



Book Review

Call of the reed warbler: a new agriculture: a new earth

By C. Massy

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558 pp.,

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The author, Charles Massy, is an Honorary Senior Lecturer at the Australian National University (ANU), where he attained his PhD in Human Ecology. He has published numerous articles on pathways to innovation in sheep breeding, value-chain wool marketing with Merino sheep and wool. He has also published on Australian history. He was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) in 2011, for service to the wool industry and community. He is a fifth generation farmer who is championing regenerative farming nationally and globally.

This book won the Non-Fiction Book of the Year at the 2019 Educational Publishing Awards. It is part memoir combined with the contemporary history of the many farms and farming practices witnessed by the author. Overall, it is a manifesto on regenerative agriculture. Regenerative agriculture is an ecologically based approach to the regeneration and rehabilitation of farms, particularly the all-important soils; it is not one simple method because different habitats and soils require different approaches.

The author uses the memoir genre as his conceptual framework. This is structured with historical accounts of farms and farmers mixed with ecological explanations. For example, the author draws upon biological cycles and general biology to explain how and why the farm has been regenerated and thus outperforms farms not using natural approaches.

At 511 pages the author proffers a long argument. The argument is presented in three parts over 22 chapters. There is an extensive bibliography broken down into one for books and one for articles, essays, papers and poems. This is followed by notes given by chapter and number. The index follows.

This long manifesto reads as though it is written for farmers and environmental scientists, particularly soil scientists.

Clearly the greatest strength of the book lies in the enormity of information it presents, yet ironically I found this was also its greatest weakness. I kept thinking how much I wanted to see a concise review paper on the subject. I did not need to read all the history and detail about each case study over the author's lifetime. Undoubtedly it was meant for someone with more time to read and absorb its arguments.

Has this text aided this discipline? Without doubt such a detailed manifesto will impact heavily on the field of regenerative agriculture. Its educational value is enormous for those who set the time aside to read it. The organisation of the book is logical with the exposition needed to understand the arguments coming before them. The level of research appears as a lifetime of detailed learning making the book authoritative in its field, although counter arguments may be missing. The writing style is clear and engaging drawing the reader into the author's life, experiences and his step-by-step learning. If the bibliography and index are regarded as supplementary material then the bibliography is excellent and the index adequate.

I would recommend this book to all farmers wanting to learn about regenerative agriculture. It will also carry much needed information for environmental scientists, particularly those who want to incorporate any of the case studies into their own teaching. Finally, soil scientist may want to read it, but like me they may prefer shorter more concise papers from the peer-reviewed literature. On a more personal note, I found myself nodding my head in agreement as the author describes what is learnt from the natural environment to vastly improve farming outcomes for nature and sustainability, and for economic gain. I was nodding because what time has taught the author is what I have learnt in my lifetime of studying biology.

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Conflicts of interest. The author declare no conflicts of interest.
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