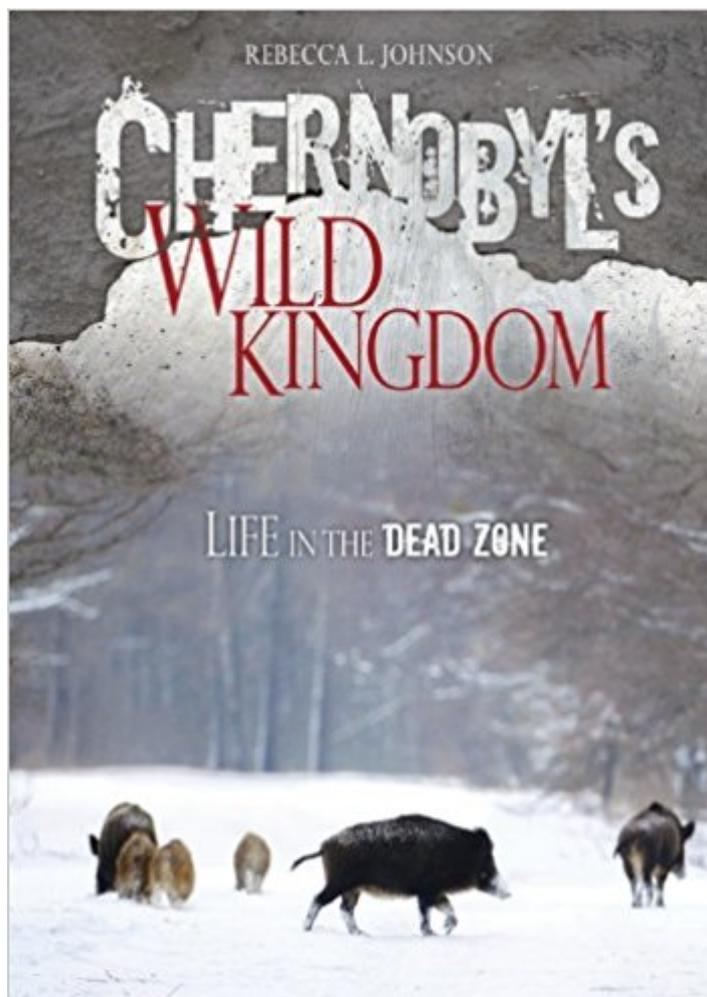


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# Chernobyl's Wild Kingdom: Life In The Dead Zone



## Synopsis

After the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear explosion in Ukraine, scientists believed radiation had created a vast and barren wasteland in which life could never resurface. But the Dead Zone, as the contaminated area is known, doesn't look dead at all. In fact, wildlife seems to be thriving there. The Zone is home to beetles, swallows, catfish, mice, voles, otters, beavers, wild boar, foxes, lynx, deer, moose even brown bears and wolves. Yet the animals in the Zone are not quite what you'd expect. Every single one of them is radioactive. In *Chernobyl's Wild Kingdom*, you'll meet the international scientists investigating the Zone's wildlife and trying to answer difficult questions: Have some animals adapted to living with radiation? Or is the radioactive environment harming them in ways we can't see or that will only show up in future generations? Learn more about the fascinating ongoing research and the debates that surround the findings in one of the most dangerous places on Earth.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Gr 5-8 • In April 1986, Reactor Number 4 in the Chernobyl nuclear power plant exploded, emitting a flood of radioactive material that devastated the surrounding countryside. The residual radioactivity permeating soil, water, plants and animals led to the creation of a miles-wide Exclusion Zone closed to human residents and dubbed the Dead Zone by the press, the general public, and scientists alike. Scientists have continued to study the ecology of this site during the intervening years, and Johnson's lucid text describes their methods and findings in this chunk of land on the border between the Ukraine and Belarus. She has read their written reports and

consulted scientists in the field to determine long-term effects on local wildlife after almost 30 years of exposure to varying doses of radioactivity. While some animals and plants appear to have been adversely affected, a large number of species seem to be coping relatively untouched. Even some former human residents (mostly elderly women) have returned to small hamlets and farms on the edge of the Zone, and poachers appear to be active in the area as well. (Other humans, massively exposed at the time of the explosion, have not fared so well.) The readable text is interspersed with dark red sidebars on such topics as how the researchers maintain safety in hot zones, the resistance of some plants to effects of long-term radiation, and reports of the damage suffered by human evacuees from the contaminated zone. Small color photos and maps provide visual evidence and geographical information. A final chapter reports on the tsunami-driven nuclear failure in the 2011 Fukushima disaster and ponders the future for similar "accidents."

Thought-provoking. — Patricia Manning, formerly at Eastchester Public Library, NY

Rebecca L. Johnson has always loved to read, and her tastes in books in grade school were quite a mix adventure stories, animal stories, lots of nonfiction science, but also mysteries, science fiction, and some adult books, too. She remembers reading Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* when she was 10 years old. It was a challenge, but she became so engrossed in the story that she could hardly put it down. Rebecca started writing books shortly after she graduated from college, first college biology textbooks and then special high-interest pieces on different science topics that went into middle school and high school science textbooks. Her first book for kids was about pheromones, chemicals that some types of animals use to communicate. Lerner published that book back in the late 1980s, and they have published quite a few more of Rebecca's books over the years. Doing research for books has taken Rebecca to a lot of amazing places where she's had fantastic opportunities to work with real scientists and at times help them with their research. Over the years she's spent about 9 months in Antarctica and many weeks scuba diving with researchers on Australia's Great Barrier Reef. She has also traveled as deep as 2500 feet below the ocean's surface in the Johnson-Sea-Link submersible, several times. The world is full of wonderful places, but visiting the deep sea was a life-changing experience, and Rebecca has never looked at anything in quite the same way since. Most of her books so far have been nonfiction, but Rebecca is working on a young adult novel at the moment. It's quite a change, but she has to admit that it's really fun to be able to make things up!

I have previously read *Wormwood Forest: A Natural History of Chernobyl* by Mary Mycio and

wanted more information on how the Chernobyl disaster affected the local wildlife and plants, so I decided to check this book out. It's written in a straightforward way with lots of interesting pictures and though it seems to be intended to middle school age children, it had some worthwhile information for adults as well. I was especially interesting to read about The Hormesis Hypothesis (which I wasn't aware of previously), which is a controversial idea that low doses of radiation over a length of time are actually beneficial to the organism by making it more resilient to disease. I would definitely recommend trying to buy this book used as the price of buying it new (around \$35) is simply too much for such a short book.

Son had to read for school. He enjoyed it! He likes nonfiction

This interesting and important short book discusses the wildlife of the area surrounding the site of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster almost 30 years after. While humans are restricted, some animals seem to have flourished or at least not died from living in the area, showing how little we understand about radiation and its effects. Some birds and moles and wild boars have made the area home in ways they would not have before the explosion, but, for instance, spiders are nowhere to be found. Of course, there are also mutations and cancers, too. It's an interesting book including some lively photographs that is not too technical, but also does not talk down to its audience. A quick informative read. Highly recommended.

Well written and appropriate for an audience of 5th-8th grade students. Johnson recounts the events just before, during, and since the Chernobyl disaster. This book really needs to be read as part of a unit of study on radioactive elements, radiation, nuclear energy, cancer or something because the weakness of the book is explaining these concepts and understanding of these concepts is critical to really getting the message. There is some attempt to explain these concepts and there are lots of pictures of the effects of the radiation, but there is very little as far as graphics and so forth to explain these concepts well. On the other hand, I don't see how you can't read a book like this when studying these concepts. The two go hand in hand for powerful learning. Disappointed that it's only available in library binding which raises the price of the book; hoping it comes out in paperback and can be bought in affordable sets for students to explore. With just one copy, this book could be read aloud to students - with the photographs and so forth projected with the doc camera.

REVIEW: CHERNOBYL'S WILD KINGDOM: LIFE IN THE DEAD ZONE by Rebecca L.

Johnson This is a deeply-researched, detailed, science-grounded account of the Exclusion Zone at and surrounding Chernobyl, site of the tremendous nuclear accident on April 26, 1986. At once simultaneously terrifying and encouraging, the author recounts the findings of courageous science researchers who have consistently studied the Zone, and its inexplicable "return" of life. This reminded me also of those scientists who research "extremophiles," the life forms surviving and thriving at extreme environmental temperatures and conditions: volcanoes, deserts, the bottom of oceans, etc. Surely these species at Chernobyl must be in the same category, as they consume radioactive foodstuffs, yet prosper. I highly recommend this well-illustrated and important book, for middle grades on through adult readers. I was pleased to review a digital ARC via NetGalley, but for both myself and my grand kids, this book is a must-buy.

This is an interesting book for young people about the effects of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster's effect on animals and plants in the area around it. While most scientists thought that all plant and animal life would die or be deformed, some animals have proved to be very resilient and for the most part, unharmed, while others do suffer from the radiation. The study of these plants and animals is important due to the proliferation of nuclear power plants. The book also includes a chapter about the Fukushima nuclear plant disaster and its effects on wildlife. With photographs, maps and charts and a glossary at the end, I think this is an excellent book for middle grade children.

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