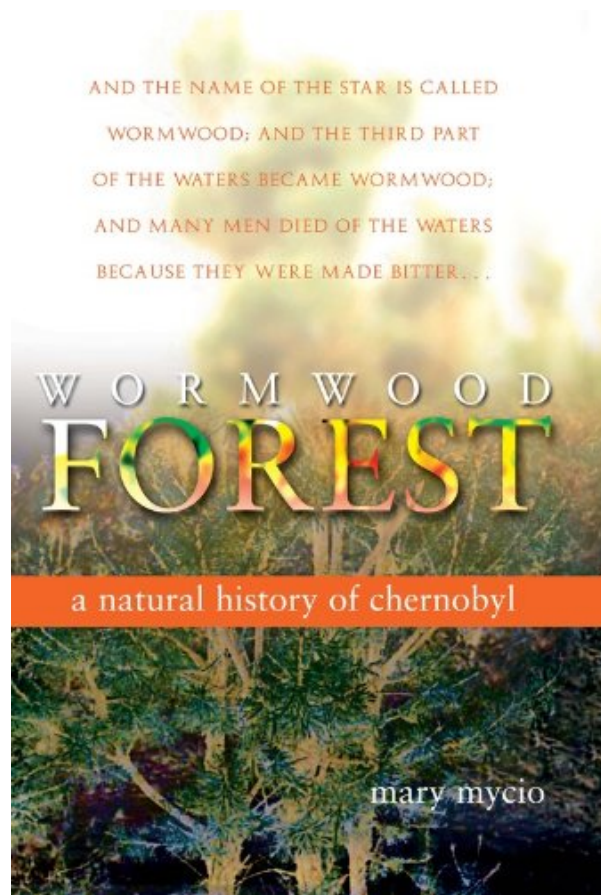


# WORMWOOD FOREST: A NATURAL HISTORY OF CHERNOBYL BY MARY MYCIO



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AND THE NAME OF THE STAR IS CALLED  
WORMWOOD; AND THE THIRD PART  
OF THE WATERS BECAME WORMWOOD;  
AND MANY MEN DIED OF THE WATERS  
BECAUSE THEY WERE MADE BITTER...

# WORMWOOD FOREST

a natural history of chernobyl

mary mycio

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## From Publishers Weekly

Mycio takes us on a timely tour of the eerie, surprisingly vigorous area around the Chernobyl nuclear disaster that's too radioactive for safe human habitation, yet where, 20 years after the explosion, flora and fauna are "thriving." Among abandoned towns, thousands of cormorants nest, and Przewalskis, a breed of wild horse, live seemingly unharmed on irradiated grass. A few people remain: workers decommissioning the plant, bureaucrats and scientists struggling with chronic underfunding, and samosels, elderly squatters so homesick that Ukraine finally let them stay. Mycio, former Kiev correspondent for the L.A. Times, is a good guide, clearly conveying the niceties of radionuclides; the elaborate, jerry-built structures containing the worst of the radiation; and the impossibility of cleaning the place up. She finds occasional humor and plenty of astonishment, as when a herd of red deer cross her path: "My recorder preserved my inarticulate reaction: 'Super. Wow. My God, they're beautiful!' " Mycio gives plenty of fuel for the discussion of nuclear power as an alternative to fossil fuel. Not all readers will share her cautious optimism, yet her verdict, that Chernobyl is not simply a disaster but a terrible paradox, is convincing. B&w photos, map.

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## Review

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#### About the Author

Mary Mycio was one of the first reporters to visit Kiev in 1989 to do a semi-clandestine interview about the Chernobyl nuclear disaster. She later became the Kiev correspondent for the *Los Angeles Times* and a contributor to a variety of newspapers around the world. She has accumulated reams of material about the disaster's environmental and health effects and has made numerous journeys into the *Zone of Alienation*.

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When a titanic explosion ripped through the Number Four reactor at the Chernobyl Nuclear Plant in 1986, spewing flames and chunks of burning, radioactive material into the atmosphere, one of our worst nightmares came true. As the news gradually seeped out of the USSR and the extent of the disaster was realized, it became clear how horribly wrong things had gone. Dozens died - two from the explosion and many more from radiation illness during the following months - while scores of additional victims came down with acute radiation sickness. Hundreds of thousands were evacuated from the most contaminated areas. The prognosis for Chernobyl and its environs - succinctly dubbed the Zone of Alienation - was grim.

Today, 20 years after the worst nuclear power plant accident in history, intrepid journalist Mary Mycio dons dosimeter and camouflage protective gear to explore the world's most infamous radioactive wilderness. As she tours the Zone to report on the disaster's long-term effects on its human, faunal, and floral inhabitants, she meets pockets of defiant local residents who have remained behind to survive and make a life in the Zone. And she is shocked to discover that the area surrounding Chernobyl has become Europe's largest wildlife sanctuary, a flourishing - at times unearthly - wilderness teeming with large animals and a variety of birds, many of them members of rare and endangered species. Like the forests, fields, and swamps of their unexpectedly inviting habitat, both the people and the animals are all radioactive. Cesium-137 is packed in their muscles and strontium-90 in their bones. But quite astonishingly, they are also thriving.

If fears of the Apocalypse and a lifeless, barren radioactive future have been constant companions of the nuclear age, Chernobyl now shows us a different view of the future. A vivid blend of reportage, popular science, and illuminating encounters that explode the myths of Chernobyl with facts that are at once beautiful and horrible, *Wormwood Forest* brings a remarkable land - and its people and animals - to life to tell a unique story of science, surprise and suspense.

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#### Most helpful customer reviews

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful.

Chernobyl Objectively

By Allen W. McDonnell

This book is by far the best over view of the situation in the Chernobyl exclusion zone I have read. The author has taken great pains to review and explain the environmental impact in many different parts of the exclusion zone and has interacted with many of the residents as well as scientists who live and work in the zone. The book will give anyone with an open mind the opportunity to learn the truth about the disaster and its lasting effects instead of just the hype pushed by advocates for or against nuclear energy and environmental issues. This book is extensively foot noted so that the interested reader can look up and verify the accuracy and completeness of the information given, but it is also written from a very personal basis, often reading like a travelogue of some daring explorer entering hazardous territory to learn what might be there. Highly recommended for young teen age readers up to the elderly.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Radioactive Decay - Too much

By L. Bos

Interesting book, but it is very technical and describes in detail (and in many pages) the science of

radioactive decay. I was hoping it would be more about the flora and fauna that has survived and flourished since the Chernobyl incident and there is some of that, but not enough to suit me.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

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Deep and astonishing account of Chernobyl.

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