

dustrialism. Many Californians in seaside towns such as Carmel and Santa Cruz were horrified that their oceanic backyards had become toxic cesspools. Others were alarmed to be alive in the era of U.S.–Soviet mutual assured destruction, horrified that chemicals were being dump-sprayed on agricultural lands. *Ecological balance* became a new catchphrase not just in California but throughout the nation. “Let the rain bring a beauteous tear to your eye,” Newhall instructed. “Tenderly now, let all men turn to the earth.”

The beautiful book set a new standard for print production. The panoramic text became, in essence, the sermon that Brower would preach for the rest of his life. Newhall, respecting the movement’s elders, had incorporated the thinking of George Perkins Marsh, Aldo Leopold, Gifford Pinchot, John Muir, and Bob Marshall into *This Is the American Earth*. The book, in fact, became like a Hall of Fame program for the entire conservation-cum-environmental movement. While Adams had aimed his photographs toward the general public there was a strong tribal element to the publication, a thank you to nature-loving philosophers from Mary Austin to Robinson Jeffers.

Brower sent all of America’s leading biologists gift copies of *This Is the American Earth*. The American Association for the Advancement of Science ended up praising the book fulsomely. Francis Crick, a Nobel Prize–winning discoverer of the structure of DNA, believed *This Is the American Earth* was unprecedented for opening people’s eyes to the interconnectedness of nature. Yale University’s top zoologist, Edward S. Deevey, summed up Adams’s nature photos perfectly when he called the Californian “a master who wields the camera’s mindless eye exactly as a painter does his brush.”

It wasn’t until the 1970s that *This Is the American Earth* became recognized as the primary catalyst for jumpstarting a new way of thinking about humans’ industrial imprint on the planet. The book served as the advance agent for the Environmental Protection Agency (formed in 1970), which was responsible

for administering the Clean Water Act, the Clean Air Act, the Toxic Substances Control Act, the Safe Drinking Water Act, the superfund program, and the registration of pesticides under the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide and Rodenticide Act, along with administering many other acts. All of this pent-up desire to do something about the environment was out there, and *This Is the American Earth* encouraged a generation to do more to save wild and scenic places.

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Owls, 2012
archival photographic print, 24 x 16 in.



courtesy: DiRosa Art Preserve