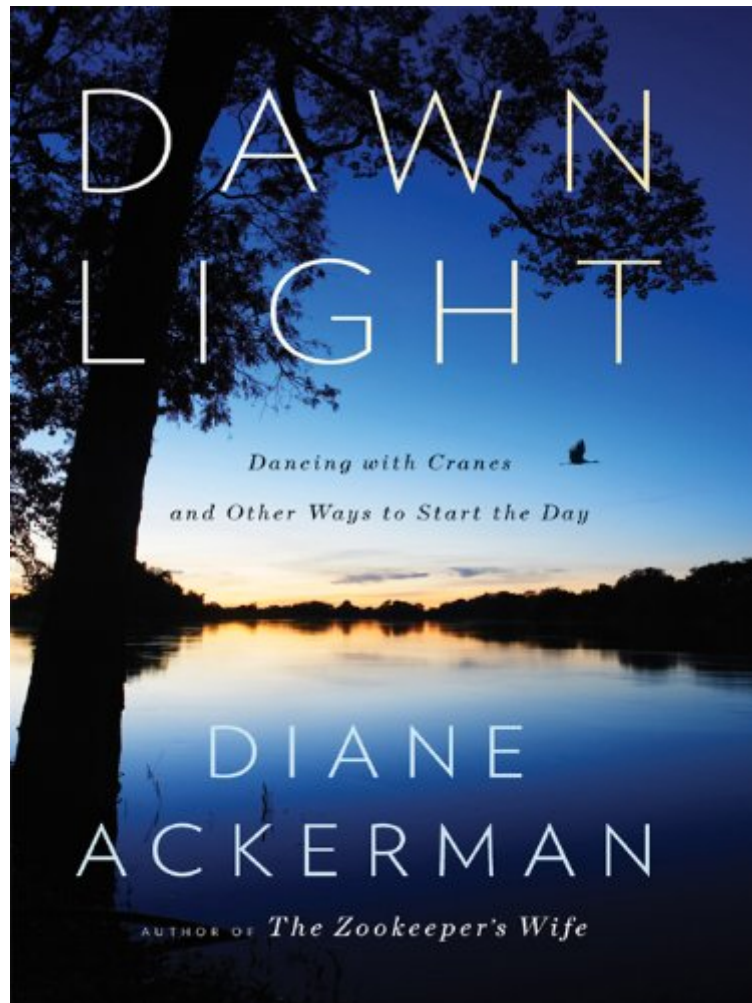




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# Dawn Light: Dancing With Cranes And Other Ways To Start The Day



## Synopsis

A celebrated storyteller-poet-naturalist explores a year of dawns in her most personal book to date. In an eye-opening sequence of personal meditations through the cycle of seasons, Diane Ackerman awakens us to the world at dawn—drawing on sources as diverse as meteorology, world religion, etymology, art history, poetry, organic farming, and beekeeping. As a patient and learned observer of animal and human physiology and behavior, she introduces us to varieties of bird music and other signs of avian intelligence, while she herself migrates from winter in Florida to spring, summer, and fall in upstate New York. Humans might luxuriate in the idea of being one with nature, Ackerman points out, but we often forget that we are nature—for one facet of nature is as unlikely as we, the tiny bipeds with the giant dreams. Joining science's devotion to detail with religion's appreciation of the sublime, *Dawn Light* is an impassioned celebration of the miracles of evolution—especially human consciousness of our numbered days on a turning earth.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Starts my day off in the right foot.

Yes!

"Dawn Light" is a new work by storyteller/poet/naturalist Diane Ackerman, in which she, natch, considers the world around her at dawn. It is chock full of close personal observation, research, and learning and shows a distinct resemblance to her previous best-selling *A Natural History of the Senses*. It also, in its level of detail, animal-loving spirit, and lushly-written prose, shows its kinship to her recent New York Times best-seller, *The Zookeeper's Wife: A War Story*. Ackerman gives us a year of dawns, as she considers that time of day at her homes in Palm Beach, Florida, and Ithaca, New York. We get her wonderfully fresh, sympathetic observations of the birds that sing dawn in, and all the other animals -- including us humans, she never lets us forget -- that then begin their days. She gives us a consideration of astronomy, particularly as it relates to dawn. But she does much more, roaming the current-day world, going as far as Australia's aborigines and India's holy rivers, to show us the dawn beliefs and rituals of other societies. She tells us that Jewish liturgy includes a list of blessings to be said first thing in the morning, one of them being thanks to God for giving us roosters to crow in dawn. The writer also goes backwards in time to the ancients, giving us a good picture of the learned Greek scientist Archimedes; explaining how the works of the well-known lesbian poet Sappho came to be saved in that wonder of the ancient world, the library at Alexandria, Egypt: then came to be lost, and partially found again. She explains long-ago Celtic, Nordic and Roman dawn legends and myths. Yet, although her mind is evidently full of facts, inclined to poetry, and interested in everything she sees around her and learns, she never overwhelms us, but wears all this information lightly. Well, let me moderate that previous statement slightly. Occasionally, very occasionally, she gets a little too intense for me; but I am not generally one to leap out of a warm bed of a cold winter's morning, not if I don't have to. Besides, her exploration and capture of winter's dawn, in upstate New York, at Ithaca, is thrilling; especially to me, who went to Cornell University, in Ithaca, New York, and spent four years in that enchanted kingdom of the Finger Lakes. Many years ago now, I interviewed Dame Iris Murdoch, the outstanding Anglo-Irish writer, whose first published novel, *Under the Net* (Vintage Classics), was selected in 2001 by the editorial board of the American Modern Library as one of the 100 best English-language novels of the 20th century. She asked where I'd gone to university, and I replied Cornell. She said she'd visited there, while working at Yale University, and it was "beautiful and mountainy," wasn't it. It surely was, and is. At any rate, I can remember one particular winter morning so clear and sharp that I did go out to clamber around the gorges, coming back only to find

it was, to me, an astonishing minus 5 degrees Fahrenheit out. I'd give the writer an extra star for this book if I could, but, unfortunately, five's the limit.

Acute and thoughtful observations of the natural world sprinkled with encyclopedic tidbits of languages and distant cultures. Sometimes the over-flowery descriptions clutter clarity and meaning: "...sky whitens to a talcy mask, the exquisite monotony of birdcalls thins to an insistent boy soprano fading into the distance" p. 120. But in the end there is a gentle light under the overload of words.

Beautiful words. Words that make you slow down and savor --- the words themselves, the phrases, and the pictures and feelings they evoke. I've been fighting with myself since the moment I finished the very first essay. I'm only allowing myself an essay a day, and when I finished the first day's reading, I had a little leap of joy in my heart, picturing myself sharing the book. Normally, that's what I do --- pass a book along when I have finished reading it. (So many books, so little time. I rarely read one twice. Better it should move along to its next reader than gather dust on my shelf.) But, right after the leap, a backtracking, a remembering of the times when I have had to buy a replacement book for one that called me back to double check a quote or lesson. I'm afraid I'm going to have to keep this one. And thus the battle began. To share, or not to share.....

This is a book that I want to share with all my friends and family. I have already given it to quite a few and recommended it to many. Diane Ackerman was introduced to me many years ago when my daughter was reading *Moon by Whale Light*. She said it was the kind of book that, after every few pages, you want to go shake someone by the shoulder and say, "Hey, listen to this!" *Dawn Light* is that kind of book too. Diane Ackerman's delight in the world of nature and art is truly inspirational. Her exuberance reminds one of the beauty that surrounds us if we would only stop to look and listen to the natural world and to the world of art. She is a national treasure.

This is a book to be read, re-read, and then read once again. Ackerman's views of nature are enlightening, informative, and spiritually transcendental. Having read the book, I looked at daily miracles in a new way, using the scientific knowledge she incorporates to better understand things I'd before taken for granted. I gave my copy of the book to my daughter who shares my delight in nature. I know I will buy myself another copy for a second and third read.

Reading Diane Ackerman's book "Dawn Light and dancing with cranes", was a delight from start to finish. Like eating and savouring fine rich chocolate, one can only eat so much, so it took 6 weeks for to finish, this did not deter me in the least. An epiphany writer, her word combinations took my breath away. Two golden morsels I recall were, "Angri-la", that cold inner mountain place of the mind is how she described her anger. And that bees are related to Sunflowers because there is only one sun flower on the plant with the seeds for germination, the rest are florets and are like the drones that feed and support the one. Certainly a book to gift yourself, and others.

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