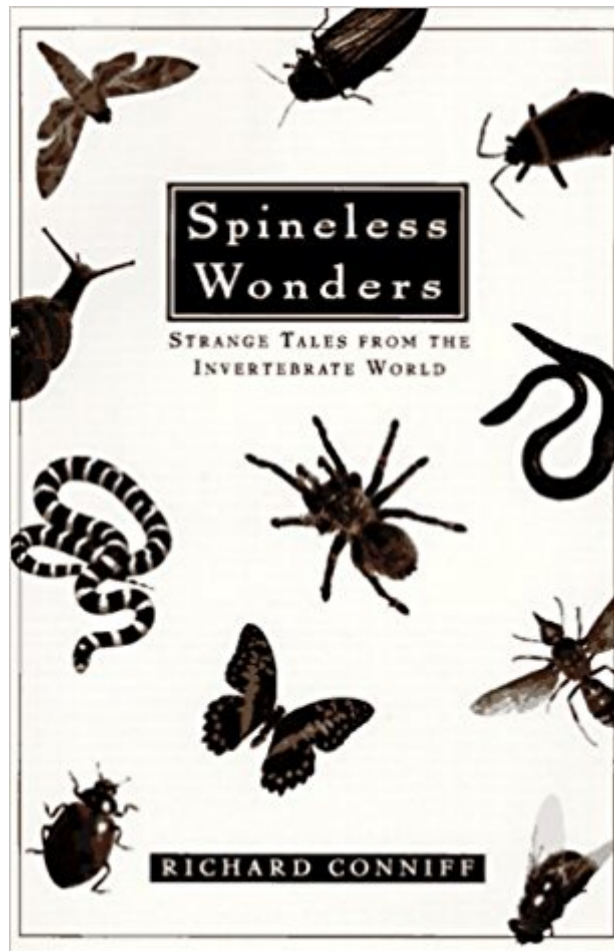


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# Spineless Wonders: Strange Tales From The Invertebrate World



## Synopsis

Natural history writer Richard Conniff's journalistic assignments have brought him in contact with invertebrates for more than 20 years--tarantulas of the upper , dragonflies in Arizona, squid in Florida, and flies on the rim of his beer glass. Here Conniff details his often hilarious encounters with the highly intelligent and eccentric people who study these creatures. 16 line drawings .

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Leeches, fire ants, dragonflies and mosquitoes; slime eels, giant squids, earthworms and fleas--this gallery of creepy-crawlies is enough to give anyone nightmares. Yet in his new book, *Spineless Wonders*, author Richard Conniff succeeds in making his subjects interesting if not exactly attractive. Conniff, a journalist, knows all too well that most people do not share his admiration for the invertebrates of the world, and so he sets out to demonstrate just what marvels of engineering they really are. From discussions of just how these creatures are made and how they survive, he goes on to tell stories about the people who study them. From the scientist who ate the only known specimen of a new species to the leech-farmer in Wales, Conniff paints a vivid picture of invertebrates and the people who love them, making even that slime eel seem almost appealing.

--This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Invertebrates are literally spineless and much maligned. But we vertebrates are figuratively spineless, at least when it comes to the creepy, slimy, hairy horror evoked by that which "represents

more than 99.5 percent of all animal species." Conniff (writer and producer of nature programs for National Geographic and the Discovery Channel) humbles us in his wonderfully weird, icky book, for he makes clear that without the fly to pollinate and the worm to till the earth, we would vanish. There is much to learn here: that leeches are being farmed and used medicinally (again); that in Texas, fire ants "frequently get to highway accident victims before the ambulance

For a while, I'd wanted to read a good overview of the insect world. After searching for a newer book, I finally came across Richard Conniff's *Spineless Wonders: Strange Tales from the Invertebrate World*, which fit the bill. Conniff's goal is to show that invertebrates are as amazing than most of the charismatic megafauna we all know and love. In fact, many of these bugs are even more incredible, with complex chemical tricks and the ability to undertake great physical leaps and bounds (relative to their size of course). Conniff's writing style is very easy to read and the book is intended for a wider audience (I suspect it might bore more initiated readers). I was disappointed that a few major bugs were not included in the book, particularly Scorpions, but I guess the book had to cut something out. Overall, a fun read and good beginning book if you are curious about the insect world.

There is more to the world of nature than cuddly koalas, magnificent whales, and beautifully singing birds. Most of the animal kingdom, and much of the biomass on the planet, are invertebrates! Insects, spiders, centipedes, molluscs, crustaceans, echinoderms, worms, all greatly outnumber vertebrates and are absolutely vital to continued life on earth, and all are greatly unappreciated by the average person. Richard Conniff takes us on a representative tour of several members of the invertebrate world. Though he only scratches the surface, he shows us some of the most fascinating of the "creepy crawlies," creatures that often have few admirers in the media or popular culture. From the fascinating world of flies to the invaluable leech to the hated fire ant to beetles, fleas, and giant squid and beyond, Conniff shows us the astounding world of invertebrates. Strictly speaking, Conniff includes one vertebrate in the mix, the lowly but extremely unusual hagfish, so it is not only invertebrates. Having said that though this was an excellent book, one well worth reading. Popular science writing at its best.

Forget Jack Hannah and his media sound bites which teach you absolutely nothing about other species. This book is a must read for anyone who really wants to learn more about some of the most misunderstood and hated creatures on our planet. Easy to read, entertaining and educational,

Richard Conniff spins tales guaranteed to shed new light on the invertebrate world and can be read and appreciated by young and old alike. Recently I was fortunate enough to spend some time interviewing this talented author and was fascinated with his insight and true depth of feeling for the planet. It is a shame that the media suffers from tunnel vision when it comes to teaching the public about animals. Over and over we are presented with the same information about the same animals which limits our understanding of the importance of bio-diversity. Richard Conniff has worked for both the Discovery Channel and National Geographic and has travelled extensively, and with "Spineless Wonders" and his latest work "Every Creeping Thing" he has achieved what many strive for but very few accomplish. Hats off to Mr. Conniff and if those talk shows had any sense they would book you immediately and discover what I already have, that you are an incredible resource for information about the relationships between humans and other species

Richard Conniff's subjects in his other works are often scientists and explorers of the natural world, and in this text he reviews the subjects of his subjects, much like the often-quoted description of the meat-packing company, Armour, wryly credited with using every part if the hog except the smell. Conniff's skilled, tight writing is an example of vivid, fascinating writing at its best, sending an appreciative audience into exploring the other trenchant discoveries.

An entire book about beetles, houseflies, worms, moths, and leeches? With an entire chapter on slime eels--aka hagfish--which burrow into dead fish and consume them from the inside out? You bet. As the author points out, the above-named creatures are but a few of the species that belong to the group of animals known as invertebrates, which not only lack a backbone, but also, pound for pound, far outweigh any other form of life on earth. "There are only 4,500 or so mammal species on the planet. There are, however, between ten million and thirty million invertebrate species. They represent more than 99.5 percent of all animal species. A spaceship visiting the blue planet would take them, not us, as the typical earthlings." And invertebrates are often far more interesting than us boring old mammals, fish, birds, reptiles, and amphibians. Take a fire ant queen, for example, who reproduces so wholeheartedly that her human equivalent would be a 120-pound woman giving birth to 500,000 babies each year. Or how about the mysterious giant squid--at sixty feet long and with eyes the size of headlights, the largest invertebrate alive--who lives five hundred fathoms beneath the ocean waves. (Nobody has ever seen one in its natural habitat.) So who's the audience? Any adult with a taste for the more slithery residents of earth--or any parents who want to wow their own offspring with bizarre true-life tales of the scaly and slimy. (Twelve-year-olds on up, or ten-year-olds

with a deep curiosity for all things gross, should have no trouble with it, either.

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