

### Naturalists at Sea: Scientific Travellers from Dampier to Darwin

GLYN WILLIAMS  
Yale University Press:  
2013.

Dutch, most of them were incarcerated and the two ships were seized.

Naturalists, by contrast, cared most about having enough time to go ashore and discover new flora and fauna. After collecting specimens, often with great difficulty, they depended on the captain's goodwill to enable them to draw and record their trophies in cramped and inclement conditions and, if possible, to keep them alive for the journey home. Darwin was fortunate to be able to spend 60% of his voyage time on land and to dispatch specimens regularly from South America to Britain. Some 70% of Cook's second voyage, however, was spent at sea — to the despair of Forster, who wrote that “after having circumnavigated very near half the globe we saw nothing, but water, Ice & Sky”.

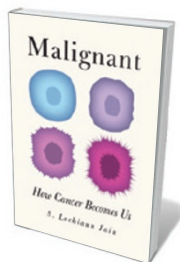
Conflict was inevitable, Williams concludes from studying such records. On Vitus Bering's 1741 Russian expedition to the strait between Russia and North America that now bears his name, naturalist Georg Wilhelm Steller had less than a day in newly discovered Alaska. He managed to walk several miles along a beach collecting plants, but when he asked Bering for a small boat and several men, was told to return within an hour or be left behind. In his journal, Steller complained that “the preparation for this ultimate purpose lasted ten years; twenty hours were devoted to the matter itself”. On George Vancouver's British expedition to the Pacific in 1791–95, an on-board greenhouse full of specimen plants, erected on the instruction of Banks (then president of the Royal Society), became a bone of contention. The burden for the crew of keeping the plants alive eventually led Vancouver to arrest the ship's naturalist, Archibald Menzies, for insubordination.

Williams has been researching the history of European incursions into the Pacific and Arctic oceans since the late 1950s, and has published many books on the subject. An erudite and beautifully illustrated work, *Naturalists at Sea* wears its learning lightly, and conveys to non-specialists an array of fascinating details about explorers and naturalists, familiar and not-so-familiar, quoting judiciously from their journals and post-voyage publications. Although it sometimes struggles to bring its dizzying cast of characters to life, every page testifies to the indomitable vitality of both explorers and naturalists. ■

**Andrew Robinson** is author of *The Story of Measurement* and *The Shape of the World: The Mapping and Discovery of the Earth*.  
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the Dutch East Indies in late 1793. After the crew learned with shock that Louis XVI had been executed and that the French Republic was at war with the

## Books in brief



### Malignant: How Cancer Became Us

S. Lochlann Jain UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS (2013)

Patients with cancer generate so much revenue for the US health-care industry that a cure would be an economic risk. Thus argues anthropologist S. Lochlann Jain, who deems cancer “a constitutive aspect of American social life, economics, and science” — so bizarrely entwined that chemical companies churn out both cancer drugs and carcinogenic herbicides. In this trenchant mix of science history, memoir and cultural analysis, Jain is thoughtful and often darkly humorous on everything from cancer statistics to treatments, trials and issues around sexuality. Brilliant and disturbing.



### Five Billion Years of Solitude: The Search for Life Among the Stars

Lee Billings CURRENT (2013)

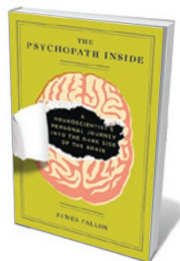
Unsurprisingly for an infant science, the quest for other Earths is sometimes fractious. Science writer Lee Billings deftly captures both behind-the-scenes ructions and landmark discoveries in his tour of this multidisciplinary field, its history and its players. The seamlessly interwoven narrative is strong on big personalities, from astronomer Frank Drake, a pioneer of the search for extraterrestrial intelligence (SETI) whose work is now overshadowed by glamorous finds in exoplanetary science, to astrophysicist Sara Seager, a scintillating star in that very field.



### High Moon Over the Amazon: My Quest to Understand the Monkeys of the Night

Patricia Chapple Wright LANTERN (2013)

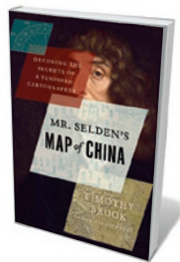
One-time “hippie housewife” Patricia Chapple Wright became a trailblazing primatologist by dint of determination and sheer curiosity. As related in this engaging memoir, her scientific odyssey began in a New York pet shop in the 1960s. After purchasing an owl monkey (*Aotus lemurinus griseimembra*), she travelled to Peru to locate a mate for it — and recognized her métier. Decades on, now a world authority on lemurs, she has set up the Ranomafana National Park and an adjacent research site, Centre ValBio, in Madagascar.



### The Psychopath Inside: A Neuroscientist's Personal Journey into the Dark Side of the Brain

James Fallon CURRENT (2013)

In 2005, neuroscientist James Fallon was checking the brain scans of psychopathic murderers and ‘normal’ controls, including himself. Noting that his scan closely resembled those of the murderers, the happy, successful Fallon had to know why. He shares his journey, mining genetics, epigenetics and neuroscience, and perusing his childhood (including a brief spell of obsessive-compulsive disorder), family tree and behavioural eccentricities. His surprising final diagnosis could broaden the way we see normality.



### Mr. Selden's Map of China: Decoding the Secrets of a Vanished Cartographer

Timothy Brook BLOOMSBURY (2013)

The Selden map of China and its environs, an anonymous cartographic puzzle unearthed in the Bodleian Library in 2009, is the pivot for this cultural history. Timothy Brook illuminates the map's odd features and backstory. Along with the lives of those tangled in its history (such as Michael Shen, the Chinese Jesuit who translated the map's script in the late 1600s), Brook reveals how the amazingly accurate chart hints at the first stirrings of globalization. **Barbara Kiser**