



Mosquito: A Natural History of Our Most Persistent and Deadly Foe

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From a world-renowned expert on mosquitoes and a prize-winning reporter comes a fascinating work of popular science -- a comprehensive study of the insect itself, its role in history, and its threat to mankind. From its irritating whine to the sting and itch of its bite, the mosquito ranks near the bottom of mankind's list of favorite creatures. But these tiny insects, once merely a seasonal annoyance, now are capturing headlines worldwide as new information emerges about the diseases they carry, their migratory population, and their growing resistance to pesticides.

Harvard professor Andrew Spielman has dedicated his life to understanding this insect, a passion that makes him the perfect guide to their amazing world and the perfect author of this lively, accessible book that offers an intriguing and horrifying mosquito-eye view of nature and man. He explains where mosquitoes breed, and how they die, showing us their natural foes and man-made enemies while explaining the myriad diseases they bring to all corners of the world. Spielman offers colorful examples of how the mosquito has insinuated itself into human history, from the defeat of Sir Francis Drake's fleet to the death of thousands of Frenchmen working on the Panama Canal to the recent widespread West Nile panic in New York City. Filled with little-known facts and illuminating anecdotes that bring this tiny being into larger focus, *Mosquito* offers fascinating, alarming, and convincing evidence that the sooner we get to know this little creature, the better off we'll be.

Mosquito: A Natural History of Our Most Persistent and Deadly Foe Details

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From Reader Review Mosquito: A Natural History of Our Most Persistent and Deadly Foe for online ebook

Franz says

I consider this to be an excellent book. Not a natural history as claimed in the title, it nevertheless provides enough information on the biology of the mosquito to bring the reader up to speed on the basic facts of mosquito biology. One aspect though that is entirely missing is information on the evolution of the mosquito - where it came from, that is, not what it might become.

The sections on the war on the mosquito were interesting. The history was well-presented, as was the chapter that introduced more contemporary designs based on genetic designs and manipulation.

The very end too held my interest when the authors briefly listed some of the mysteries that still surround the mosquito, such as the fact that it is still unknown what component of the blood exactly the mosquito craves. I was disappointed then that the book ended there - surely there must be some ideas out there.

Maybe not quite what I expected (i.e. "natural history") but an excellent book nevertheless. Five stars.

Krista says

Now that I am living with mosquitoes, I figured that I should know something about them. This was a great place to start. Maybe a little heavy on the public health aspects of mosquito borne diseases, but still really interesting. I really enjoyed learning how mosquitoes shaped the development of coastal cities. The very descriptive section on yellow fever made my stomach twitch, but was gruesomely wonderful all the same. Did you know that there are 2500 different species of mosquitoes world wide and most of them do not bite people? Just one of the juicy little factoids that I have piled in my brain thanks to this book.

Frederick Bingham says

This book is about mosquitoes. It describes all the different kinds there are, what some of their behaviors are, like how they reproduce and how they feed. It talks about the diseases they carry, malaria, yellow fever, St. Louis Encephalitis, etc. It describes efforts to control them. In the 1960's there was a massive campaign to eradicate mosquitoes using DDT. It talks about the role of mosquitoes in human history. (Did you know that 1/3 of american soldiers in Vietnam would be sick with malaria at any one time?) It talks about directions in mosquito control and control of mosquito-transmitted disease. After having read this book, slapping a mosquito will never be the same.

Bea says

Lots of good information about the life history of mosquitoes, the diseases they carry, and the history of how we came to discover those things. Very interesting to learn about the diversity and complexity of some life histories.

I thought he came up a bit short though in his discussions of pesticides. He describes how resistance develops and what problems that creates. However he glosses over the ecological effects of pesticides and concludes that we mustn't ban ddt out-right. That conclusion did not follow from his logic, in my opinion.

Michael says

The first half of this book was very interesting but it tends to drag on after a bit.

It is clear that the author loves DDT and thinks that the world could have rid itself of mosquitoes and malaria if it weren't for those pesky environmentalists.

My other big beef with this book is the lack of endnotes. I know this is a laymans text but if you are going to make claims about history it is nice to show some evidence.

This seems to be the only book around on this topic so I would just read the first half.

Abbi says

Wonderful overview of this remarkable animal and her nature as a vector for some of mankind's most horrible and debilitating diseases and also, our vain efforts to control them. I fear out of date slightly, but written by one of the world's leading experts on mosquitoes. I wouldn't consider myself a layman (I read it just as I had completed my degree) but I found it educational, and a nice summery on the subject, recommended to me by my tutor.

It is enthralling, humorous and passionately written. Highly recommended, even to newcomers to the subject.

Tammam Aloudat says

I am a public health professional who works on global health issues and I have learned enormous amounts of information from this book. Far from being a dreary scientific text on mosquitos, this is a story that masterfully mixes all the science most people need to know with history, stories, and anecdotes making it very interesting and readable to all.

Unless you are a certified "mosquito person", this is all you need to read about the subject. That being said, and if I had anything to say about it, this should be promoted as a must read.

Petra X says

Reviewed Feb. 18th, edited Feb. 20th, 2013

Everything you never actually wanted to know about mosquitos. And when I say everything, I mean that.

From geographic distribution, to all the parts of the tiny body, via the science of malaria and politics of eradication. It's all immensely readable which is a triumph of good writing considering the subject.

Will it make you love the not-really-humble mosquito, bastard flying torture machine that it is? Will it make you think of this kamikaze insect with more respect? Will it help you defeat the enemy a la Sun Tzu? No to all of this, but it's still a really interesting book.

Years ago I had dengue fever and moved house. It was the easiest house move I ever did - I couldn't move. I had to be carried to the bathroom even. The other name for dengue is breakbone fever. It feels like someone has smashed your skull behind your eyes and that every bone in your body has been broken. There isn't any treatment for it, you just have to make sure you don't get dehydrated and wait it out. A few years ago a friend's husband got the very rare haemorrhagic dengue fever. He was medivac'd out to a hospital in the US but he still died.

Dengue is going around again I heard yesterday. The streets are getting sprayed, the Public Health people are going around houses asking if you have anything, plant pot bases, old tyres, discarded toys in the garden that might be holding water. Dengue isn't common around here and isn't fatal apart from the haemorrhagic variety, but it is worrying, it's just the most painful illness you can imagine. Fingers crossed.

Kaethe says

After reading Petra's marvelous review I was keen to give it a read. Well, it's not exactly *disappointment*, picking up a book, recognizing every line, realizing you've already read and enjoyed it very much. Yay, of course, only now you have to find something else to read.

Very engaging book of science and medicine.

Samuel Muggington says

This book was published in 2001 but it is still relevant today. In fact, I wish the author could write an updated version. It is fascinating that such a tiny creature can have such tremendous effects on humans. The author points out that massive amounts of time, energy and money have been spent to defeat mosquito borne diseases but in the end, simple improvements in living standards, buildings, window and door screens, air conditioning, eliminating breeding grounds, etc. have more beneficial effects than the use of chemicals or genetic intervention.

I'm glad that there are dedicated entomologists like the author working on problems like this.

William says

A couple of criticisms:

The author states "More than most other living things, the mosquito is a self-serving creature. [...] She does

not even serve as an essential food item for some other animal."

I find this to be hyperbole, and a statement of the author's worldview rather than an objective statement about mosquitoes.

As well, this book is hardly a natural history. It would be more appropriate to remove "natural" from the title as much of the book is spent chronicling the history of trying to control or eradicate mosquitoes.

Otherwise, this is a wonderful book. It is very readable and an excellent source of information.

Denise Louise says

Mostly read in the spirit of knowing the enemy, I was pleasantly surprised to find this book more interesting than I expected. The history of the diseases caused and spread by mosquitos and the various fights against them were clearly explained. Living in Michigan, my experience with mosquitos is they are just an irritant and nuisance, but not in any way deadly. I guess I can be thankful now for the innocuous variety that plague my little world. It could be worse.

Riley says

I was born in southeast Alaska, where mosquitoes are everywhere, but I honestly never knew very much about them. This book taught me a lot: for instance, that they use human blood for reproduction and that if you're bit, it's going to be from a female. I also had not realized how much DDT was once considered a wonder chemical in the fight against malaria.

One passage I highlighted that I thought was interesting:

"More than most other living things, the mosquito is a self-serving creature. She doesn't aerate the soil, like ants and worms. She is not an important pollinator of plants, like the bee. She does not even serve as an essential food item for some other animal. She has no 'purpose' other than to perpetuate her species. That the mosquito plagues human beings is really, to her, incidental. She is simply surviving and reproducing."

Zena Casteel says

This book provided an interesting introduction to mosquitos as vectors of various pathogens as well as a very basic overview of their natural history. The author has worked on numerous interesting projects in various locations, and provides a historical perspective of the relationship between disease, politics and science. I found some aspects of the book to be over opinionated, but overall I think Spielman and D'Antonio do a reasonable job of shedding light on the plethora of modern, mosquito-related issues.

Shea Mastison says

Andrew Spielman and Michael D'Antonio, a Harvard professor and Pulitzer Prize winning journalist (respectively), have teamed up to give us an easily readable book on the mosquito. The book has excellent information about the mosquito's life-cycle, breeding habits; as well as the various pathogens that they carry.

Admittedly, the book isn't exactly the most exciting page-turner you'll come across; but the obvious wit of Spielman comes across well in D'Antonio's writing, and the various photos and diagrams are very handy when trying to get a grasp on the mosquito.

If you think you're the kind of person who would enjoy reading about mosquitoes; this book will not disappoint.
