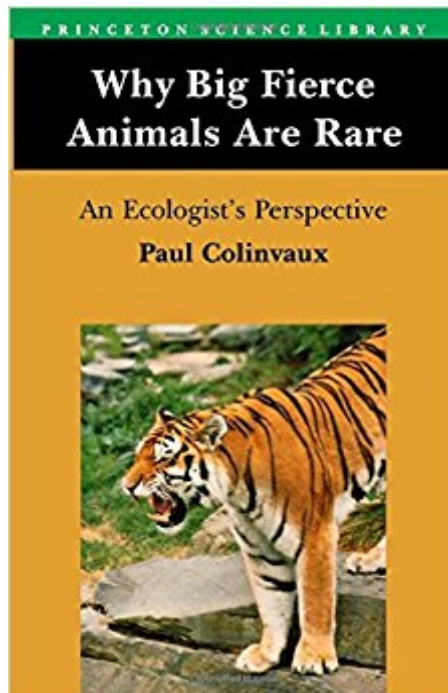




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Why Big Fierce Animals Are Rare: An Ecologist's Perspective



Synopsis

Here is one of the most provocative, wide-ranging, and delightful books ever written about our environment. Paul Colinvaux takes a penetrating look at the science of ecology, bringing to his subject both profound knowledge and an enthusiasm that will encourage a greater understanding of the environment and of the efforts of those who seek to preserve it.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"A rare achievement. . . . Colinvaux makes us marvel with him at the stability of nature and the incredible fit of every part of it."--New York Times Book Review
"A mind-tingling survey . . . of the many factors involved in the interrelationships of all living things. . . . An incisive and stirring book, and a model of scientific explanation."--New Yorker

"A highly readable and accessible account of the complex way in which nature has molded its ecosystems by fitting predators to prey and food chains to both."--John Barkham

Paul Colinvaux's *Why Big Fierce Animals are Rare* could have also been called *The Nature of Nature*, *An Introduction to Ecology* or *Why Things are the Way They Are*. Chapters of the book include

subjects such as *The Efficiency of Life*, *The Social Lives of Plants*, *Why the Sea is Blue* and *The Regulation of the Air*. If that sounds off-putting; like a dull textbook only geeks would suffer through you would be surprised that this is a quick enjoyable read. For example, *Why the Sea is Blue* and the following chapter *The Ocean System* are a combined 15 small pages. This is a book anyone can enjoy and learn from.

Writing 10/10: The book is a delight to read and one of, if not the most well written books I have ever read along with *The Beak of the Finch* by Jonathan Weiner (an excellent book on Peter and Rosemary Grant's continual trips to the Galapagos Islands in search of recorded "real" "speciation or "macro-evolution by way of natural selection). While the former may be technically better written, I would choose this any day because of the conciseness along with the sometimes hilarious humor and totally enjoyable and stimulating content. Colinvaux English roots help to infuse the book with style and humor. My favorite chapter to highlight the excellent writing and humor would have to be *"The Social Imperatives of Space"*. For example: "As with other seminal ideas, the idea of the territoriality of birds has been used to support some queer propositions." "We can learn what Howard found by following his observation of just one of them, a little English finch with a yellow head known colloquially as the yellowhammer."

Content 10/10: One can also learn much about the natural world. Colinvaux extensively uses niches of differing and very similar forms of life to explain that nature isn't so much about violence, "kill or be killed" and "this is my territory" but about survival; minimizing risk for predators, laying down spatial rules for the best chance of survival for the species as a whole and how this (and everything else) is actually in-line with Darwin's rules of fitness. It's all perfectly logical the way nature works even as the revelation might be very hard to come by. All the more reason to read the book; as I'm sure you will have many revelations of "why" from questions you might not have even known, or thought of, to ask.

Overall: 10/10

This book is awesome. It is a bit dated, makes me wonder what they've learned since it was written in 1978. But is definitely a fun read.

I gained important insights into population ecology when I first read it years ago. And I have enjoyed reading it again.

For the nature lovers. Great book! Learn about the animals and learn about fantastic places hard to visit.

A very good read and for any ecology or science teacher, it is flat out wonderful.

This was a great deal. The book has been going out of print on and off for a while now, so this was a great find at a great price. The shipping time was quick. I received it in about a week at the latest after purchasing it. The book definitely fit its description of it.

The author does okay in the beginning when he sticks to the physical principles underlying ecology. Unfortunately, later chapters are tarnished when he mixes unsubstantiated (and outmoded) opinion with fact. Indeed, parts of the book are better suited to an editorial than a work on science. The world has moved light-years on in the twenty plus years since this book was written. The publisher does us a disservice by keeping it in print.

Interesting, humorous, lucid, balanced -- Paul Colinvaux's book is one of the finest books I've read. He takes biological conundrums and makes them crystalline. Controversial topics are handled with balance and grace. Abstruse terms are explained simply and wittily. Written in 1978, the book is a little dated in some areas. For instance, he has a whole chapter on the increase of carbon dioxide in the air and never once mentions global warming. But this is a very small issue. Most of the book is timeless, and invaluable.

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