

“TOO OFTEN WE FORGET THAT CONSERVATION IS NECESSARY TO PROTECT HUMAN HEALTH AS WELL.”



Adélie penguins swim and jump near Cape Royds in 28-degree Fahrenheit waters of the Ross Sea, thought to be the world's last intact marine ecosystem.

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**JOHN WELLER**

Weller started taking photos when he was 6 years old. At 30, he published his first photography book, focusing on an area that fascinated him: *Great Sand Dunes National Park: Between Light and Shadow*. Soon afterward, when a court case prevented developers from pumping away the Dunes' aquifer water, Weller was inspired to immerse himself further in environmental issues.

Seven years later Weller's convictions have led him from the desert to the Antarctic, where another ecosystem was in need of protection. "Every marine system in the world has been intrinsically altered," Weller says. "What may be the last ecosystem basically unchanged by humans is the southernmost sea in the world, the Ross Sea."

Thanks to its remote location and protective ice, the Ross Sea is not yet heavily fished. And unlike every other ocean in the world, its top predator populations are all nearly intact. But there is a new threat: a highly controversial fishery for toothfish—which you may recognize by its more appetizing restaurant-menu name, Chilean sea bass. Removing toothfish en masse would create a domino effect, throwing the life cycles of various species out of whack.

Though stills are his chosen art form, Weller often stitches his photos together to make short films. In 2009 he produced a nine-minute video, made up of 1,700 still images, meant to bring the issues facing the Ross Sea to as many people as possible (see it at [bit.ly/cFdQz6](http://bit.ly/cFdQz6)). "Each film is connected to a specific legislative initiative. My goal is to contribute to the process of change." Weller plans to release his book about the Ross Sea in the spring of 2012. He also wants to remind people that he's not just in this to save some cute animals. "People sometimes think that marine conservation is solely to protect birds and fish," Weller says. "Too often we forget that conservation is necessary to protect human health as well." [lastocean.com](http://lastocean.com)



A seal ascends toward the light in this surreal photo shot from the freezing depths below the sea ice.