

For release, June 2010

# LIGHT FADING

*Reflections on the Imperiled Everglades*

By Joel M. Curzon

Peter E. Randall Publisher

National Book Network

[<http://www.lightfading.com>]

Publication date – March 1, 2010

\$60.00, 302 pgs, cloth+jacket,  
250+ 4/c photos, 10.5" x 13.25"

ISBN# 978-1-931807-28-9

- **The only hardcover coffee-table book of the Everglades!**
- **2010 Independent Publisher Book Award - Southeast Regional**
- **More than 250 exquisite full-color photographs**
- **Stunning landscape + wildlife images; crocs, birds, snakes & more**

*Light Fading* is a call to cosmic humility in our interactions with the natural world. In the Everglades, the author, a Harvard educated attorney turned naturalist/photographer, makes clear that which merits our rekindled reverence. **Curzon romances the reader towards right action, by virtue of his superb images.** His thoughtful essay derides further development in the region, highlighting his belief that for the wild places that remain in our world, “no growth is good growth.”

## **Praise for *Light Fading* . . .**

*"The hidden—and perhaps doomed—beauty of an American Eden shines forth in this magnificent coffee-table collection of photographs... A radiant panorama of the Everglades that's both a feast for the eyes and a prod to the conscience."*

—*Kirkus Discoveries Review*

*"This is a powerful book, a powerful evocation of the startling majesty of the Everglades."*

—*Ken Burns, award-winning documentary filmmaker*

## **From the essay:**

“It was late afternoon in April, hot and dry. I left my vehicle, my pack heavily laden with lenses and camera equipment, and hiked across the Everglades’ southern marshes, toward the westward-trending rocky pinelands of the southern Coastal Ridge. Here the peat was thin to nonexistent, and walking through the patchy sawgrass required close attention to innumerable solution holes and irregularities in the rugged limestone surface. Dried periphyton crunched underfoot; biting deerflies descended mercilessly...

When I reached the ridge, the pines offered sporadic, light shade. The deerflies seemed to lose interest—perhaps they had taken their fill of blood—and left me in peace. With the light still harsh, there was little to do but look and wait for the softening of sunset. It was hot but beginning to cool, and aside from an occasional birdcall or breath of wind, it was silent. With my pack off and my tripod resting on the ground, I changed lenses and snapped some documentary shots of a solution hole to my west. Considerable time passed in this way—slowly, peacefully, waiting for the light to change.”

## **About the Author**

Joel M. Curzon grew up in Utah. He is a graduate of Harvard Law School (1999). After practicing law for several years in Silicon Valley, Joel ceased full-time practice in 2003 in order to focus on writing and photography. He currently resides in San Diego, California with his wife and daughter.

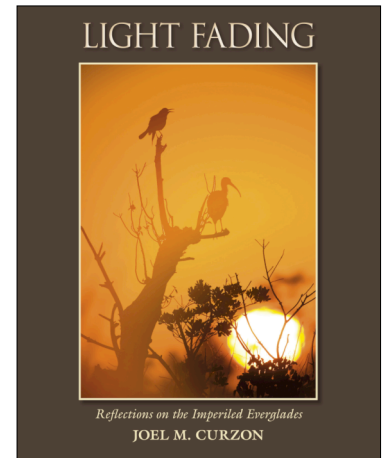
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### **Praise for *Light Fading*:**

"A deeply personal and passionate plea to preserve the natural areas of southern Florida, this book portrays the turbulent natural and human history of this harsh yet delicate region. Joel Curzon's marvelous photographs are sure to inspire readers to reflect on how the wonders of southern Florida are in danger of vanishing unless restoration plans are enacted immediately."

— *William F. Loftus, Ph.D., recently retired Research Ecologist with the U. S. Geological Survey's Everglades National Park Field Station. Now president of Aquatic Research & Communication, LLC.*

"Joel Curzon brings us into an Everglades of astonishing beauty and infinite meaning. Few people have seen the landscapes and the living creatures of the Everglades as Curzon's photos reveal them, and his insights explain why our own government is damaging, instead of restoring, millions of acres of National Park and other protected lands and waters in south Florida."

— *Joe Browder has led efforts to protect and restore the Everglades for almost half a century.*

"The Everglades is not just a place of great beauty, it's a deep test for our ability (and willingness) to make up for the damage we've caused. This book should help inspire us in the right direction."

— *Bill McKibben, author, Deep Economy*

"Joel Curzon's *Reflections on the Imperiled Everglades* is a visually stunning journey through the heart of the Everglades and its reflection on the soul of man."

— *David P. Reiner, President, Friends of the Everglades*

### ***Kirkus Discoveries Review:***

"The hidden—and perhaps doomed—beauty of an American Eden shines forth in this magnificent coffee-table collection of photographs. Worried that the dominant perception of the Florida Everglades is of a flat, monotonous swamp, the author—a lawyer, photographer and amateur naturalist—sets out to reveal the area's visual riches. **Curzon succeeds marvelously by turning an artist's eye, aided by a superb photographic technique, on varied landscapes, flora and wildlife.** He gives us **stirring vistas**: sunsets framed by blood-red storm clouds; expanses of mist-shrouded marsh and spindly pines, as delicately lined and shaded as a Chinese watercolor; lush groves of giant cypress trees that vault into the air like living cathedrals. But he also paints **fascinating miniatures**: a single dewdrop on a cypress needle, a tiny white crab spider lying in wait on a lavender petal, a close-up of a panther lewdly licking its chops.

Curzon's spare text sketches in the region's ecology and natural history and decries the overdevelopment that increasingly deprives the Everglades of the water it needs (and thus threatens with extinction the habitats and creatures he photographs.) But the **book's educational and polemical impulses never elbow aside its aesthetics. Curzon has an extraordinary ability to capture color and ambient light**, from the subtly chiaroscuroed pink plumage of a roseate spoonbill to the molten-silver carapace of an alligator swimming in the sunshine to the bright, flat patches of primary pigments that make a coral snake look a bit like a Mondrian painting. Many of his images—the dusky vortexes of a coiled rattlesnake, the brilliant emerald eye staring from a cormorant's lurid orange face—are as fascinating for their inventive compositions as for their documentary value. By giving us a visceral sense of the treasures that could be lost, each of these pictures is worth a thousand words and more of environmentalist pleading. **A radiant panorama of the Everglades that's both a feast for the eyes and a prod to the conscience.** "

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### **Q&A with Joel Curzon** (1 of 3 pgs)

Lawyer Joel Curzon gave up a lucrative practice in intellectual property law to pursue nature photography and environmental writing. Although he grew up primarily in Utah, earned his law degree at Harvard, and practiced law in Silicon Valley, Curzon was drawn to Florida for the subject matter of his new book, *Light Fading: Reflections on the Imperiled Everglades*.

### **Q: Why did you give up the law?**

A: My interests have always been in the natural sciences. I've done nature photography as a hobby since I was 16. Before attending Harvard Law, I majored in physics, with a minor in philosophy. The decision to attend law school was a pragmatic one, based on a perceived need for a sizeable income, but I thought the intellectual challenge of the law would grow on me.

The longer I was at law school, though, the more I felt it wasn't where my heart was. Compared to hard science and philosophy, law's intellectual standards are quite low. There's more concern for advocacy than for logical consistency. Physics and philosophy have rigorous standards for evaluating whether a hypothesis is true or false, and that's simply not the point when addressing a legal question.

After a few years of practicing law, I had paid off my school debt, saved some money, and could afford some professional photographic equipment and to take some time off. Around the same time, I was making my first trips to the Everglades because I was interested in their ecology. So it was natural that when I began shooting professionally, I would begin with this project.

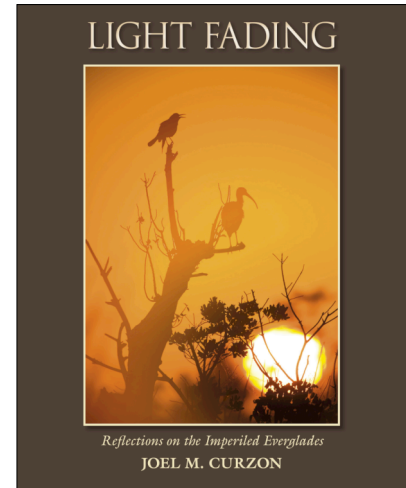
### **Q: What was your objective in writing and photographing *Light Fading*? Whom do you hope to influence?**

A: Most people who would buy a book like this probably have some appreciation for the environment and wildlife. I hope it will cause them to think more deeply about the relationships between human beings and the environment.

As I spent time in the Everglades, I found it to be a case study to what's going wrong around the world. The problem with the ecology in the Everglades isn't a lack of regulation – it has been intensively micromanaged, yet it's on the brink of collapse. The problem is a bigger issue: our overall relationship with nature.

In *Light Fading*, I discuss the Copernican Revolution, and how the human race never fully internalized the notion that we are not the center of the universe. Intellectually we know we're not, but we continue to act as if we were. Our value system still promotes unlimited economic growth, and the Everglades have long since reached the point where they can no longer absorb those pressures.

We tend to think that limitations on growth are un-American, but at some point people are going to have to say enough is enough. Florida's population has been growing rapidly for decades, and there's not a lot of room left. We need stability, not further growth, if the environment of the Everglades is to survive.



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**Q: So you're concerned about environmental disaster?**

A: Not in the sense that I think human beings will wipe themselves out. We're probably clever enough to avoid that. I'm concerned about the impoverished, depleted world that we might end up living in. Even if we could maintain a decent standard of living in the face of ecological disaster, that's not a world I'd want to live in.

**Q: What are some of the biggest environmental challenges facing the Everglades today?**

A: There are so many. The diversion of water to serve growing communities and agriculture has been well documented. It's depriving water from vast areas of the Everglades and causing major changes in the ecology. Loss of land to development is another, causing many habitats to shrink and forcing species into competition for ever-scarcer resources.

Another problem is invasion by foreign species. The Everglades offer benign conditions to a large range of foreign fish, insects, reptiles, and plants, and if they take hold, they can dramatically change the ecological balance.

Perhaps the biggest issue is climate change. The Everglades are so low that even a few inches of rise in sea levels will cause a major intrusion of salt water, causing wholesale loss of freshwater habitats.

**Q: Let's discuss your photography. What do you shoot, and why?**

A: Much of it is based on my interest in natural history. I concentrate on wildlife that I find compelling, and I look for a way to capture it in a way that's legitimately documentary but that also emphasizes the subject in a way that moves me.

Many of the professional photographers who work in the Everglades concentrate on birds and alligators, because they're so spectacular and prominent. I'm more interested in amphibians and smaller reptiles, including snakes. They don't get as much attention and fanfare as the birds, and I'm comfortable with snakes: they don't intimidate me.

**Q: What's your approach to composition?**

A: If I'm shooting a scenic or a static image, I have latitude to pay attention to composition, the Rule of Thirds, etc. On the other hand, if what I'm photographing is moving – particularly a bird in flight – the best I can do is center the focal point on the eye and try to get that sharp. Sometimes compositionally that's not what I'd want, but maybe that can be adjusted by cropping.

When shooting scenics, one of the challenges is that the Everglades are incredibly flat. The challenge is two-fold. When you're wading, with the sawgrass up to your chest or higher, it's hard to get good perspective. But you can use tree islands to elevate yourself subtly – just a foot or two--which makes a significant difference in the camera angle.

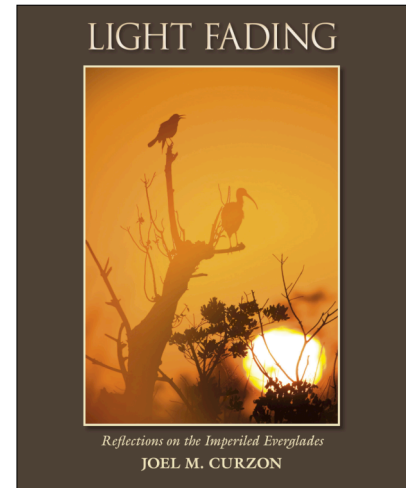
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The other part of the challenge is to provide vertical elements in a horizontal environment. Clyde Butcher, a famous photographer of the Everglades, said something like, "when you're photographing in a place like the Everglades, one of the fundamental compositional elements to use is the clouds." And you get some spectacular ones there, especially thunderclouds building, which add height and dimension. But of course clouds are ephemeral, and shooting in thunderstorms creates a whole raft of special concerns.

### **Q: What role does chance play, versus planning, in capturing an image?**

A: A lot of planning goes into scenic images. It's crucial to get it the right light, which often doesn't last long. You have to know the hours of dawn and sunset, and especially for dawn shots you have to be there on time with your tripod, all set to go. But it inevitably takes longer to drive and hike to a spot than you anticipate. And if you've been camping and shooting in an area for a month, it can be difficult to answer the alarm clock at 4:00 a.m.

I spend a lot of time learning about areas that might be interesting from people who know the land, particularly field research biologists. I've had good assistance from biologists about where to go and the timing.

I may be out of touch of weather reports, but I am very attentive to the weather around me. Even so, you can only plan so much before chance takes over. You don't always get the lighting conditions you hope for, or you might spend hours chasing cloud buildups that end up petering out or going off in a direction you don't expect.

Lightning, of course, is highly unpredictable and difficult to capture, but it can make a spectacular addition to a landscape that is otherwise rather flat. Sometimes I'll actively follow a building thunderstorm, but they can surprise you with changes in speed or direction. There have been times when a thunderstorm was literally overhead, and I just had to duck down, put the tripod down, get as low as possible and hope for the best.

### **Q: Is lightning the biggest hazard you face?**

A: By far. It's unpredictable, and in flat terrain there may be nothing to hide behind. Reptiles, including alligators and poisonous snakes, are comparatively predictable, and if you understand their behavior and pay attention to where they are, they present a very manageable level of danger.

### **About the Author**

Joel M. Curzon grew up primarily in Utah. He is a graduate of Harvard Law School, class of 1999. After practicing law for several years in Silicon Valley, Joel ceased full-time practice in 2003 in order to focus on writing and photography. He currently resides in San Diego, California with his wife and daughter.

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