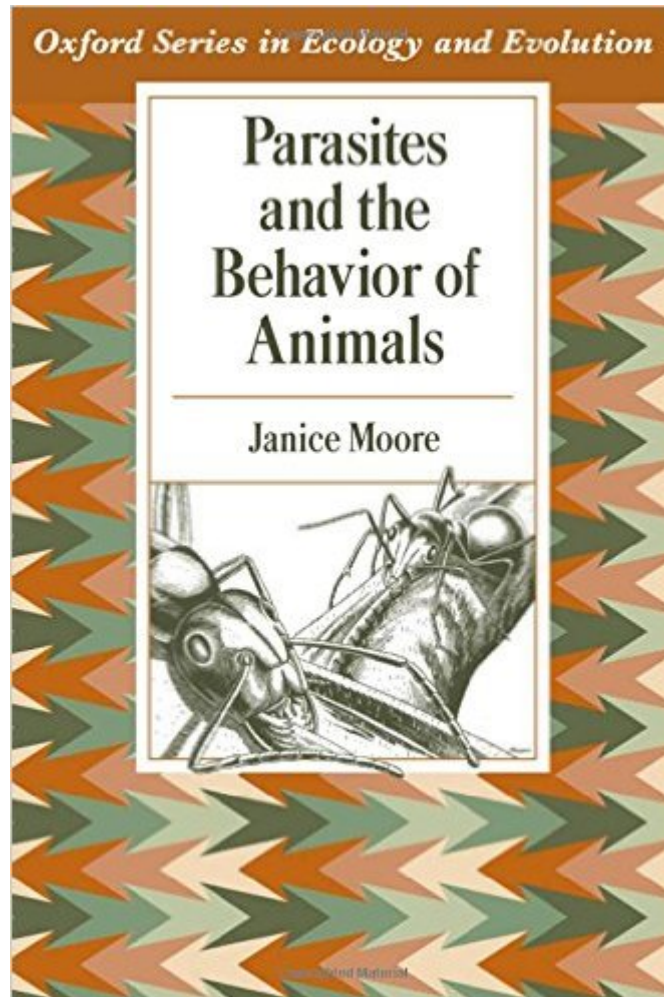


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Parasites And The Behavior Of Animals (Oxford Series In Ecology And Evolution)



Synopsis

When a parasite invades an ant, does the ant behave like other ants? Maybe not-and if it doesn't, who, if anyone, benefits from the altered behaviors? The parasite? The ant? *Parasites and the Behavior of Animals* shows that parasite-induced behavioral alterations are more common than we might realize, and it places these alterations in an evolutionary and ecological context. Emphasizing eukaryotic parasites, the book examines the adaptive nature of behavioral changes associated with parasitism, exploring the effects of these changes on parasite transmission, parasite avoidance, and the fitness of both host and parasite. The behavioral changes and their effects are not always straightforward. To the extent that virulence, for instance, is linked to parasite transmission, the evolutionary interests of parasite and host will diverge, and the current winner of the contest to maximize reproductive rates may not be clear, or, for that matter, inevitable. Nonetheless, by affecting susceptibility, host/parasite lifespan and fecundity, and transmission itself, host behavior influences parameters that are basic to our comprehension of how parasites invade host populations, and fundamentally, how parasites evolve. Such an understanding is important for a wide range of scientists, from ecologists and parasitologists to evolutionary, conservation and behavioral biologists: The behavioral alterations that parasites induce can subtly and profoundly affect the distribution and abundance of animals.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Moore's book was written for professional biologists but the writing is so good and the subject matter so, um, interesting that I can recommend it for lay readers as well. If you don't know much about invertebrate zoology you can breeze past a lot of the taxonomic terms and focus on the juicy stuff - of which there is plenty (and the parasites love it!). Most of us don't spend a lot of time thinking about the critters that share our bodies with us. In the case of humans they are mostly on a scale between benign and beneficial, but sometimes they are nasty and even fatal. Elsewhere in the animal kingdom it is much worse. Organisms unlucky enough to get infected are often completely at the mercy of their parasites. Moore's focus is on the behavioral changes that parasites induce in their hosts, some of which are spectacularly gross. My favorite is the marine isopod (related to those grey pill bugs found under rocks) that sucks the blood from a fish's tongue until the tongue shrivels away, at which time the isopod happily lives in the fish's mouth, attaches itself to the stub of the tongue muscles, and functions in place of the tongue. (It's *Cymothoa exigua* if you must know.) There are plenty of "eww, that's disgusting" moments in Moore's book, but its real beauty is the insight it provides into the variety of life on Earth and the incredibly detailed and sophisticated ways in which organisms have learned to take advantage of each other. And she's a funny writer. Unfortunately this is a very expensive book and no one is likely to buy it for casual reading. This is too bad, but maybe the interested lay reader can find it at a library.

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