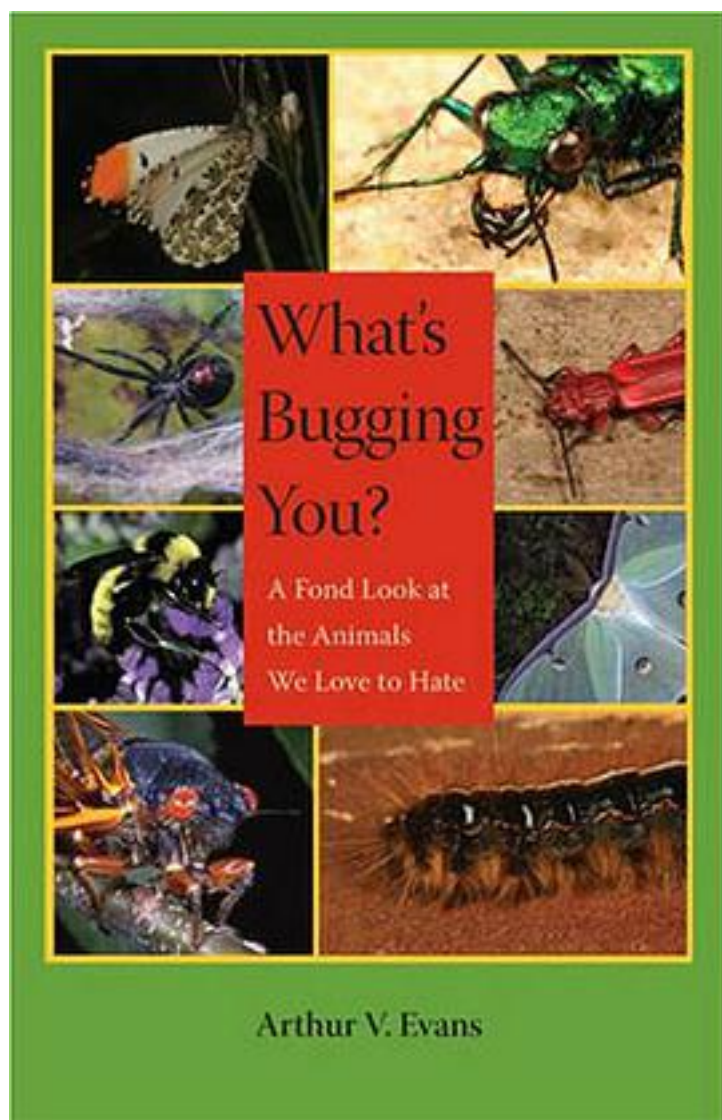


What's Bugging You?



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We are told from the time we are children that insects and spiders are pests, when the truth is that most have little or no effect on us--although the few that do are often essential to our existence. Arthur Evans suggests we take a closer look at our slapped-at, stepped-on, and otherwise ignored cohabitants, who vastly outnumber us and whose worlds often occupy spaces that we didn't even know existed. "What's Bugging You?" brings together fifty unforgettable stories from the celebrated nature writer and entomologist's popular "Richmond Times-Dispatch" column. Evans has scoured Virginia's wild places and returned with wondrous stories about the seventeen-year sleep of the periodical cicadas, moths that evade hungry bats by sensing echolocation signals, and the luminous language of light employed by fireflies. He also visits some not-so-wild places: the little mounds of upturned soil scattered along the margins of soccer fields are the dung beetle's calling card. What does the world look like to a bug? Evans explores insect vision, which is both better, and worse, than that of humans (they are capable of detecting ultraviolet light, but many cannot see the color red), pausing to observe that it is its wide-set forward-looking eyes that imbue the praying mantis with "personality." He is willing to defend such oft-maligned creatures as the earwig, the tent caterpillar, and the cockroach--revealed here as a valuable scavenger, food source for other animals, and even a pollinator, that spends more time grooming itself than it does invading human space. Evans's search for multilegged life takes him to an enchanting assortment of locations, ranging from gleaming sandy beaches preferred by a threatened tiger beetle to the shady, leaf-strewn forest floors where a centipede digs its brood chamber--to a busy country road where Evans must dodge constant foot and vehicular traffic to photograph a spider wasp as it claims its paralyzed prey. His forays also provide the reader with a unique window on the cycles of nature. What Evans refers to as the FBI--fungus, bacteria, insects--are the chief agents in decomposition and a vital part of regeneration. Evans also takes on many issues concerning humans' almost always destructive interaction with insect life, such as excessive mowing and clearing of wood that robs wildlife of its food and habitat, as well as harmful bug zappers that kill everything "but" mosquitoes. The reader emerges from this book realizing that even seemingly mundane forms of insect and spider life present us with unexpected beauty and fascinating lifestyles.

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