



"David Gessner is a necessary traveler along the border between the present and the future. Let him be your guide with this splendid book. Long may he run."

—Congressman Jamie Raskin

Dear Editor/Producer,

As the earth's climate rapidly changes, how do we inhabit this moment? How should we talk and write about the crisis? How do we live with the reality of what our children will face? In **A TRAVELER'S GUIDE TO THE END OF THE WORLD: Tales of Fire, Wind and Water** (June 20, Torrey House Press), bestselling author David Gessner takes readers on a cross-country tour of America's climate hotspots—from his hurricane-prone backyard in North Carolina to the charred town of Paradise, CA to drought-ridden Phoenix to the sunken lands below New Orleans—talking to anyone and everyone, observing the damage, trying and trying again to work out a new way of facing our great existential crisis.

In visits to these water-logged areas and smoked-out mountains, Gessner speaks with scientists, thinkers, and everyday people about the future, what it looks like, what they fear, and always about one personally vexing question: What will the world be like in 2064, when his daughter Hadley, already suffering from intense climate anxiety—her generation's birthright—is his current age?

Avoiding both doom-and-gloom and false hope, Gessner is clear-eyed about our environmental reality in **TRAVELER'S GUIDE**, but he offers this sobering and informative account of the climate crisis in language that's convivial, energized, and sometimes wild. Perhaps writing about the unfathomable in this way, he gestures, we can more fully encounter the crisis, mitigate it as best we can, then navigate the new age of fire, heat, wind, and water together.

Thanks for considering,  
Kailey Wolcott / Leah Paulos  
Kailey@PressShopPR.com / Leah@PressShopPR.com

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

David Gessner is the author of twelve books that blend a love of nature, humor, memoir, and environmentalism, including *Leave It As It Is: A Journey Through Theodore Roosevelt's American Wilderness* and the *New York Times*-bestselling *All the Wild That Remains: Edward Abbey, Wallace Stegner and the American West*. Gessner currently serves as Chair of the Creative Writing Department at the University of North Carolina Wilmington, where he is also the founder and Editor-in-Chief of the literary magazine, *Ecotone*. His prizes include a Pushcart Prize, the John Burroughs Award for Best Nature Essay, the Association for Study of Literature and the Environment's award for best book of creative writing, and the Reed Award for Best Book on the Southern Environment. In 2017 he hosted the National Geographic Explorer show, "The Call of the Wild." He is married to the novelist Nina de Gramont.

## **Q&A WITH DAVID GESSNER**

**You've spent the last twenty years reporting on the front lines of climate and the natural world in bestselling books and magazine features. What's stayed the same over that period and what has changed, and how have you responded to climate change in your writing?**

Part of what the new book is about is breaking up old paradigms and I, along with almost everybody else, have been slow to see things in a new light, in this case the light of climate change. I have long rankled against being called a "nature writer," it seems dismissive, but it's true I came to this sort of work with a nature writer's tools: observing and celebrating the natural world and the people who lived close to it, railing against those destroying it. But I, like so many of us, was slow to see how pervasive climate change was.

As I have grown older, and evolved from a moment-seeking nature romantic into a reporter, I have witnessed global warming (to call it by its less-watered down original name) change from an obscure idea that few understood into a theory that does almost as good a job describing the reality of our present world as Darwin did describing why animals evolve. I have now seen the climate crisis with my own eyes. Seen flash floods rip down canyons in the west, seen fires threaten people and places I love, seen hurricanes hit my house, not to mention the water rising in my own backyard. I've also long traveled to places gutted by the search for fossil fuels, to Vernal, Utah fracked and Barataria Bay, Louisiana covered in a film of oil. Gradually, far too slowly, I started to see how it all fit into the larger picture.

**Your college-aged daughter Hadley is part of a generation that's grown up with the specter of an uninhabitable planet. How has her perspective on the climate crisis affected your own?**

Like many people of my generation, I first came to the idea of an altered future theoretically, through books like *The End of Nature* and films like *An Inconvenient Truth*. But while we may have



already been at the end of nature, it always seemed to me that there was plenty of nature left, and back then it felt like they were talking about a time that was far away. It turned out we were wrong. It wasn't far away. We are in it now. For my daughter and for many of my students, there is nothing theoretical about facing a world where the elements—fire, water, wind—have turned against us.

There are all sorts of studies that reach this same conclusion: Last year *The Lancet*, one of the oldest and most-respected general medical journals, published a study of ten thousand young people, ages sixteen to twenty-five, in ten countries, that revealed that the majority of the respondents experienced climate anxiety as a regular part of their lives. But studies are one thing. Hadley, and my students, *feel* climate change in a way my generation does not. "Doom is normal," Hadley told me. Talking to her was what led me to ask scientists what the world will be like in 42 years, when Hadley is the age I am now. I wanted to really feel the future, as much as that is possible.

**In all the dire warnings about global warming, it can be easy to overlook the emotional experience of it all. Yes, we're hotter in the summer and the beaches are shrinking, but we're also scared, angry, despairing. Why is acknowledging that piece often a challenge?**

The short answer is repression.

Think of how much we repress in our regular lives. Climate change is almost perfectly built for repression. First of all it is, we still perceive, off in the future. Second, it is something that seems so large and pervasive that we feel powerless in the face of it. Third, the world provides us with many handy ways to repress it: from the obvious climate denying of industry and media to the more gentle denial of news reports that always have to end "hopefully."

No one wants to talk about the massive chunk of ice that broke off Antarctica. Can you blame them? We all bury. We hide. We learn to ignore. To take deep breaths and buy coffee cups that tell us not to panic. We don't go down in the basement.

Mine is not a book that provides bullet points or answers. If I am doing any service, if I am helping in any way, it is on the level of awareness. I am saying: please look at what is happening and what will soon happen. Just look and don't turn away for a minute.

I challenge people to attempt to empathize with human beings in the future, with their children and their children. This is not an easy thing to do. But it is a first step. Awareness is important. Letting it break up through the ice of repression.

**What was the most surprising thing you saw or heard from people living in places destroyed by climate change?**

I guess I would have to say it was the reflexive re-building. It is an instinct I completely understand. It is a resilient instinct to not be destroyed, to reassert oneself. I live in a hurricane bull's eye and I'm not sure I wouldn't rebuild if my house was destroyed, betting that lightning—and winds and water—wouldn't strike twice.

And yet as Orrin Pilkey, the coastal geologist, says, it's often like re-building on a train track, and then keeping your fingers crossed and hoping the train doesn't come again. At some point we will hopefully begin to understand that there are certain places, in flood and fire zones, where we should simply not rebuild. Otherwise our houses are just fodder for storms and fires. Driftwood and kindling.

**Do you think there's a disconnect between how far along we are into the climate crisis and how literature has addressed it? What's been missing?**

There has been a good burst of recent climate lit that is taking us new places. Some potent re-imaginings. But there is still a lack of complex non-preachy literature on the subject. By literature I don't mean propaganda, nor do I mean fact-spewing book reports that read like television punditry frozen into print. In most of the writing about climate the sentences are not sloppy enough, too uncomplicated. And they are not BIG enough. The language does not rise to the challenge. Literature is not policy.

I know what doesn't work. A list of horrors and statistics. Doom alone doesn't inspire.

What to make of the end of the world? That is my guiding question. It is a writer's question. Another question that I find pressing upon me is this: how will people look back on the literature of our time if it does not address our major existential issue?

I've been surprised how well-suited the genre of nature writing is for reporting on climate. Of course I don't see a gang of nature writers riding to the rescue. But perhaps the modest and long-scorned genre can help. It is well suited for contemplating the world beyond the human and how we interact with that world. "Each disaster is that person's experience," a victim of the Paradise fire said to me. Exactly. By having first person encounters, not alone but with other people and animals and habitats in the climate-plagued places that increasingly make up our world, we can help make the larger story personal.

Can nature writers save the world?

How ridiculous, like believing that hobbits could save Middle Earth.

**You call hope a “treacherous” and “overused” word, but you’re not ready to give into despair. How should we be facing this moment? What are our options?**

The reason that I am wary of hope is that it has become a cliché of climate writing, climate reporting, and climate discussions. You can barely get the bad stuff out before people come charging in waving the hope flag. I swore off the word hope during my travels because it seemed overused, trite, the kind of thing that must always be tacked onto the end of any climate change story in the news. Hope as trope. “Well, we just mowed down this forest but here’s a sprig of green.”

Of course I understand why we do this, and I do it too. “Without hope there is no endeavor,” said Samuel Johnson and I know hope can be fuel for doing.

In fact looking back on the dozen books I have written I see a pattern of hopefulness. The story that was central to my early books was that of the ospreys, birds that were decimated by DDT, and then came back after the government outlawed the chemical. While I came into the present book determined not to be falsely hopeful, to see this world with cold eyes, it is true I see strands. Strands that if not “hopeful” given the fate my daughter will likely face in forty-two years, contain possibilities. I also see some reassurance in uncertainty. That is one thing that wildness is, isn’t it? An unclear path, a path that doesn’t follow the models. I will resist braiding these strands into a rope. I will not end inspirationally. But it would be dishonest not to include these threads in my thinking.

Maybe it is soft-minded of me to return to hope after all I’ve seen. Maybe being hopeful is naïve in the face of a heating world. But if I were looking for hope I know where I would find it. I would find it in the land building in southern Louisiana, in slot canyons coming back to life as the dam waters recede, in the way that barrier islands re-build themselves if we let them. I would find it in nature. For me the living natural world is where I feel, if not hopeful, then whole. It is the origin, it is the source, not just of the dwindling Colorado river, but of so much. So much creativity, so much energy, so much true diversity, so much possibility. And maybe that is the word I want to use here. *Possibility*. Because strangely one of the most reassuring things is the fact that we really don’t know where we are heading.

## **PRAISE FOR A TRAVELER’S GUIDE TO THE END OF THE WORLD**

“This is a work of astonishing and visionary scope but also sharply intimate and grounded detail. David Gessner’s kaleidoscopic journey sweeps in mammoth forces of nature, seemingly uncontrollable forces in society and economy, and an utterly refreshing, almost heartbreaking faith in language, communication and the potential of the human word to save the human world.”—**Congressman Jamie Raskin**



"With elements of dark humor that come flying like swallows going home, and with much beauty of detail, Gessner's journey becomes one of hoping to remember what's gone, writing a field guide to the life still present, as the reverent, remembering spirit of one human being."—**Linda Hogan**

"David Gessner is perennially provocative, but never more so than in this fine volume, which asks us to actually think about and feel the world we are creating. It is an act of generational love and courage."—**Bill McKibben**

"In *A Traveler's Guide to the End of the World*, David Gessner, a self-described 'polygamist of place,' bears powerful witness to the places he loves best, tracing the connections among their crises and finding possibility in their uncertain futures."—**Michelle Nijhuis, author of *Beloved Beasts***

"In *A Traveler's Guide to the End of the World*, David Gessner comes in hot with an indispensable contribution to our urgent conversation about how we should respond to the unprecedented environmental destruction our species has created. But this book is neither a bitter diatribe nor a dreary elegy. It is an engaging, entertaining, informative, unblinkingly honest look at the new world that climate change has wrought. Part poignant memoir, part adventurous travelogue, part accessible environmental science, this profound love letter to an uncertain future will forever change the way you imagine resilience, resistance, and transformation in the face of a rapidly changing planet."—**Michael P. Branch, author of *On the Trail of the Jackalope and Raising Wild***

"The Clash were called 'the only band that matters.' When it comes to climate, Gessner is the only writer who matters. Others write book reports on global warming, spewing statistics. Gessner immerses himself, gets to know the people most affected while telling their stories, writing from inside the crisis."—**Mark Spitzer, author of *Return of the Gar***

"Gessner astutely tracks, guides, and plunges headfirst into the reality of climate change across our country in this visionary and crystalline portrait of how our world, our landscapes, and perhaps most importantly—our *hearts*, are forever altered."—**Aimee Nezhukumatathil, author of *World of Wonders***