

## Re: Book recommendation

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**From:** Perplexed in Peoria ([jimmenegay\\_at\\_sbcglobal.net](mailto:jimmenegay_at_sbcglobal.net))

**Date:** 03/03/05

Date: Thu, 3 Mar 2005 16:35:24 -0500 (EST)

"Guy Hoelzer" <[hoelzer@unr.edu](mailto:hoelzer@unr.edu)> wrote in message [news:d07jor\\$vk8\\$1@darwin.ediacara.org...](mailto:news:d07jor$vk8$1@darwin.ediacara.org...)

> *in article [d0626g\\$gfi\\$1@darwin.ediacara.org](mailto:d0626g$gfi$1@darwin.ediacara.org), Perplexed in Peoria at*

> *[jimmenegay@sbglobal.net](mailto:jimmenegay@sbglobal.net) wrote on 3/2/05 8:01 PM:*

>

>> <[clemenr@wmin.ac.uk](mailto:clemenr@wmin.ac.uk)> wrote in message

>> *[news:cvvldt\\$1eha\\$1@darwin.ediacara.org...](mailto:news:cvvldt$1eha$1@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.*

I can accept that. My complaint was about some subtle things. Too much sympathy for those among his readers who hate math, perhaps. I don't have a copy available now, so I can't give examples. But I do recall his presentation of a table from Fisher in which something or other was computed after 1, 3, 7, 15, 31, 63, and 127 generations. Futuyama had a footnote in which he expressed puzzlement at those particular numbers, and especially amusement that Fisher had stopped at such an odd number as 127. But Fisher had explained the (clever, mathematical) reason why those numbers were chosen in his own footnote.

> *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*

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- > *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. Futuyma*
- > *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 Futuyma? 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*
- > *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.*

Thanks. You have made all three sound attractive. Since I don't have a general biology text, I need a survey of taxonomy, and I also would like to learn a little more about Henegian cladistics.

I'll probably go with the Ridley simply because the companion "Oxford Readers" also seems attractive. I probably have enough independent sources of information that I don't have to be afraid of Ridley's biases.

[snip]

- >> *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.*

And thanks again.