

Local Bugs Hit the Press

Our ENHS President's latest find is all about bugs: *Bugs of Washington and Oregon* by John Acorn, illustrated by Ian Sheldon.

I found this book in the visitor center gift shop at Yaquina Head Outstanding Natural Area on the Oregon coast just north of Newport. My wife (Connie) and I were looking for things which would be useful for the Eugene Natural History Society booth present at the spring and fall festivals of the Mount Pisgah Arboretum. I had plastic models of a jelly fish, a starfish, and an orca in hand when Connie picked this up and showed it to me. Flipping through the book, reading a half dozen pages at random, quickly convinced me that this would be a great book to keep at the booth as a reference for the booth tenders.

This is a great book for the avid naturalist who lacks formal training in entomology. The author describes 125 different "bugs," a term he uses in the most general sense to include a wide variety of insect families besides true bugs, as well as spiders (Arthropoda), and a few other notable non-insect arthropods. His choice of species was based on four criteria: 1) **big**, 2) **colorful**, 3) **really hard to miss**, or 4) **extremely weird**. I found his selection thoughtful and wonderful; I'd call them "bugs you really ought to know." Another way to look at the selection is that if you master the information in this slim book, you will be able to identify specimens and answer questions about most of the buggy things kids (or anybody with a healthy curiosity and sharp eye) will notice during walks outdoors.

Acorn's writing style is casual and breezy, reminiscent of the TV style of the late Steve Irwin, crocodile hunter. It is akin to what Jerry Franklin calls "gee whiz botany," information presented with a simple enthusiasm that avoids being corny because the facts are pertinent, accurate and interesting.

There is one page for each bug, up to one half of which is taken up by an illustration. These are not crude sketches. Sheldon's meticulous watercolor images are exquisite, showing why a good illustration is often much clearer than a photograph. Almost every image arouses in me the thoughts: "I know that one; I've seen that before!" The selections are familiar or memorable or both. The picture

sets me up to read about the bug: where it lives, how it mates, what sounds it makes, what kind of sting it has

The arrangement is nontraditional, butterflies first and the primitive springtails last. A section near the end comprises an ecologic group, the aquatic insects. The culmination is an array of non-insect arthropods. However, the arrangement is not really important; there's no reason to begin at the beginning and read to the end. I would urge somebody to keep this book on the bedstand or in the throne

room, to be picked up and read at random, a little or a lot. That's the way we encounter bugs, whatever happens to catch our eye at a particular moment in a particular habitat. It doesn't hurt to learn them as we meet them, sometimes rereading about an old favorite and sometimes hunting for something new.

This is the kind of book I wish more people would buy and read. It inflames me with a missionary urge like my father's. My father was, as a matter of fact, a missionary. He would always encourage people to reestablish their spiritual connection with that which is holy and sacred. He felt this would save their soul from destruction and despair. I always seek to encourage people to reestablish their appreciation of nature, and thereby respect and

conserve the world which nourishes our very existence. I've imagined a movement that places books like *Bugs of Washington and Oregon* in the nightstand drawers of motel

Order Pseudoscorpionida



Ophiogomphus severus

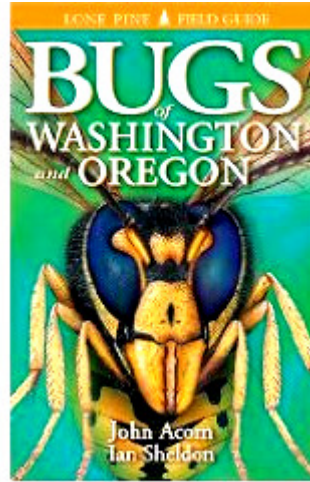


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rooms and hotels, in waiting rooms and lobbies around the country. People who read them would (I imagine) feel a new closeness to nature and be inspired to care for the natural world. It wouldn't necessarily save their souls, but what good is a saved soul that has to live in a toxic wasteland?

Well, getting a little carried away there but the point is that this simple book of bugs has the potential to educate powerfully. It is not a perfect book. I have no idea where, in making the map on page 14, the editors got the idea that there is a "Great Sandy Desert" in the southeast quarter of Oregon. Hopefully, future editions will call it what we do, the High Lava Plains. Hopefully, there will be future editions.

David Wagner



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