Nature Reviews Walters’ Six Modern Plagues
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Six Plagues by Mark Walters

One of the world’s most prestigious scholarly and scientific journals has reviewed the recently published book by Mark Jerome Walters, associate professor of Media and Journalism Studies at USF St. Petersburg. The author’s Six Modern Plagues and How We Are Causing Them (Island Press 2003) was reviewed in the March 4 issue of Nature.

"It’s unusual for a book to achieve wide popular as well as scientific acclaim," V. Mark Durand, PhD, dean of arts and sciences, said. "With a positive review in both the New York Times and Nature, Walters’ work bridges the gulf that divides scholarly and popular work."

The positive review in Nature states that, "Refreshingly, this latest book explores the underlying shifts in human ecology and behaviour that have potentiated recent epidemics...Walters achieves a balance between environmental science, clinical medicine, human interest and social comment."

Trained in veterinary medicine and journalism, in his book Walters traces links between ecological disruption and the emergence of HIV/AIDS, SARS, West Nile Virus, Mad Cow Disease, Lyme Disease, Hanta virus, SARS and antibiotic resistance. He explains how people, through intensive agriculture, deforestation, global climate change, and elimination of other species have brought many of these recent plagues upon themselves. "So closely are many new epidemics linked to ecological change that they might rightfully be called ‘ecodemics.’"

But the book also conveys a positive message. "What we humans have done, we can also undo," he said. "New diseases are teaching us a difficult but vital lesson: we must respect and preserve the natural systems that are our home."

Walters has published in Audubon, Natural History, and numerous other publications. He is a former editor and staff writer for Reader's Digest, where he reported from Alaska, Mexico, Brazil and elsewhere. He is currently a contributing editor of Orion magazine.

"I’m always telling my students who are interested in science writing that to write for the popular press doesn’t mean unmercifully dumbing down your ideas. You can write scientifically and credibly without sacrificing accessibility," Walters said. "By reaching both a popular and a scientific audience, I hope to dispel for my students the myth that it’s impossible to do."