

Review of: An Introduction To Behavioural Ecology

Davies, Krebs & West (4th Edition), Wiley-Blackwell 2012

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'An Introduction To Behavioural Ecology' has been a classic textbook in the field since it was first published in 1981. It was revised for the third time in 1993, but even in 2011, during the second year of my Zoology degree this book, out of date as it was, was still being recommended as the best introductory level textbook to buy. This fourth edition was released in early 2012, and has bought the title bang up to date. It therefore stands tall as *the* textbook to have in the field of Behavioral Ecology. It certainly isn't the most detailed book in the field, but as a starting point for research, it works perfectly. The text is well written throughout, and is aimed very squarely at undergrads. Because of this, I expect anyone with an A level in Biology, or equivalent, or an interest in Zoology without the qualification, could pick this book up and get a lot out of it. Behavioral Ecology, in many ways, is where the scientific method runs squarely into observations of animal behavior in the wild. Because of this, it would not surprise me if birdwatchers would get a lot out of this book, despite the academic blood flowing through it (or perhaps, because of it).

The book is well printed, as you would expect, with great clear photographs used liberally, and a lot of graphs and diagrams. These are all there to help illustrate points, and they are well integrated into the text. I am normally frustrated by the huge gaps some books use on the outside of the pages to put 'key points'. Normally these look ridiculous because they are not utilized properly, but here you get paragraph summaries of the text which can be very useful if you are just looking for a quick sentence to commit to memory. For instance, on page 151, you have "Individuals in the middle of a group may be safer than those at the edge...", followed by "...but position choice may reflect a trade-off between predation and foraging" at the side of the next paragraph. It gives you a quick sound bite, without going into detail. Obviously, if you want the detail you can just read the paragraph. Because of this, the spaces found on some pages where there are no paragraph summaries written can be forgiven.

References are given in the text, though the reader will need to go to the back of the book to find the full reference. A short section on Further Reading is added at the end of each paragraph, where a bunch of references are talked about briefly. Again, full details of said references are found at the back of the book. The index is fine, no complaints there, and at nearly 500 pages, what looks like a fairly thin book really is packed with information

Because the subject of the book is so wide ranging, and covers topics that are observable outside of a laboratory, in many ways this could well have been marketed as a popular science book. Certainly, it drew me in far more than most, but without the political posturing that popular science books can have. What this book is, is good science explained well, and not too much more. This may sound like I am damning the book with faint praise, but I certainly am not. I got a lot out of this book, and it helped me out immensely during my third year exams. A personal anecdote: I scored higher in my behavioral ecology exam than I did in any other exam in my finals. I wouldn't put that entirely down to this book, but it certainly influenced things.

In summary then, if you want to know why animals behave the way they do, why swordtail fish do really have the long tails, why birds sing, why fish shoal under certain circumstances, why well fed parrot females produce more males, and why related long-tailed tits help each other raise young, then this book really is for you. I recommend it wholeheartedly.