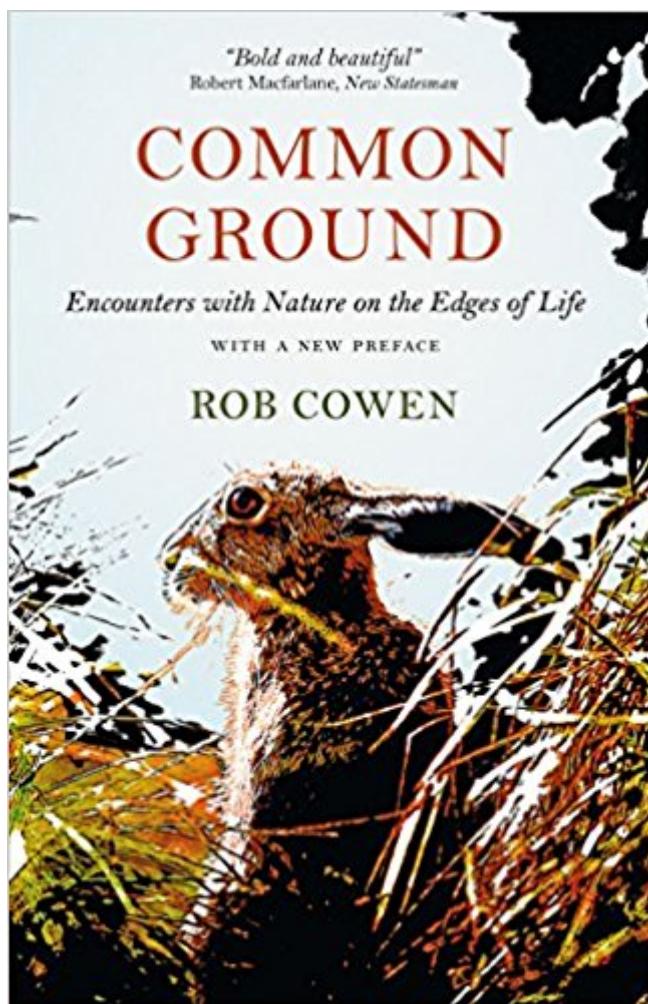


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# Common Ground: Encounters With Nature At The Edges Of Life



## Synopsis

All too often, we think of nature as something distinct from ourselves, something to go and see, a place that's separate from the ordinary modern world in which we live and work. But if we take the time to look, we soon find that's not how nature works. Even in our parceled-out, paved-over urban environs, nature is all around us; it is in us. It is us. *That's* what Rob Cowen discovered after moving to a new home in northern England. After ten years in London he was suddenly adrift, searching for a sense of connection. He found himself drawn to a square-mile patch of waste ground at the edge of town. Scrappy, weed-filled, this heart-shaped tangle of land was the very definition of overlooked—a thoroughly in-between place that capitalism no longer had any use for, leaving nature to take its course. Wandering its meadows, woods, hedges, and fields, Cowen found it was also a magical, mysterious place, haunted and haunting, abandoned but wildly alive—and he fell in fascinated love. *Common Ground* is a true account of that place and Cowen's transformative journey through its layers and lives, but it's much more too. As the land's stories intertwine with events in his own life—and he learns he is to become a father for the first time—the divisions between human and nature begin to blur and shift. The place turns out to be a mirror, revealing what we are, what we're not and how those two things are ultimately inseparable. *This is a book about discovering a new world, a forgotten world on the fringes of our daily lives, and the richness that comes from uncovering the stories and lives animal and human—contained within. It is an unforgettable piece of nature writing, part of a brilliant tradition that stretches from Gilbert White to Robert Macfarlane and Helen Macdonald.* *"I am dreaming of the edge-land again,"* Cowen writes. Read *Common Ground*, and you, too, will be dreaming of the spaces in between, and what—including us—thrives there.

## Book Information

Hardcover: 352 pages

Publisher: University Of Chicago Press (November 2, 2016)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 022642426X

ISBN-13: 978-0226424262

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 1.2 x 8.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.2 pounds ([View shipping rates and policies](#))

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars 3 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #364,847 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #1 in Books > Travel > Europe > England > Yorkshire #202 in Books > Sports & Outdoors > Nature Travel > Ecotourism #299 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Professionals & Academics > Environmentalists & Naturalists

## Customer Reviews

A *Guardian* readers' Top Ten Book of the Year (Guardian) "In beautifully written and evocative prose, English nature writer Cowen explores the relationship between humans and nature, making it abundantly clear that nature is where you find it." His subject is ostensibly a single square mile of waste land on the edge of Bilton, a small town in northern England. . . . He masterfully describes this place of beauty and garbage, a place filled with wildlife and the smells and sounds of the encroaching town. But he does much more than superbly describe the transformation of the seasons over the course of a single year. In discussing the changes the land and its inhabitants have experienced over hundreds of generations, Cowen brings the lives of individuals into sharp and poignant focus. . . . He captivatingly blends science, politics, and poetry. . . . Cowen shows how to find joy and awe in the quotidian while cogitating on the world we will leave the next generation." (Publishers Weekly, starred review) "Bold and beautiful." (Robert Macfarlane *New Statesman*) "A poetic examination of humankind's relationship with nature. . . . Recommended for the dedicated nature enthusiast and those interested in environmentalism." (Library Journal) "Thanks to Rob Cowen's remarkable book *Common Ground*, I've learned that there's a word for my woods: edgelands. A British nature writer, Cowen celebrates not remote slices of paradise but the wild places accessible to all of us: the unregulated land at the edges of human habitation where nature has been left to its own devices. Or, as Cowen puts it, 'the inglorious fallow patches you find at the fringes of the everyday.' . . . Cowen brings reverent attention to an edgeland near his home in the north of England. (Christian Century) "Sensitive, thoughtful, and poetic. Rob Cowen rakes over a scrap of land with forensic care, leading us into a whole new way of looking at the world." (Michael Palin) "A cracking book, and having finished, I now feel deprived." (Alan Bennett *London Review of Books*) "One of the most original books in any genre." (Melissa Harrison *Times*, Books of the Year) "Touched by genius." (John Lewis-Stempel *Sunday Express*, Books of the Year) "Highly poetic. . . . *Common Ground* is about the transformative power of this unnoticed piece of land, if one can only stand and stare for long enough." (Serena Tarling *Financial Times*) "Strange, complicated, deeply original and

ultimately satisfying. . . . Swings from realism into remarkable histories, human and animal. All our relationships with nature are fed by the imaginative as well as the scientific parts of the mind and in Common Ground, Cowen has found a new way of opening out this aspect." (Sarah Maitland Countryfile, Book of the Month)"Wild and unusual. An author coming into his real story, leaping over the space between animal and human as though there were no difference between us." (Observer)"An eerie, haunting book . . . rendered with hair raising, almost hallucinogenic, lyricism. . . . Cowen moves on through the seasons of the year and the creatures of the edge land, feeling, more than observing, how the improving circumstances of animal life mirror his own climb out of darkness." (Maclean's)"Heartfelt, deep, beautiful, and moving." (Tristan Gooley, author of The Natural Navigator)"Luminous. . . . A breath of fresh air." (Irish Times)"Blending natural history with a novelistic approach, Cowen revives his connection to the evocative, mysterious power to the natural world." (Sunday Express)

Rob Cowen is an award-winning journalist and writer whom the Guardian called, "one of the UK's most exciting nature writers." He has written regular columns on nature and travel for the Independent, Independent on Sunday and the Telegraph, and he is the author of Skimming Stones and Other Ways of Being in the Wild. He lives and writes in Yorkshire in the north of England.

This is a beautifully written reflection on a life in nature and in the real world, about the overlap of society and nature.

A respite for the weary soul

It's different..I have not finished it yet...but he does go on a bit about that fox.....and I am expecting him to go on those midnight journeys in the daytime before I get to the end.

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