

The Canadian Field-Naturalist

Book Reviews

Book Review Editor's Note: *The Canadian Field-Naturalist* is a peer-reviewed scientific journal publishing papers on ecology, behaviour, taxonomy, conservation, and other topics relevant to Canadian natural history. In line with this mandate, we review books with a Canadian connection, including those on any species (native or non-native) that inhabits Canada, as well as books covering topics of global relevance, including climate change, biodiversity, species extinction, habitat loss, evolution, and field research experiences.

Currency Codes: CAD Canadian Dollars, USD United States Dollars, EUR Euros, AUD Australian Dollars, GBP British Pounds.

ENTOMOLOGY

Buzz, Sting, Bite: Why We Need Insects

By Anne Sverdrup-Thygeson. 2019. Simon and Schuster. 235 pages, 35.00 CAD, Cloth.

Buzz, Sting, Bite is another entry into the growing list of accessible popular science books written as passion projects by an academic researcher. A professor of conservation biology at the Norwegian University of Environmental and Life Sciences and a scientific advisor to the Norwegian Institute for Nature Research, Sverdrup-Thygeson's specialty is the ecological role of insects in trees and forests, but the book covers arthropods and their ecological roles more broadly. In addition to a multitude of interesting facts, it includes some discussion of broader conservation ecology, such as habitat connectivity, extinction debt, and endangered species. As promised by the tagline "why we need insects", the work also delves into humanity's ties to the insect world, from 13th century Chinese cricket fights to termites eating their way through stashes of bank notes.

Organized into nine main chapters, the scope is broad and about what you would expect from the outset: anatomy, mating, agricultural food systems, the ecological role of detritivores, and insect-human interactions. While each chapter has a stated theme, they are further divided into multiple sections and subsections. Overall quite intuitive and well managed, this structure does pose narrative challenges and can become disjointed at times as topics begin



to blur together. One key advantage of this bite-sized-piece approach is that like many books written for popular audiences, it makes for easy reading; this book may not pull you in for an all-night reading binge but it is well designed to be picked up at your leisure.

Artfully translated by Lucy Moffatt from the original Norwegian 2018 publication, *Buzz, Sting, Bite* includes some truly excellent explanations and turns of phrase. Although there are a few notable oversimplifications when discussing the natural history of insect groups and genera (e.g., bumble bees), the writing is at its best when it focusses on the truly weird and wonderful. Chapter 7, From Silk to Shellac: Industries of Insects, was by far my personal favourite, galloping across time periods and cultural traditions to bring together everything from oak gall wasps and historical records, silk production, bulletproof vests, and the Aztec and Mayan traditions of breeding cochineal bugs. To my repertoire of offbeat insect-based cocktail conversation I can now add the link between shellac, phonograph records, and a 1942 restriction ordered by the United States government on the record industry to reduce shellac consumption by at least 70%—for this I am forever grateful.

The main text is complimented by black and white illustrations by artist Tuva Sverdrup-Thygeson, one at the beginning of each chapter matched to its overall theme. These are welcome additions, as is the list of eight other author-recommended popular science insect books found under Further Reading following the Acknowledgments section. Although no in-text citations are provided, a bibliography of sorts is

found in the 20-page Sources section which is organized by chapter and includes full citations of journal papers, reports, books, and popular science articles. The text ends with a detailed Index, so when you inevitably want to refresh the details on a specific fact or anecdote it is at your fingertips.

One of the author's objectives in writing this book is to shine a spotlight on the creepy-crawly things of the world and shower them with the praise and appreciation that they deserve. In highlighting their value to human societies and their intrinsic 'cool' factor (even going so far as to use that rarest punctuation mark, the exclamation point, on several occasions), the author is largely successful. Although I doubt that those with a serious bug phobia will be drawn to this book, the range and variety of topics covered means that there is probably something here for every-

one. Human-insect-avian interactions? Take Greater Honeyguide (*Indicator indicator*) birds and their collaboration with the Yao people of Mozambique. Urban ecology and localized natural selection events? Have a side of mosquito speciation by station area of the London Underground. Want to hop on the insect eating bandwagon? You'll find it espoused here, if only briefly. Reading *Buzz, Sting, Bite*, I was reminded why I enjoy reading books on broad topics written by good writers—the more I learn, the more I want to know. This book provides more breadth than depth when it comes to bug love but is an excellent jumping off point for those who want to dive deeper, and a great toe dip for any who may otherwise hesitate to even approach the water's edge.

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