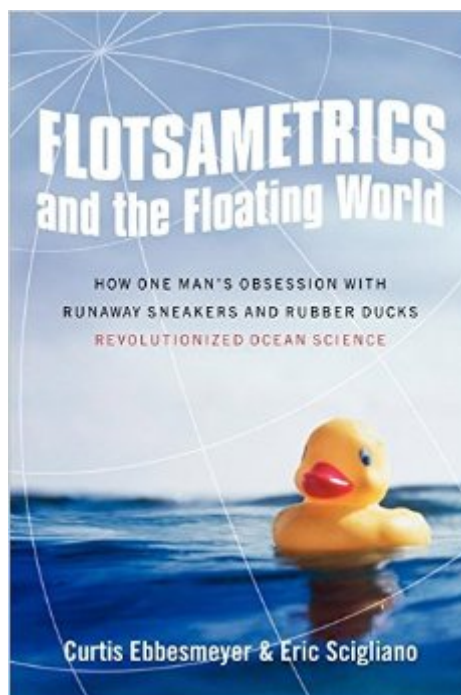


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Flotsametrics And The Floating World: How One Man's Obsession With Runaway Sneakers And Rubber Ducks Revolutionized Ocean Science



Synopsis

“Curtis Ebbesmeyer’s goal is noble and fresh: to show how the flow of ocean debris around the world reveals the ‘music’ of the world’s oceans.” —New York Times Book Review
Through the fascinating stories of flotsam, one of the Earth’s greatest secrets is revealed. In *Flotsametrics and the Floating World*, maverick scientist Curtis Ebbesmeyer details how his obsession with floating garbage—from rubber ducks to discarded Nike sneakers—helped to revolutionize ocean science. Scientist and environmentalist David Suzuki, host of CBC TV’s “The Nature of Things,” calls *Flotsametrics and the Floating World* “Science and storytelling at its very best.” “A very enjoyable, if at times dark, book” (Nature), it is must reading for anyone interested in Oceanography, Environmental Science, and the way our world works.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This book contains many charming anecdotes about how floating objects, from garbage to sneakers to dead bodies, are carried around by the surface currents of the ocean. I particularly liked the extended discussion of how careful observation of flotsam may have persuaded Columbus that the ocean wasn't too wide to cross to India. The book also gives some nice descriptions of what it's like to conduct science at sea. However, as a physical oceanographer, I was disappointed and finally infuriated by the book's neglect of the discoveries of literally hundreds of scientists who have studied ocean circulation in the last century. The book argues for new names of the major ocean

gyres but says little about how the gyres work. Other fascinating topics in physical oceanography poorly explained by the book are the relationship between the wind and ocean currents, the existence and cause of strong currents on the western side of gyres, and the way the Earth's rotation creates a simple relation between water velocity and pressure. An intrinsic feature of ocean dynamics is that surface water tends to converge (draw together in the center) in the subtropical gyres and diverge (float apart) in the subpolar gyres. This is very important for understanding why garbage patches would accumulate in the subtropical gyres and make landfall adjacent to the subpolar gyres. Based on the book's discussions of physical oceanography, I suspect the book could have said more about garbage and other flotsam as well. The large gaps in explanation would be less irritating if the book didn't sometimes give the impression that Dr.

For some reason, people tend to flock to the water. Especially when vacation calls. There is something magical about sitting on a beach, watching the waves. Or in having a cold beverage while gazing at the vastness of the ocean. This migration to the water seems to be part of human nature - a throw back to some ancient time. As we are in the midst of summer, a book concerning the oceans, and things that float on it, seems like a great idea. Part science, part autobiography, part cautionary tale, *Flotsametrics and the Floating World: How One Man's Obsession with Runaway Sneakers and Rubber Ducks Revolutionized Ocean Science*, by Curt Ebbesmeyer and Eric Scigliano, makes for the perfectly literal beach book. Contents: Preface: A New World, Chasing Water; Oil and Icebergs; Messages in Bottles; Eureka, a Sneaker!; Coffins, Castaways, and Cadavers; The Admiral of the Floating World; Borne on a Black Current; The Great Conveyor; Ashes to Ashes, Life from the Sea; Junk Beach and Garbage Patch; The Synthetic Sea; The Music of the Gyres; Appendix A: Urban Legends of the Sea; Appendix B: A Million Drifting Messages; Appendix C: The Oceanic Gyres; Appendix D: Ocean Memory; Appendix E: Harmonics of the Gyres; Acknowledgements; Illustration Credits; Glossary; Further Reading; Index. Dr. Curt Ebbesmeyer wasn't always an oceanographer; his undergraduate degree is in Mechanical Engineering and after college, he landed a job with Mobil Oil. Soon, he decided he wanted a graduate degree and gravitated toward two possibilities; nuclear engineering and oceanography. His wife was interested in library sciences. Deciding on a college that was strong in all three took him to the University of Washington. It was there that Dr. Ebbesmeyer decided on oceanography.

Curtis Ebbesmeyer graduated from college with a degree in mechanical engineering. When he went to work for Big Oil, he also got his doctorate in oceanography. He got to travel all over the world

because ocean flows affect oil rigs. He became interested in sea currents and in beaches and how debris is carried onto land. And then in 1990 five shipping containers full of shoes washed off a ship, and it set Ebbesmeyer into his true scientific calling, which has made him world famous. In *Flotsametrics and the Floating World: How One Man's Obsession with Runaway Sneakers and Rubber Ducks Revolutionized Ocean Science* (Smithsonian Books / Collins), Ebbesmeyer, writing with reporter Eric Scigliano, has given an anecdote-filled autobiography, along with plenty of instruction in oceanography basics. It is a lively, funny look at a life spent doing serious science in an eccentric way. Ebbesmeyer tells us not only about adventures at sea and combing beaches, but also about the joys and frustrations of such things as getting peer-reviewed articles published. His book is a welcome look at what a particular scientific life has been like. It was Ebbesmeyer's mother in 1991 who clipped an article for him to see. Nike shoes were landing all over the Oregon coast. Beachcombers helped him document where the shoes were found, and he started asking questions about where they came from. Nike was helpful. Not only could it tell him the exact location of the spill, but every single shoe is stamped with an ID number, which can be tracked back to the particular container that spilled it. Ebbesmeyer teamed with colleague Jim Ingraham to use a computer program called the Ocean Surface Current Simulator.

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