

Six-legged Sex: The Erotic Lives of Bugs by James Wangberg and illustrated by Marjorie Leggitt is a new at the Castlegar and District Public Library. Wangberg, is a former entomology researcher and teacher at the University of Wyoming. Marjorie Leggitt has created such glorious illustrations that I can't decide if the text supports the art or vice versa.

In his introduction, Wangberg laments that it seems unfortunate that the exciting stories revealed by scientists are only shared among scientists. Some aspects of scientific work are popularized, but there is so much information that remains hidden in scientific literature, accessible only to relatively few. This book was written to let others in on some of these secrets.

He says, "perhaps this book deserves an "R" rating, or at least a "PG-13." It contains adult language, sexual content, nudity, and violence. But such is the nature of the animal world. At least I can assure you that the sex and violence is not of the gratuitous kind. It is matter-of-fact, and meant to be educational as well as entertaining."

Beyond sex, this book is about insects. We all know insects, their pervasiveness and their diversity. Try as we might to ignore mosquitoes buzzing in our ears as we attempt to sleep, to avoid the worm in our cherries, and to squish the green caterpillars eating our cabbages. Insects are the most successful group of animals the earth has yet known. They annoyed dinosaurs and they will be swarming long after we are a remnant in the fossil record.

There are twenty-five short, stand-alone, chapters. Each is edited to a razor's edge. You don't need a PhD to read and to enjoy this book.

Here are a few flecks of insect trivia. Pheromones are chemicals that stimulate a strong sexual response. Female moths emit pheromones in units of picograms or one trillionth of a gram. A male moth can detect the scent of a receptive female for over a mile. Some male moths deposit an anti-aphrodisiac after mating that masks the female's pheromone to other males.

Wangberg corrects a popular myth. Spanishfly is neither pheromone nor aphrodisiac, but an irritating and toxic chemical secreted by blister beetles as a defense mechanism. It is unclear how spanishfly gained its more seductive reputation.

Female fireflies attract mates, not with perfume, but with lanterns. With yearning males drawn to flashy lights, it's not surprising to learn that one firefly species, Photurus, has evolved a nasty deception. Photurus females mimic the flashing pattern of Photinus female fireflies. An unsuspecting Photinus male soars into the arms of a Photurus female expecting to satisfy his primal urges. Instead he satisfies her hunger. Photurus females switch signals when they're in the mood for love.

The males of certain fly species tempt prospective mates with gifts of food and displays of light-footed dance. Eventually, the shy females begin to eat the gifts. But as they eat, the males mount.

There are three fly species in the Hilara genus that have evolved permutations to this ploy. The first captures an insect to offer his bride. The second captures an insect and wraps it in silk as a gift for his bride. The third little pig, captures nothing at all, but wraps it to appear as a gift. By the time his unwitting female unwraps the empty box, well you can guess the ending.

The next time someone wishes to be a fly on the wall, you'll be able to set them straight.