this book helped?



Shortlist
2025

If you enjoyed this book try some of our recommended reads on the next page.

How should humans balance the need to support livelihoods with environmental concerns? Which is more important: jobs or ocean health and longevity?

NEXT STEPS

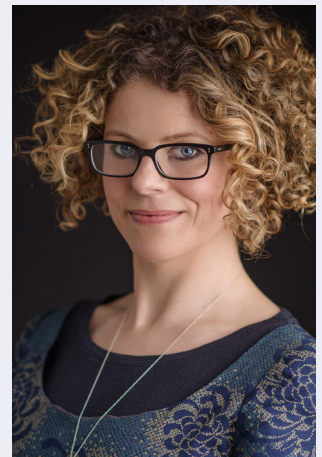
Scales gives the example of Emperor Penguins inhabiting Antarctica as ‘a visible, incremental barometer of the climate crisis,’ because they are easily monitored by scientists due to their obvious visibility, standing in groups on the ice.

Research ways that you can support Emperor Penguins – are there charities you can support, or simply raise awareness of species such as penguins and others that are being threatened by climate change?

As Scales notes in the chapter ‘Living in the Future Ocean’, as consumers we have a lot of power. She suggests that you can use social media to name and shame companies that are filling the ocean with pointless plastics. Research how to cut back on plastic packaging in your shopping; if you have investments, see if you can invest in funds that do not support fossil fuels. In eating seafood, seek out the options ‘that tread most lightly on sea life and give your business to people working hardest to make a sustainable, ethical living from the ocean.’ Think about the small ways that you can support the world’s oceans. ■

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Helen Scales is a marine biologist, acclaimed author and broadcaster who explores the wonders and plight of the oceans and the living planet. Her books, including *The Brilliant Abyss and Spirals in Time*, have been adapted for stage and screen, and translated into 15 languages. She writes for *National Geographic Magazine* and *The Guardian*, teaches at Cambridge University and is a storytelling ambassador for the Save Our Seas Foundation. Helen divides her time between Cambridge, England and France.



Shortlist
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If you enjoyed this book...

RECOMMENDED READS

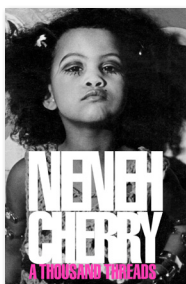
In *The Brilliant Abyss: True Tales of Exploring the Deep Sea, Discovering Hidden Life and Selling the Seabed*, Helen Scales captures the golden age of discovery we are currently in and looks back at the history of how we got here, while also looking forward to the unfolding new environmental disasters that are taking place miles beneath the waves.

In *Fathoms: The World in the Whale*, Rebecca Giggs explores the profound connection between whales and the environment, revealing how these majestic creatures reflect the impact of human activity on the ocean.

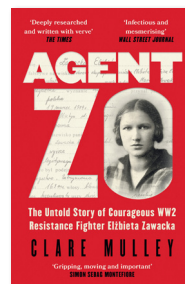
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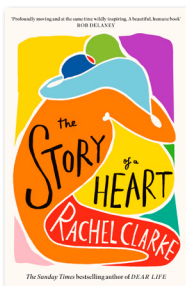
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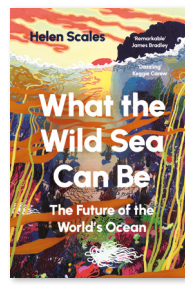
A Thousand Threads
by Neneh Cherry



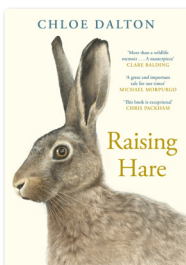
Agent Zo: The Untold Story of Courageous WW2 Resistance Fighter Elżbieta Zawacka
by Clare Mulley



The Story of a Heart
by Rachel Clarke



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