

## A great catch!

By **Emily Long and Luke Johnson**/ Special To The Tab  
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New England is certainly linked in peoples' minds with lobsters. On a mid-western college tour, we were informed by our tour guide sporting shorts with little red lobsters that he was from New England. Lobsters are commonly found here in a big boiling pot or on a bib covered in buttery lobster juice, but how much do we really know about them? Do we ever stop to think what kind of lives these crustaceans might live outside of the plate in front of us?

Trevor Corson's "The Secret Life of Lobsters" offers an intellectual awakening on an anecdotal plate. He interweaves stories of lobstermen and scientists, offering a hint of the friction between the two groups, while demonstrating their common love of lobsters. Having spent his childhood summers on Little Cranberry Island, Corson developed an early interest in lobstering and he gained a general appreciation of



The authors of this book review enjoy a lobster at Legal Seafood

the village's economic dependence on the lobster industry. Later in his life, he spent two years working full-time aboard a lobster boat and gained a much deeper appreciation of lobstering: "I wanted to be a marine biologist when I grew up, but also a commercial fisherman."

The non-fiction book takes the reader directly into the lobster's world. We travel into the traps at the bottom of the ocean, to a scientist's make-shift lobster town equipped with video cameras. Occasionally, Corson takes us back in time to discuss issues of over-fishing and to speculate about future generations of lobsters and lobstermen. Corson's witty parallels between humans and lobsters make the book especially interesting. In one section he dramatizes the mating rituals of lobsters by making allusions to their human counterparts, as when he described a female molting before mating: "a few minutes later, she fell over on her side, unzipped the back of her shell, and began to wiggle." In another chapter, Corson graphically describes male lobster fights in parallel with

descriptions of the battles between lobstermen and scientists regarding lobster conservation.

The book provides insight into lobster politics, discussing how people use lobsters as a resource. Scientists are constantly working for the preservation of lobsters, while fishermen are juggling the preservation of lobsters with the preservation of their livelihood and their families. In the book, you hear these two groups really listening to each other. In one scene, scientists, skeptical of the lobstermen's preservation efforts, witness a lobster haul and are amazed by the large number of lobsters tossed back into the sea. Throughout the book, the two groups are always learning new things about each other, resulting in a new level of mutual respect.

The writing style is laid back and Corson conveys his message in a playful manner. He has an informative voice, but the scientific information and historical references are not overemphasized, so the story narrative flows. He takes basic biological and behavioral facts and shows their complexity. At times it is like a lobster soap opera.

You might say that Corson has a talent for conveying lobster personalities. He describes the drama of lobsters that have been placed into artificial environments with a clarity that keeps you wanting to read more. There were moments when our minds drifted from the page, especially when nautical jargon was involved - yet we yearned to get back to the action underwater!

There's a profound conservation lesson to be learned from this book.

Studying lobsters is a window into our environment. Lobstermen do not set out to catch every lobster they can. They are aware of the impact of their actions on the lobster population so they set standards to control overfishing, standards that exceed those set by scientists and lawmakers. This book enriched our knowledge of lobster fishermen and of the workings of the lobster fishery. As the title implies, there's more to lobsters than most of us know. The author makes us see why scientists and fishermen care about lobsters. If you read this book, you, too, will understand the fascination and intrigue of lobsters.

Emily Long and Luke Johnson are seniors at Newton North High School. They wrote an opinion piece for the TAB last year based on a year-long Biology project. Having discovered that the TAB is a useful link to the community, they will continue contributing to the Environment page because they want to increase public awareness of environmental issues.