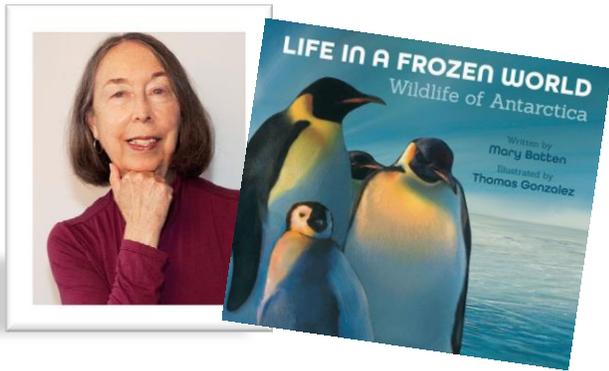

AUTHOR SPOTLIGHT



Mary Batten on *Life in a Frozen World*

ABOUT THE BOOK

Over millions of years, organisms in Antarctica—one of the most extreme environments on Earth—have evolved in amazing ways that enable them to thrive on the ice, in the ice, and under the ice. How is climate change affecting the creatures that live in this frozen world?

Even in the intensely cold, windy, and dry environment of Antarctica, a wide variety of wildlife—from the massive swarms of krill in the Southern Ocean to the throngs of penguins on its icy shores—finds ways to thrive. Some species of Antarctic fishes make a natural antifreeze that prevents their blood from freezing solid, and although no trees grow on Antarctica, a forest of giant seaweed flourishes under the sea.

Antarctica's creatures are exquisitely adapted to their extreme habitat, but can they survive warmer waters and atmosphere? Scientists are racing to find out. Climate change is already affecting the frozen continent. Though it seems very far away from us at the bottom of the world, we need to remember that Antarctica affects weather, ocean currents, and sea levels all over the planet. Antarctica's creatures depend on the ice. And in the long run, we do, too.

Q: *What inspired you to write this story? How did you first get involved with The Cousteau Society and explorer Jacques Cousteau's campaign to protect Antarctica?*

A: I was working as editor of the Society's membership magazine, *Calypso Log*, during the late 80s and early 90s when Captain Cousteau led the Society in launching a campaign to protect Antarctica from mineral exploitation. As editor of *Calypso Log*, it was my responsibility to report on The Cousteau Society's campaigns and missions. The emphasis of this campaign was to protect this pristine continent for future generations. As part of the campaign we launched a children's petition to protect Antarctica and obtained signatures on petitions from tens of thousands of children all over the world. To further dramatize that goal, the Society mounted a special expedition. Captain Cousteau took six children—one from each of the other continents—to Antarctica. He asked me to go as a kind of mother figure for the children. I was honored that he asked me and was looking forward to this expedition adventure, but I developed pleurisy a few weeks before departure date and was unable to go. I was devastated not to be able to take part in this expedition—a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. As the photos and film footage came back to the U.S., I saw what an incredible opportunity I had missed and became fascinated with everything I was seeing and learning about the frozen continent and its importance to the planet. This book is my “virtual journey” to Antarctica.

Q: *What about Antarctica interests you the most?*

A: Everything about Antarctica interests me, but its profound impact on global sea level, weather, and climate interests me most. Here is a frozen continent at the bottom of the Earth, seemingly so far away, but its impact touches life everywhere.

Q: *One of the main themes in this book is climate change and how it's affecting creatures living in this particular environment. Why do you think this is such an important issue to discuss, especially with younger readers?*

A: Climate change is real. More than a hundred years of science supports it, and accelerating rising seas and melting ice packs from the Arctic to Antarctica are already affecting global climate and sea level in coastal areas. In 2019, the World Health Organization predicted that climate change would kill more than 250,000 people each year. Already, people, referred to as “climate refugees,” are having to move as sea-level rise makes their homes unlivable. This issue is especially important to discuss with young readers because they will inherit the conditions left to them by the older generation. Young Swedish teenager Greta Thunberg led mass demonstrations with young people around the world, demanding that their leaders take more aggressive actions to combat climate change. In many cases, the young people are more educated and concerned than some of the so-called “leaders” who deny climate change is happening, claim it’s a hoax, and support the fossil fuel industry rather than alternative energy.

Q: *What was your research process like?*

A: I watched many films about Antarctica, including the old Cousteau expedition to Antarctica and videos taken by scientists doing current research in Antarctica. I interviewed scientists working in Antarctica and read books and articles reflecting recent research. My favorite part of the research is speaking with and/or emailing scientists because they’re the ones on the ground or, in the case of Antarctica, under the water, gathering information on animals and plants and their behavior. It’s their work that gives us knowledge about Antarctica, and I’m grateful to everyone who generously took the time to speak with me and answer my questions.

Q: *How did your experience with writing nature documentaries for television contribute to the development of this book?*

A: I think visually. When you write a nature film, you are working with the visual material—the footage. There’s interplay between the film’s narration and the images. The same is true when writing a picture book. Words and images must support each other, not just repeat each other. When writing a film, the first 30 seconds, called the “tease,” are the most important because they will either hook the viewer or they will switch to another channel. The first page, the first paragraph of a picture book functions in the same way as a film’s “tease.” I want to hook the reader so they will persist in reading the book all the way through. So I use

some film-writing techniques in crafting a picture book text. And then, just as a film writer works with the film editor when narration and visuals are put together, my wonderful editor, Vicky Holifield, and I work together once the book’s designer flows Thomas’ illustrations into the page layout and we see what adjustments need to be made in order to achieve the best visual presentation of the whole book. Sometimes I have to cut some of the text to avoid a visually crowded page. Each page has to be pleasing to the eye as well as stimulating to the brain. The illustrations are key to whether a person will pick up the book in a bookstore or when browsing online. The illustrator’s images are as important as a film’s footage in selling the book.

Q: *How did you react when you first saw Thomas Gonzalez’s illustrations? What do you like most about his art style?*

A: WOW! I’m thrilled with Thomas’ illustrations. His larger-than-life style makes for visual impact. The scenic illustrations are spectacularly beautiful, and the illustrations of different species are accurate and bring my words to life. I feel fortunate indeed that Thomas is the illustrator for this book as well as the next one.

Q: *What’s one thing you had to omit from the final version of the book that you wish you could have included?*

A: We had to leave out a lot of details about how scientists work on the ice to obtain ice cores and what the cores tell about the history of climate on Earth.

Q: *What’s the most interesting thing you learned in your research for Life in a Frozen World?*

A: There’s no one most interesting thing. The adaptations that some animals have evolved for life in this frigid world are particularly fascinating—such as the ice fish’s natural antifreeze that prevents its blood from freezing solid, the food chain’s dependence on tiny krill, the effect of melting glaciers on penguins in West Antarctica, the “forest” of plants growing underwater. Everything about Antarctica is interesting, and I hope readers will finish this book with excitement. Maybe some of them will want to become scientists who study this remarkable continent.

Q: *What was your favorite species to write about in this book?*

A: The tiny crustaceans called krill and the ice fish.

Q: *What is the most important thing you want readers to take away from this book?*

A: That what happens to Antarctica's ice affects not only the animals that live in Antarctica but also creatures, including humans, in every other place on Earth. Antarctic species need the ice to survive and so do we in order to keep our planet livable.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mary Batten, an award-winning writer for television, film and publishing, was nominated for an Emmy for her work on the Children's Television Workshop's science series *3-2-1 Contact* and has written more than fifty nature documentaries for television, including the syndicated series *Wild Wild World of Animals*. She lives in Virginia.

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