PROLOGUE

This book is unusual among the California Natural History Guides. It explores not only the natural history of San Francisco Bay but also its human history and how each affects the other. It may be the first in the series to describe a place so urbanized and to focus on a body of water rather than a piece of land, though land and water here are inextricably linked in their destiny.

This guide may also be the first to have so many voices in it. As a journalist who has researched and reported on water issues for over 20 years, I have come to know dozens of scientists, agency staffers, activists, teachers, engineers, and businesspeople with a passion for the bay and its watershed. By including so many quotes and memories from diverse people, I hope I've captured here the intensity with which people view the bay and the amount of energy they pour into studying it, understanding it, and caring for it.

Something else that may be different in this guide, in comparison to others, is the way in which I explore my own particular interest in science and scientists, and the extraordinary ways in which they test their theories in a medium—water, waves, tides, mud—that is relatively challenging for humans to work in. I am personally fascinated by the lengths to which humans will go to learn, and I marvel at the inventions they create to enable them to measure and track the subtle changes in the estuarine environment and all that lives in it.

As I observe our millennial battle for control of nature, I am encouraged that we humans continue to seek our proper place within it. I am heartened that we can not only build a dam but also take it down, as well as by the fact that we can spend hours counting weeds, sifting bay mud for tiny forms of life, following a plastic drifter downriver, or trying to mimic nature so that we can better balance our relationship with the ecosystem.

Perhaps the human race is destined to find the meaning of life on-screen, but I, for one, am all for getting hands dirty and feet wet.

Ariel Rubissow Okamoto

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