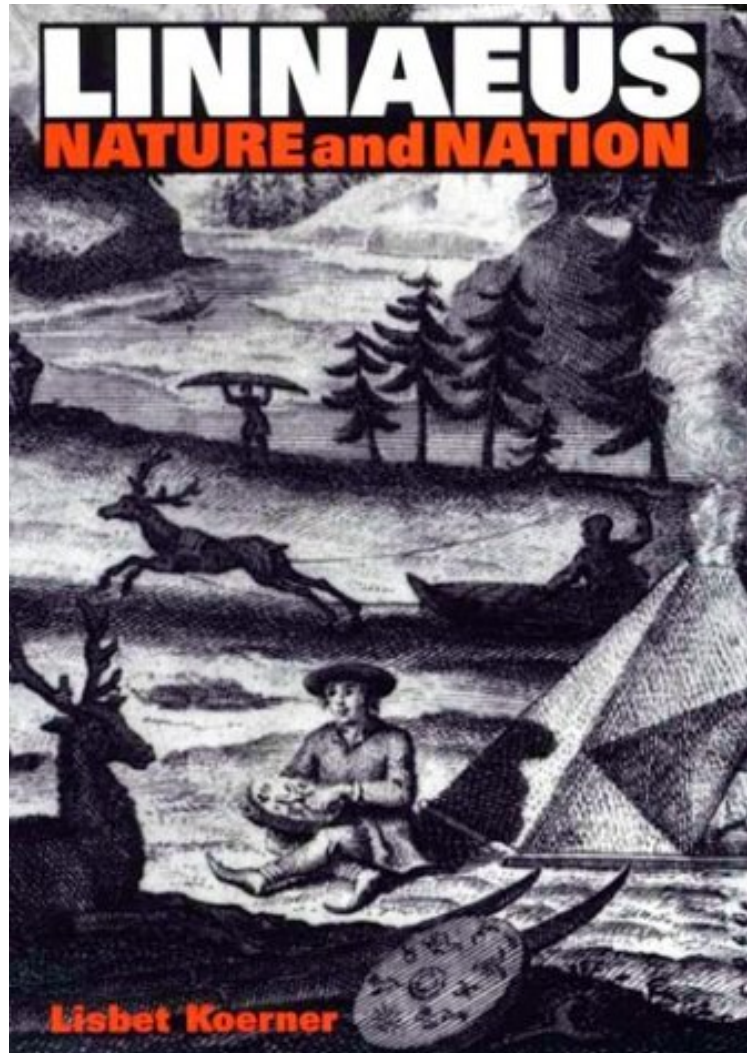


[Download] Linnaeus: Nature and Nation

## Linnaeus: Nature and Nation

*Lisbet Koerner*

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**Lisbet Koerner : Linnaeus: Nature and Nation** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Linnaeus: Nature and Nation:

5 of 8 people found the following review helpful. Interesting Reading. By Thomas Leo Ogren  
Linnaeus : Nature and Nation by Lisbet Koerner  
Reviewed by Thomas Leo Ogren, author of Allergy-Free Gardening, Ten Speed Press.  
Honestly I have mixed feelings about this book. One, I love it and really did enjoy reading it. I learned quite a bit from it too. But I do wish it had been written in a more reader-friendly manner. It is a good bit too scholarly for my tastes, a trifle too text-bookishly written. One of the important things about Linnaeus himself is that he always tried to reach the common man, tried to make his work popular and easily understood. I feel this book could have emulated some of that flavor. But I don't mean to be too critical by any means because I did like this book very much. There is a real wealth

of research here, many things about Linnaeus here that I'd never read before. Karl Linnaeus was THE botanist--of his time, and of our own time as well. His system of binomial nomenclature, Genus species, was pretty much right on the money. He was the first to realize that plants' sexual characteristics were what largely either grouped them together or set them apart. His system is often criticized today, but to me it still makes great sense. *Linnaeus : Nature and Nation*, is not for everyone, but serious gardeners will enjoy it, as will historians, especially those with an interest in botany, horticulture, science. Well worth reading. 6 of 8 people found the following review helpful. The Big Issue By Dr. I. D. McCormick  
Gazing at a flower by the grass-roofed cottage where he was born [...] Linnaeus was quintessentially a local man. (187). But as Lisbet Koerner explains, he also linked the 'universal with the local [...] nature with nation. In this fascinating account, Koerner demonstrates that the father of modern taxonomy was also a political economist. Unlike Adam Smith, his interest was not so much in international trade or colonial conquest, but the substitution of imports (a cameralist program). Although Linnaeus had travelled in Holland, France, and England (1735-48) there were nineteen 'first-generation' students who undertook 'voyages of discovery' between 1745 and 1792. Koerner asserts that their travels 'were part of their larger strategy to create a miniature mercantile empire within a European state' (114). Linnaeus sensed that 'explorers fostered strategies of national improvement based on ecological diversification rather than on territorial expansion.' (114). Linnaeus, it is argued was essentially a civil servant who turned his students into an effective and efficient support staff. Chapter 3 deals with the Lapland journey. In line with economic and political priorities the area was to be colonized as a kind of Scandinavian 'West Indies'. As a committed Lutheran, it is fascinating to deconstruct the theology at work in Linnaeus's thought. Nature was a prelapsarian Paradise, but it must be exploited within each country. Accordingly, Linnaeus was concerned by the luxury and excess of products that trade supplied from the cornucopia of the New World. As this book notes, 'He even urged Scandinavians to return to the old Gothic foods,' such as acorns, pork, and mead. (95) At the same time he was keen to cultivate at home (to acclimatize) what was normally cultivated abroad. We even find him thinking, theorizing, and cultivating 'an art to Make Mussels bring forth pearls.' (141) He professed an anxiety that the pearl plantations 'could not long remain secret before our neighbours in Norway, Russia, and Siberia, who own more stores of Pearl mussels, could thus intirely triumph over us in quantity.' (143) Yet as Linnaeus's stock rose in Europe among the Romantics, at home it fell as he failed to deliver economic advantage and superiority through import substitution. Ernst Moritz Arndt attacked Linnaeus's cameralist projects in 1783, wondering how 'One was supposed to believe that Sweden suddenly had become Asia Minor and Sicily.' (168) His enterprising schemes turned out to be 'fantastic and chimerical'; it was left to his taxonomic system to enrich the world. Nonetheless, in light of recent global protests and persistent underdevelopment, the larger issues which the book eloquently discusses, seem to me as relevant now as then. *Linnaeus: Nature and Nation* concludes by stating that it 'memorializes a local attempt at a local modernity, a now-forgotten future of the past' (193), but the other issue it raises is timely: 'Or can native subjects, using only local means of production, build a complex and complete local economy, incorporating contemporary technologies, and functioning as a microcosm of the global economy.' (192) 21 of 37 people found the following review helpful. *Nature and Nonsense* By Cecil Fox It has become axiomatic that historians of science know little about either. This revisionist treatment of the foibles of 18th century Swedish life paints poor Linnaeus as a whacko. However, he really wasn't too far removed from the contemporary members of the Royal Society of London in credulity, self promotion and ignorance and was certainly typical of Swedish Professors of that and more recent times. This is really a silly book first produced under the tutelage of Simon Schama and reissued from HUP. The author does not acknowledge the intellectual ferment of the time when the Enlightenment was being crushed under the heels of van Herder and by the Romantic curse (that we still enjoy as political correctness). The greatest contribution of the Linne's systematics was the "taxonomic key" that allows some order out of biology, not his fatuous attempts to make booze out of lichens or grow pineapples in Bothnia. I suppose other historians of "science" will someday mock Aristotle for his ignorance of DNA and not knowing how many teeth women have, but really, this is a silly book.

Drawing on letters, poems, notebooks, and secret diaries, Lisbet Koerner tells the moving story of one of the most famous naturalists who ever lived, the Swedish-born botanist and systematizer, Carl Linnaeus. The first scholarly biography of this great Enlightenment scientist in almost one hundred years, *Linnaeus* also recounts for the first time Linnaeus' grand and bizarre economic projects: to "teach" tea, saffron, and rice to grow on the Arctic tundra and to domesticate buffaloes, guinea pigs, and elks as Swedish farm animals. Linnaeus hoped to reproduce the economy of empire and colony within the borders of his family home by growing cash crops in Northern Europe. Koerner shows us the often surprising ways he embarked on this project. Her narrative goes against the grain of Linnaean scholarship old and new by analyzing not how modern Linnaeus was, but how he understood science in his time. At the same time, his attempts to organize a state economy according to principles of science prefigured an idea that has become one of the defining features of modernity. Meticulously researched, and based on archival data, *Linnaeus* will be of compelling interest to historians of the Enlightenment, historians of economics, and historians of science. But this

engaging, often funny, and sometimes tragic portrait of a great man will be valued by general readers as well.

From Publishers Weekly Carl Linnaeus was one of Sweden's greatest scientists and the man who, almost 250 years ago, created the binomial scientific nomenclature still in use today. Harvard historian of science Koerner takes her place alongside several other Linnaeus biographers with her scholarly look at his life and times, including some of the scientist's more foolish projects. Koerner's work is "both a biography and a case study of the relation between natural knowledge and political economy in the early Enlightenment." Thus, she focuses on Linnaeus's attempts to use science to enrich the failing Swedish economy. Linnaeus came of age in the 18th century after Sweden had suffered a series of serious military defeats and famines and at a time when the country's trade deficit threatened to destabilize its political environment. Believing that it was possible to make Sweden economically independent through effective cultivation of the world's natural resources, Linnaeus worked diligently to import a wide array of plants and animals as such as saffron and tea hoping to acclimate them to the harsh Scandinavian climate. Unfortunately, none of his experiments were successful, and Linnaeus's utilitarian approach to science had to be discarded. While Koerner's perspective is interesting and yields some new insights, her reliance on academic jargon makes for very difficult reading. (Dec.) Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Library Journal Koerner's biography of Carl Linnaeus (best remembered for his work in botany and as the originator of a taxonomic classification system of plants) shows that this scientist was interested in a great deal more than just vegetation. Placing Linnaeus's botanical studies in the larger context of his life's work, Koerner explores his ideas about the relationship between nature and national economics. Linnaeus comes across as a hopeless optimist and a schemer who employed a host of tricks (exaggeration, lies, rhetoric, and self-promotion) in his pursuit of a state economy modeled on the principles of the natural world; his grand and often absurd economic suggestions (growing tea and other exotic plants in the Arctic tundra, raising guinea pigs as farm animals) were all attempts to make Sweden's economy less dependent on imported goods. Throughout, Koerner wisely relies on passages from Linnaeus's own writing to illustrate her arguments; much of what she recounts would otherwise be hard to believe. And overall, her arguments are well crafted: she deftly balances his shortcomings against his good intentions and knowledge. Recommended for large public libraries and all academic libraries. AMarianne Stowell Bracke, Univ. of Houston Libs. Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Kirkus sA rich biographical study that documents the strange, often unfortunate relation between the well-known scientific thinking and the forgotten economic theories of famed Swedish naturalist Carl Linnaeus (1707-78). Assuming that scientific theories emanate from an imagination fixed in a particular time and place and therefore express a world view Koerner (History of Science/Harvard) presents Linnaeus as a rude provincial, a quack doctor and occasional social embarrassment. Descended from a long line of clergymen, the future scientist was named for a Linden tree that was taken as the family symbol. Self-educated, Linnaeus undertook from his earliest years to catalogue the entirety of nature his own variation of his family's calling from God. This archiving impulse yielded the triumphant taxonomy of binomial classification, the convention whereby flora and fauna are named by genus (Homo) and species (sapiens). Koerner stresses that the system is not rigorously logical or faithful to natural phenomena, but is convenient, a useful technology passing for high science. Useful particularly in advancing Linnaeus economic vision, which required accurate identification of plant and animal life. Linnaeus believed that Sweden, having abandoned hope of an empire, should seek to replicate the diversity of the world on Swedish soil. Koerner provides a dismal menu of his failed projects pearls and tea are particularly spectacular fiascos and his equally unfortunate Scandocentric anthropological adventures among the Sami of Lapland, as he plotted to destroy the basis of his admiration for that indigenous culture by exploiting the natural resources upon which it relied for sustenance. Along the way, Koerner sketches Linnaeus study and his specimen-collecting botanical armies: gems of generous reconstruction that make for occasionally charming entertainment. Astute and engaging: not only a useful treatment of the economic relatives of Linnaeus well-known taxonomy, but also a taxonomy of its own, that of genus Linnaeus, species intellectual imagination. (4 halftones) -- Copyright copy;1999, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.