

CALL OF NATURE: THE SECRET LIFE OF DUNG

Richard Jones. Due February 2017. Pelagic Publishing, Exeter. 304 pp. Hardback. £16.99.
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When I first received this advanced review copy I intended to ring around a few invertebrate specialists to enquire who was available to write this review. Upon reflection, however, the author is such a well known and nationally acclaimed expert that I was sure the book would receive its due attention and credit from a wide range of entomologists anyway and so I decided to retain it and prepare the review myself to determine its potential attraction to the non-specialist. I am glad that I did, for this book is a true gem and one that opened up a whole new world of natural history to me.

Described by the publisher as a 'journey through the digestive systems of humans, farm and wild animals', this book opens with a quote from Monty Python and this rather sets the tone for an highly interesting read about an unusual and much-overlooked subject that is, nevertheless, an integral part of the animal kingdom. Many background facts, such as the origins of the word dung itself (from the Old Norse *myk-dyngja* brought to Britain by the Viking invasions of the 8 - 11th centuries and meaning 'muck heap') are revealed as part of the journey that is being told. The book begins with the most basic question of what exactly is dung, before moving on to consider dung as an ecological resource, dung communities, the evolution of dung-feeding and concludes with a rogues' gallery review of the different orders of dung-feeders.

At no time does the book utilise technical language that would place it out of reach of the general naturalist or layman and it stands as a 'best practice' example of scientific writing for the widest possible audience whilst avoiding any hint of the 'dumbing-down' that is seen in some contemporary nature writing these days. In summary, this publication deserves a 'ten out of ten' mark for bringing the topic to life (pun intended) and retaining this reviewer's interest throughout.

CLIVE HERBERT