

Re: Book recommendation

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in article d0626g\$gfi\$1@darwin.ediacara.org, Perplexed in Peoria at jimmenegay@sbcglobal.net wrote on 3/2/05 8:01 PM:

> <clemenr@wmin.ac.uk> wrote in message
> news:cvvldt\$Ieha\$I@darwin.ediacara.org...
>> Hi. Could someone please recommend a book on evolutionary biology for
>> me. While I have good access to various journals such as the Journal of
>> Evolutionary Biology, Evolution, Trends in Ecology and Evolution etc.,
>> I would also like to have what could be described as "a good
>> undergraduate textbook". I have used *Evolutionary Biology (3rd
>> Edition)* by Futuyama before, but note that it's from 1998, and am
>> thinking that there might be something better around. I **mostly** find
>> the journal articles quite readable, so any suitable books would not
>> have to be at undergraduate level.
>
> My requirements are similar. I notice by browsing Amazon that there seem
> to be three textbooks available – Futuyama, Ridley, and Strickberger.
> I've browsed thru Futuyama and was a little put off by his sneers at
> mathematics and models.

You must be misreading his comments. Futuyama does not personally dismiss the value of mathematics and models in evolutionary biology. My opinion is that Futuyama's textbook called "Evolutionary Biology" is the most accurate and thorough textbook in Evolution out there. He does the best job of not twisting difficult concepts as a way of pandering to his student audience. I found that it was too encyclopedic for the undergraduates at my institution, but it is the best choice for graduate students IMHO. Futuyama has also just published a new textbook simply called "Evolution", which is shorter and targeted more to undergraduates. I haven't completed a thorough review yet, but I like the coverage of topics and the order in which they are presented.

> Can anyone tell me anything about Ridley or
> Strickberger? How do they compare with Futuyama? Which would be used
> at the better universities? All three cost about a hundred bucks apiece.

I have used Ridley and reviewed Strickberger, who is the author of what used to be the best selling textbook in Genetics (about 20 years ago). I like

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many things about Ridley (the layout, topic coverage, readability), but I find him to be too biased in his personal views of evolutionary theory and methodology to present them in a balanced way. IMHO he often distorts ideas to make them more palatable to undergraduates, and information in the textbook is sometimes contradictory. For example, Ridley is a diehard cladist. He tries to present the set of alternative conventional approaches to phylogenetics, but elsewhere in the book he basically indicates that cladistics is the only valid approach. There are several such examples. I think that Strickberger's textbook is rather rarely used in Evolution courses. It is relatively dry, IMHO. It does take a rather novel approach of walking the reader through the diversity of taxonomic groups, so if that is something you would like, then I Strickberger might be a good choice. However, if that is the primary thing you are after there may be better options that don't claim to be evolution textbooks.

- > *I guess I don't need much math in the text; I can get that elsewhere.*
- > *But I would like to see proper attention paid to the history of the*
- > *field. I've heard names like deVries, Bateson, Goldschmidt, etc., but*
- > *I don't know much about them. Also, I have no overwhelming interest*
- > *in human evolution.*

I don't think that any of the books you listed are very good in their coverage of historically influential evolutionary biologists like these. Futuyma and Ridley cover the main players in the modern synthesis, but don't go much further. I forget what Strickberger covers in this regard. There is a wonderful old evolution textbook you might enjoy that was co-authored by four of the leading evolutionary biologists of the day, each from a different sub-discipline. The authors included Francisco Ayala, and I think they included George Gaylord Simpson and Theodius Dobzhansky. It was published in the 1960's.

- > *While talking books, I notice Amazon has a book by Sean Rice called*
- > *"Evolutionary Theory". Looks good. Anyone know anything about it?*

I highly recommend it for someone as prepared to appreciate quantitative arguments as you are.

Guy Hoelzer