



ANTHROPOLOGY  
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**Critical Green Engagements**

## NARRATING NATURE

WILDLIFE CONSERVATION AND MAASAI WAYS OF  
KNOWING

**MARA J. GOLDMAN**

*Challenging conventional conservation approaches with new stories  
of living with nature*

The current environmental crises demand that we revisit dominant approaches for understanding nature-society relations. *Narrating Nature* brings together various ways of knowing nature from differently situated Maasai and conservation practitioners and scientists into lively debate. It speaks to the growing movement within the academy and beyond on decolonizing knowledge about and relationships with nature, and debates within the social sciences on how to work across epistemologies and ontologies. It also speaks to a growing need within conservation studies to find ways to manage nature with people.

This book employs different storytelling practices, including a traditional Maasai oral meeting—the *enkiguena*—to decenter conventional scientific ways of communicating about, knowing, and managing nature. Author Mara J. Goldman draws on more than two decades of deep ethnographic and ecological engagements in the semi-arid rangelands of East Africa—in landscapes inhabited by pastoral and agro-pastoral Maasai people and heavily utilized by wildlife. These iconic landscapes have continuously been subjected to boundary drawing practices by outsiders, separating out places for people (villages) from places for nature (protected areas). *Narrating Nature* follows the resulting boundary crossings that regularly occur—of people, wildlife, and knowledge—to expose them not as transgressions but as opportunities to complicate the categories themselves and create ontological openings for knowing and being with nature otherwise.

*Narrating Nature* opens up dialogue that counters traditional conservation narratives by providing space for local Maasai inhabitants to share their ways of knowing and being with nature. It moves beyond standard community conservation narratives that see local people as beneficiaries or contributors to conservation, to demonstrate how they are essential knowledgeable members of the conservation landscape itself.

**MARA J. GOLDMAN** is an associate professor of geography and fellow at the Institute for Behavioral Science at the University of Colorado, Boulder. She co-edited *Knowing Nature: Conversations at the Intersection of Political Ecology and Science Studies*.

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*“Narrating Nature is a colorful and groundbreaking analysis of the hidden tensions inside the science underlying environmental conservation in Africa. Mara J. Goldman skillfully draws together scientific expertise and local discussions of environmental priorities to show how wildlife conservation in Africa can exclude local practices and how understanding the Maasai can enhance environmental policy and show alternative outcomes.”*

—Tim Forsyth, University of London