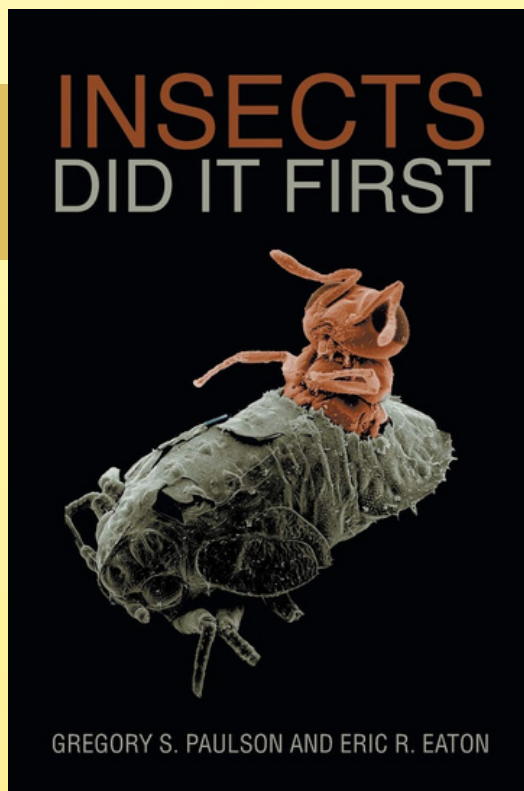


A Brief Conversation with Author Eric Eaton

Insects Did it First,
Gregory S. Paulson and Eric R. Eaton,
XLibris US, 2018, 156 pages



“The most astonishing example of surfing insects are ants. In Venezuela, several species of ants have been observed body surfing on small (to us, huge to them) shore breaking waves. Instead of being swept out to sea when struck by a wave the ants assume a characteristic body position and ride the wave to shore, and safety.”



Insects Did It First is a charmer. Who wouldn't want to dig into chapters like "Blinking Neon Sign," "Tunnel Builders," and "Glue" with explanations on insect behavior from two professional entomologists? Illustrated with humorous anthropomorphized insects, this is a perfect addition to a classroom library or a gift for the curious of all ages.

How do insect or invertebrates' innovations lead you to find inspiration?

I don't know that any insect or arthropod innovations inspire me as much as the incredible durability of insects. We tend to assume insects are fragile because they are small, and many of them have membranous wings that appear to thin and flimsy to let them get very far very fast. Such is not the case. The exoskeleton, the built-in armor of insects and their kin, is shockingly strong. Insects can bounce off most objects they collide with and continue going their merry way. An insect can lose a leg, or large areas of its wings, and barely be slowed down. I find that kind of physical resilience to be highly inspiring. Insects could be fabulously inspirational in settings like hospitals and clinics, as examples of triumph over "handicaps."

What is your favorite "insects did it first" example? Why?

What is my favorite insect "invention?" I think it might be the "gear" that propels the hind legs of many jumping planthoppers, because that seems so improbable! The example we use in our book is *Issus coleoptratus*, but the nymphs of many planthoppers have a similar, if not identical, mechanism that permits them to jump far with great efficiency. How does such a thing evolve? It looks exactly like a cogged, wheel-like gear you would find in an old wristwatch. Crazy.



Interview conducted by Book Recommendation Panelist,
scientist, and artist, Efrain Leal Escalera