

Eating ethically involves self-education, imagination

Author: Julie Andres

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There are myriad stories to tell when it comes to how oceans and waterways are being despoiled around the world, and many of them can make your stomach churn. How, then, does Taras Grescoe make his recently released book, *Bottomfeeder: How to eat ethically in a world of vanishing seafood*, an enormously compelling page-turner? It's in the telling. Grescoe masterfully introduces colourful characters and a strong sense of place, woven together with the culture, history and mouth-watering delicacies of the dozen or so seafood-centred areas he explores in North America, Europe and Asia. Together with carefully researched statistics, *Bottomfeeder* leaves no stones, algae blooms or bad attitudes unturned.

I had the chance to talk with the author earlier this month while he was on Bowen Island to visit his parents, writers Paul and Audrey Grescoe. It was already hot at 11 a.m. when we settled in a shady spot of the Grescoes' garden, high over Eagle Cliff and Howe Sound. Several times during the interview, the Montreal resident quietly paused to observe a rufous hummingbird sipping nectar from scarlet-flowered crocosmia a few feet away. He also enjoyed the cocky antics of a visiting Steller's jay.

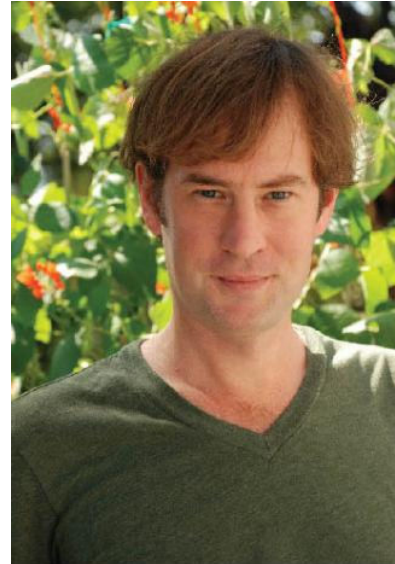


Photo: Julie Andrés Taras Grescoe, author of *Bottomfeeder: how to eat ethically in a world of vanishing seafood*

"It's going to take massive legislative change in aquaculture practice ... and the establishment of marine reserves," said Grescoe when asked what it will take to avoid the collapse of the world's most plentiful, self-generating food supply. "I believe in the oceans' ability to recover if they're given a break." He explained how, during the Second World War, fishing boats were used for the war effort and fish stocks rebounded considerably within a few years.

On Bowen the Ruddy Potato is making efforts to adopt sound seafood buying practices. Buyer Tim Frazer says that the store now features 70 per cent seafood approved by **Ocean Wise**, a Vancouver Aquarium conservation program that aims to help consumers make environmentally sound seafood choices. Frazer recently removed farmed steelhead from their shelves because of reports of escapements into open waters. The store still sells shrimp and prawns farmed in Thailand. In the *Bottomfeeder* chapter, *Wave of Mutilation*, Grescoe writes, "The simple fact is, if you are eating cheap shrimp today, it almost certainly comes from a turbid, pesticide-and-antibiotic-filled, virus-ridden pond in the tropical climes of one of the world's poorest countries." Frazer said that because the margin of profit on seafood is small, the Ruddy Potato has to offer products that its customers will buy.

In other words, they sell farmed shrimp, one of the world's least sustainably produced seafoods, because we buy it. If we make informed choices to buy seafood caught in a way that ensures the health of the oceans for years to come, and not because of low prices or gastronomic trends, we can make a real difference, Grescoe asserts. We need to ask fish

mongers and servers in restaurants where their seafood comes from and how it was caught, and know what the answers means.

The salmon farms on the coast of British Columbia are as alarmingly toxic and destructive as the shrimp farms of Asia. "Everyone in B.C. should be outraged. We should be shouting from every point with loudspeakers," Grescoe said. "They are demonstrably killing off our wild stock. And most of the dollars go to Oslo." Norwegian multinational Marine Harvest operates 70 sites in B.C.

"On a personal level we can educate ourselves to eat ethically and healthily," said Grescoe. *Bottomfeeder*, Grescoe's fourth book, offers the rationale and tools to do so, particularly the concept of consciously lowering our trophic levels of consumption. Plants and plankton are rated at a trophic level of 1, shark at 4.5; oysters, clams and mussels are rated at 2. A list of seafood choices (No, Never; Depends, Sometimes; and Absolutely, Always) is included in the book's Appendix.

Bottomfeeder can be found at Phoenix on Bowen. Taras Grescoe can be found visiting sustainably operated inland fish farms and writing follow up articles to *Bottomfeeder* before he begins his next book project, which in a couple of years time is sure to shed light on another big topic – the relationship between the personal automobile and the city.