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Growing a Revolution: Bringing Our Soil Back to Life by
David R. Montgomery (review)

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(Review)

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agreements. Climate change and globalization of energy markets present new conflicts and challenges that are not a respecter of national boundaries.

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Herping Texas: The Quest for Reptiles and

Amphibians. By Michael Smith and Clint King.

College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2018.

ix + 316 pp. Illustrations, map, glossary, notes, bibliography, index. \$30.00 flexbound.

Herping Texas: The Quest for Reptiles and Amphibians provides a captivating story of exploring habitats throughout the state of Texas, which has a vast array of both eastern and western reptiles and amphibians. The book is an engaging mix of anecdotes and herpetological education.

Following the introduction by Smith, the book has 12 coauthored chapters. Chapters 9 (“Seven Nights on the Great Rattlesnake Highway in the Rolling Plains”) and 10 (“At the Doorstep of the Trans-Pecos”) are by King. At the end are sections titled “Final Thoughts: Getting Started Field Herping” by Smith and “Afterword: Copperhead Road for the Generations” by King.

The chapters cover different ecoregions of Texas, from the Great Plains in the northwest corner to the Gulf Prairies in the southeast. Most begin with brief geological, cultural, and ecological descriptions to set the stage for the herpetological adventures to come. The field trips to different areas are well-written field notes, many accounts with their own title. In chapter 8 (“The Plains Grasslands and Palo Duro Canyon”), King’s account (“Battle of the Badlands”) artfully describes the capture of a foot-long Great Plains skink by a six-foot western coachwhip. As a bonus, two photographs show the skink and snake in a battle to the death, the coachwhip being the victor. In chapter 7 (“The Blackland Prairie and Post Oak Savannah”), Smith details in “Searching for Salamanders in Winter Woodlands” a gloomy day with minimal expectations of finding herps but one ending with two marbled salamanders beneath ground litter as a thunderstorm rolls in. Again, a photograph of one of these marvelous creatures accompanies the text.

Most photographs complementing the field accounts are high-quality views of habitats or specific animals found during the field trip, providing a superb overview of the natural habitats in Texas and the remarkable reptile and amphibian diversity inhabiting them. The placement of one photograph per page (occasionally two) allows for field-guide-quality illustrations of identifying features of a species or of the animal in its natural habitat. I commend the authors for another aspect of their photographs, which is that they serve to reinforce an important conservation message made early and throughout the book: field herpers should observe and photograph, not remove reptiles or amphibians from the wild. Smith and King make their point well by example. The book has an appropriate glossary for nonherpetologists, an appendix listing state and federal protected species of Texas, and a bibliography for each chapter.

Herping Texas will bring back fond memories for some of their own field trips to an area or will entice other field herpetologists to make their first visit. After reading the descriptions of field excursions, some who have already been to a field site will likely wish they could return. This is an ideal book for all young herpetologists and many older ones, whether their calling is as an amateur or professional.

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Growing a Revolution: Bringing Our Soil Back to Life.

By David R. Montgomery. New York: W. W. Norton, 2017. 317 pp. Notes, sources, index. \$26.95 cloth.

The Dust Bowl was an eye-opening, harrowing period for agriculture on the Great Plains. Even after nearly 90 years it continues to be the example of consequences of overworking, degrading, and missing one of our most important resources—soil. This cataclysmic event led to the common understanding and implementation of reduced tillage techniques, keeping plants on the land, and returning nutrients to the soil. But with decreasing crop values, decreasing yields, and rising input costs for fertilizers, pesticides, machinery, and technology, con-

ventional and simple no-till practices are not maintaining the health of the world's agricultural land. In fact, most are worsening the health of our soils and also having dire environmental impacts on other components of the natural systems.

David Montgomery's *Growing a Revolution* will convince readers that the modern tale of agriculture should not be about soil conservation, but rather soil restoration and regenerative farming. The author recounts examples of farmers around the world embracing regenerative farming to improve soil health, and doing so successfully. Following the author from the Great Plains, to Africa, South and Central America, and back, Montgomery shows that using innovative regenerative farming practices is not only improving soil health and rebuilding soil organic matter but also dramatically increasing crop yields and decreasing chemical inputs, pesticide use, and fuel costs. Montgomery is quick to note that while no-till, cover crops, and diverse crop rotations are common practices in the Great Plains, they are proving most successful when all three are used together. These practices have also been shown to have additional environmental benefits—reducing the amount of carbon in the atmosphere by returning it to the soil, reducing runoff of key plant nutrients that degrade groundwater and surface-water systems, and generating more drought-resilient cropping systems through improved soil conditions.

Agriculture is at the heart of the Great Plains, where the farmers take pride in their land and their businesses. Most know their fields as well as the faces of their family, and hope to pass their land and history on to their future generations. The spirit and tenacity of the earliest homesteaders runs deep through the veins of the Great Plains. Montgomery makes an honest and compelling point that in order for farmers to restore the health of their soils and pass on better land to future generations, they will need to generate bottom-up change. Farmers must look beyond farm programs, agronomists, and extension agents, to the farmers in their region who are already seeing the successes of these changes. The author provides examples of four different operations from Kansas, South Dakota, and North Dakota, which prove there is no single method or recipe for improving soil health, but which provide a framework of “ditch the plow, cover up, and grow diversity” that can work for all farms.

Growing a Revolution should be required reading for those who not only grow food but eat food. It will in-

spire and encourage readers to rethink the vitality of soil health for sustained and responsible food production for a growing world. Montgomery hints at how regenerative farming can restore the idyllic image and thinking of the thick, dark, fertile soils of the Great Plains, capable of producing a bounty to feed a growing world.

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Words of Passage: National Longing and the Imagined Lives of Mexican Migrants. By Hilary Parsons Dick. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2018. xi + 268 pp. Notes, bibliography, index. \$29.95 paper.

Hilary Parsons Dick's long-awaited ethnography, *Words of Passage: National Longing and the Imagined Lives of Mexican Migrants*, provides novel and astute insight into the dynamics of the well-examined sphere of Mexican migration. In spite of the book's title, the book focuses primarily on the perspectives of those who do *not* migrate in the town of Uriangato, an industrialized small city in the state of Guanajuato, in the neighborhood she calls La Libertad.

Building on an initial role in Douglas Massey's Princeton-based longitudinal study, the massive Mexican Migration Project, Dick effectively positions herself in the first months of research as an “apprentice,” thus enabling her to credibly inquire about the details of the lives of her interlocutors while living among them, without violating the norms and expectations of decent female personhood and sociality germane to the community. She makes visible the ways that the ethnographer's best and primary instrument is herself, attentive always to the ways that she is perceived, moves, and interacts, which is as revealing as anything else in her field sites.

Uriangato is to Mexico what the Plains states are to the United States. It is a town in the Bajío region of Central Mexico, and is “posited in state-endorsed imaginaries of national belonging as the heartland of the country: populated by straight-shooting and humble people of faith” (197). By situating herself in a place as central in symbolic and geographic visions of Mexico as this, Dick demonstrates the fragility at the heart of the imagined nation. Even these salt-of-the-earth folks struggle to