

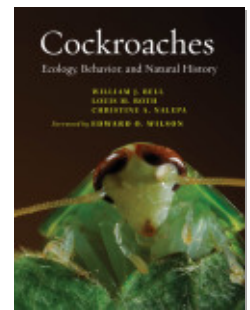


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Foreword

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Foreword

Let the lowly cockroach crawl up, or, better, fly up, to its rightful place in human esteem! Most of us, even the entomologists in whose ranks I belong, have a stereotype of revolting little creatures that scatter from leftover food when you turn on the kitchen light and instantly disappear into inaccessible crevices. These particular cockroaches are a *problem*, and the only solution is *blatticide*, with spray, poison, or trap.

I developed a better understanding when I came to realize that the house pests and feces-consuming sewer dwellers are only the least pleasant tip of a great blattarian biodiversity. My aesthetic appreciation of these insects began during one of my first excursions to the Suriname rainforest, where I encountered a delicate cockroach perched on the leaf of a shrub in the sunshine, gazing at me with large uncockroach-like eyes. When I came too close, it fluttered away on gaily colored wings like a butterfly.

My general blattarian education was advanced when I traveled with Lou Roth to Costa Rica in 1959, and further over the decades we shared at Harvard's Museum of Comparative Zoology, as he worked as a taxonomist through the great evolutionary radiation of the blattarian world fauna.

This volume lays out, in detail suitable for specialists but also in language easily understood by naturalists, the amazing panorama of adaptations achieved by one important group of insects during hundreds of millions of years of evolution. Abundant in most terrestrial habitats of the world, cockroaches are among the principal detritivores (their role, for example, in our kitchens), but some species are plant eaters as well. The species vary enormously in size, anatomy, and behavior. They range in habitat preference from old-growth forests to deserts to caves. They form intricate symbioses with microorganisms. The full processes of their ecology, physiology, and other aspects of their biology have only begun to be explored. This book will provide a valuable framework for the research to come.

Edward O. Wilson

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