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Craig W. Allin, Ph.D.

Jon Marañón is a son of the post-war baby boom, a student of cultural anthropology, a college dropout, a dreamer, an entrepreneur, a skin diver, a self-taught naturalist, a committed conservationist, an astute observer of people and places, an affluent American expatriate with a conscience, and a writer. His absorbing memoir, **The Gringo's Hawk**, recounts a quarter century of adaptation to changing conditions on the Pacific Coast of southern Costa Rica.

In the short space of a single generation Marañón witnessed enormous environmental devastation as the effects of industrial civilization and global markets gradually encroached on a previously isolated region, destroying the fauna, flora, and indigenous culture he had learned to love. Despite valiant efforts and occasional victories, Marañón was ultimately powerless to stem the tidal rush of civilization. It is tempting for an environmentalist to describe Marañón's story as one of paradise lost, but his narrative is more nuanced. Like Henry David Thoreau before him, Marañón exhibits an appreciation of wilderness that is always informed by the perspective of civilization and a view of civilization that is only achieved by freeing oneself from its comfortable embrace.

The Gringo's Hawk is the story of one exceptional man coming to terms with one exotic place and the people who inhabited it. Seeing wild Costa Rica through Marañón's eyes, we are compelled to consider how the human race is coming to terms with Planet Earth and with our fellow travelers of different races, religions and tribes. The loss of innocence that inevitably accompanies Marañón's passage from youth to middle age parallels the despoliation around him, and both are described with a certain ambivalence. Somehow, both man and nature must be served. For Marañón the wisdom that comes with advancing years produces more questions than answers. He develops an appreciation for the complexity and interconnectedness of peoples, places and cultures, an appreciation not often shared by busy Americans whose spending habits affect planetary health by remote control. In the end Marañón's memoir is about discovering the world outside ourselves and trying to find our proper place in it-something we all need to do.

Craig W. Allin, Ph.D., Author of [Politics of Wilderness Preservation](#)

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