

2012 Book Reviews

Finalists for the Animal Behavior Society Outstanding Children's Book Award for books published in 2011.

WINNER: Animal Eggs, by Dawn Cusick and Joanne O'Sullivan.
Published by Early Light Books, 2011.

[Buy Animal Eggs!](#)

Review by Michelle Solensky, University of Jamestown (ND)

Do you know what a mermaid's purse is? Have you heard of a male parent so dedicated that he holds his eggs in his mouth for more than a week to keep them safe? Did you know that eggs can be blue, red, pink, yellow, green, white, black, or a variety of other colors? *Animal Eggs* includes intriguing stories about these and other reproductive marvels. This book is filled with fascinating information about egg size, shape and coloration, and about the behavior of the parents who care for the eggs, the young that hatch from them, and the predators that target them. This catalog of cool egg trivia is organized into short, manageable pieces that are beautifully illustrated with vivid color photographs. This organization makes it easy to read this book cover to cover, or just take in one section at a time. The reader can learn about more than 100 egg-laying animals, including examples from a diverse array of animal groups – insects, fish, birds, and even two egg-laying mammals.

This book has 48 pages, and includes a table of contents with 9 sections and an index that will help the reader relocate a particular animal example. Readers from age 8 and beyond will find this an interesting and readable book. Students in grades 3-5 from three countries gave this book high marks that resulted in *Animal Eggs* being selected as the 2012 Winner of the Animal Behavior Society Children's Book Award. Many of the elementary school student reviewers commented on the wonderful photographs and the cool animal information. The vivid book cover will draw readers in, while the amazing photos and facts keep the pages turning!

FINALIST: Bug Shots, by Alexandra Siy and Dennis Kunkel

Published by Holiday House, 2011

[Buy Bug Shots!](#)

Review by Eduardo Bessa, Universidade do Estado de Mato Grosso

Like a good crime script, *Bug Shots* drags young readers to the deceitful world of insects, in which telling who are the enemies and who are good guys is not that easy. *Bug Shots* combines well-written and easy to understand text with striking

photomicrographs. The authors' proposal is to provide bugs their deserved fair trial, check the evidence, examine these animals' ecological roles, and then judge them friend or foe

Bug Shots demonstrates not only how important insects are, but also explores their morphology and how it helps them play so many roles in nature. Insect diversity and their differences from correlated groups like the mites are also important topics here. My only concern is that sometimes the authors' discussion on why an insect should be considered innocent or guilty is too anthropocentric.

The images that illustrate the book are artificially-colored scanning electron microscope (SEM) photomicrographs, presented in various details. The authors were careful enough to make sure every picture was accompanied by its scale and to state that the original images are not colored but color was added to help differentiate structures.

Both the main text and the micrograph captions complement each other and are rich in precise and quality information. Although the text is mostly clear, at the end of the book there is a glossary. There is also a list of further readings so that children can keep learning.

Bug Shots reminds us of how important insects are. But it mostly it reminds us how much fun learning can be.

FINALIST: Leaps and Creeps: How Animals Move to Survive

Published by Marshall Cavendish/Benchmark, 2011

[Buy Leaps and Creeps!](#)

Review by Wendy Hein, Oregon State University Extension Service

Let's face it – if animals just sat there, they would not be nearly so interesting. It's fascinating to watch them jump, run, climb, fly, glide, dig, swim and even dance. Young readers will find a new form of locomotion described on every page of Leaps and Creeps.

Illustrations in this book are predominately photographs of the animals described in the accompanying text. Examples come from throughout the animal kingdom. Readers learn about sidwinding snakes, gliding Wallace's tree frogs, shoaling fish, and the multi-talented mudskipper. The descriptions of each movement are vivid so that children and non-scientists can easily create a mental image of the movement. The book introduces less than a dozen really sophisticated words,

like “brachiation” (swinging by the arms from branch to branch), which are highlighted and defined in the glossary. There are a few book and web resources for interested readers who want to learn more.

This book is one of five in the Amazing Animal Skills series, written by prolific children’s book author Robin Koontz. It was the only book of the series submitted by the publisher, but the other titles in the series sound intriguing: Movers and Makers, Screams and Songs, Sniffs and Stinks, and Spits and Squirts. This book is available in a sturdy library binding or as an eBook.

FINALIST: Seabird in the Forest: the Mystery of the Marbled Murrelet, written and illustrated by Joan Dunning

Published by Boyds Mills Press, 2011

[Buy Seabird in the Forest!](#)

Review by Abby Schwarz, Dandelion Environmental Consulting, Vancouver, B.C., Canada

The marbled murrelet (*Brachyramphus marmoratus*), smallest relative of the common murre, is a seabird classed as threatened under the U.S. Endangered Species Act and the Canadian Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC). One of the most important discoveries about the marbled murrelet was made within the last 20 years: it prefers to nest in old-growth coastal forests of the Pacific Northwest. Joan Dunning describes some of the life history of this secretive bird in poetic prose matched by lovely illustrations. Text and illustrations are accompanied by inserts containing more facts about the forests, canopy life, how the murrelets conceal themselves and their chick from predators such as ravens and Steller’s jays, and how many of these discoveries were made (by using cameras put in place before nesting begins).

The story begins with a pair of murrelets leaving their feeding grounds in coastal waters of the Pacific ocean and flying into the forest to their nest site. (The birds exhibit nest-site fidelity, suggesting that they are monogamous.) The female lays a single large egg and for a month she and her partner take turns incubating it. The incubating bird stays motionless and relies on camouflage to avoid discovery by a predator. When the chick hatches, the parents take turns feeding and brooding it until it can keep itself warm. Then for another month the chick stays alone and quiet, as Dunning puts it, “a living secret”, while the parents come and go, bringing it fish. One day the chick pulls out as much of its own down as it can reach, stands on the edge of the nest, flaps its wings, and with no experience to guide it, flies strong and straight to the ocean and begins catching its own food.

One of the book's strengths is Dunning's interweaving of natural history with the importance of preserving the murrelet's preferred habitat. For example, clearcutting increases the distance the parents must fly to find and then deliver fish to their single offspring, thus increasing their energy costs. This and their nest site fidelity is one of several factors causing a decline in their populations.

Rather than posing specific questions, Dunning presents the story and its context simply and directly. This too is one of the book's strengths, as it subtly encourages the reader to ask questions. I spoke to a number of children after they had read and evaluated the book. Some wondered how the chick knew how to catch its food once it got to the ocean; others how it could fly without lessons, knew where to go, and how it knew that staying still when left alone was the best anti-predator strategy. These and other questions are left unanswered in this beautiful book. Highly recommended for young readers, even though most children wanted more facts.