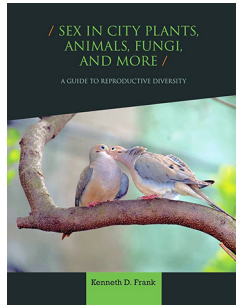


Sex in City Plants, Animals, Fungi, and More: a Guide to Reproductive Diversity

By Kenneth D. Frank. Foreword by Jonathan Silvertown. 2022. Columbia University Press. 208 pages, 120.00 USD, Hardcover, 39.00 CAD, Paper. Also available as an E-book.

Sex in City Plants, Animals, Fungi, and More is a collection of examples of reproductive diversity. The author describes these as “illustrated essays on mating systems and sexual behavior” (p. xi), and each essay is a single page in length. All examples were selected based on their locale in the city of Philadelphia, USA (where the author resides) and the existence of published literature on the reproductive biologies of the organisms featured. The book is composed of 13 chapters, each with a different focus (e.g., Nonflowering Plants, Mammals, and Birds), with chapters further divided into a variety of topic sections that include one accompanying example (e.g., Urban Self-Fertilization: Creeping Wood Sorrel). It is well-illustrated; most of the photos included are large, clear, high-quality, and well-selected to compliment the text.

Sex in City Plants, Animals, Fungi, and More has the look and dimensions of a thin paperback textbook (22 cm × 28 cm). However, it is not exactly a textbook, nor is it a guide so much as a tasting menu of reproductive strategies in an urban environment, showcasing the diversity of practices but never digging deeper into the topics raised. Sometimes this brevity comes at the expense of clarity; to fit each topic onto a single page, some ideas feel clipped or over-edited to the point of being disjointed. These short examples collectively touch on a variety of topics, including light and noise pollution, introduced parasites, and the benefits of urban environments such as low competition (e.g., Purple Cliffbrake Fern establishing colonies on dry stone walls [p. 6]) or uniquely suitable environments (e.g., Pavement Ants that specialize in cities,



including buildings [p. 56]). I would have liked more depth or a unifying narrative around these topics; but this is not that book, and the one-page conclusion doesn't effectively pull the topics together.

The examples included are interesting and varied, and the book is well-researched. Common and Latin names are provided for all organisms, and the end of the book boasts an excellent Glossary and Index. It also includes a whopping 33 pages of Notes, which is organized by page number and topic (e.g., “Page 12. Nectar Robbery: Jewelweed [*Impatiens capensis*]” [p.132]), providing detailed references. In the text, references are cited as superscript numbers, which makes for easy cross-referencing but does not distract from the writing.

I certainly learned new facts from this book. A humorous highlight is the “male stuffing” behaviour of European Paper Wasps (*Polistes dominula*). To prevent males from poaching food brought into the nest to feed larvae, female wasps stuff males headfirst into empty nest cells by using aggression and coercion—biting, grappling, and threatening to sting the males (p. 53). Under threat of restuffing, males stay put for a short time, and the larvae can be fed without interruption. As the author explains, “when not stuffed into a cell, a male can forage on his own outside of the nest; but he may prefer to eat in” (p. 53).

Although it left something to be desired for me as a guide, overall this is a well-executed collection that showcases the diversity and peculiarities of reproductive strategies in urban environments using Philadelphia as a case study. As a quasi coffee-table book, it would be a good jumping-off point for additional research on the examples provided and suitable for those with an interest in learning interesting facts about the common North American organisms that surround us.

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