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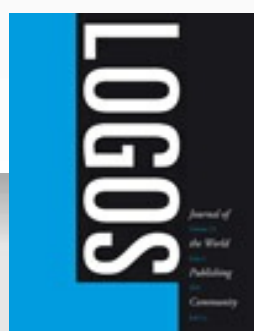
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## Books and the environment: A curious paradox



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[« Previous Article](#) | [Table of Contents](#) | [Next Article »](#)

[Abstract](#)

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# Books and the environment

## A curious paradox



## Iain Stevenson

Iain Stevenson is professor of publishing at University College London (UCL). For a quarter of a century he was a practising publisher, working for Longman, Macmillan, Pinter, Leicester University Press, Wiley and The Stationery Office. He set up the pioneering environmental imprint, Belhaven Press, in 1986, publishing some of the earliest books on climatic change, environmental sustainability and globalization. In 1999 he joined City University London to establish a new master's degree in publishing whose graduates now occupy many senior publishing positions. He was one of the founders of UCL's Centre for Publishing in 2006 and was appointed to the first established chair of publishing in Britain at UCL. He is currently writing a history of 20th-century British publishing to be published by the British Library in 2009.

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In the days when "environment" in the countryside, books — fiction, non-fiction — were ambassadors which not only drew the attention of city dwellers to the beauties of the landscape but also led to new concepts of the landscape in some cases, to changes by human intervention in the landscape itself. For example, in one generation the English lakes were forever changed by the imagination and experience of their beholders from barren, desolate wastes to be avoided, to magnificent awe-inspiring "fields of beauty" to be avidly enjoyed and explored. This was due in no small measure to the influence of the Romantic poets — Coleridge, Wordsworth and their acolytes. Equally, widely, the invention of the novel in the nineteenth century and the growth of literacy in the emergent middle class led to a much more widespread "domestication" of landscape and a shared understanding of the nature of place.

The influence of books on the environment today is enormous. Not only books concerning climate change and the saving of endangered species ("inconvenient truths" to quote the title of one of the most famous of the genre) but also travel books, guidebooks, atlases, and general interest books are among the most flourishing sectors of the modern book publishing industry. Today's books have a dimension not present in those of the previous centuries. They advocate the responsibility of those who enjoy nature to act to preserve it against its progressive decline and potential destruction by humanity. Books, once the catalysts to interest in nature and the environment, are now crucial to save them.

But behind this positive role lies a paradox: the books themselves are manufactured with scant attention to their environmental impact. Books themselves are not "green."

If the publishing industry is serious about tackling green issues, rather than just docu-

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