

BOOK REVIEW

Spider Silk

Evolution and 400 Million Years of Spinning, Waiting, Snagging and Mating.

Leslie Brunetta and Catherine L. Craig. (2010)
Published by CSIRO Publishing, Collingwood, Victoria, Australia,
ISBN: 9780643098473, 280pp. RRP A\$39.95 (hardcover).

I watched a lot of Disney wildlife documentaries when I was a child. The sort of film where a hawk chased a rabbit and where we were amazed as to how much the narrator knew about what these animals were thinking. It was very anthropomorphic but it worked because we knew that rabbits eat carrots and the hawk was most likely to catch and eat the rabbits. The documentary didn't really have to show all the details of this for us to understand.

Spider Silk follows this style. It contains 12 chapters with rather fancy titles such as *Triumph over Thin Air* and *Beyond "Perfect"* and these are presented in a loose evolutionary sequence: the evolution of different kinds of silk and how they are used. As the title suggests spider silk is the one common thread of this book, but the book is not really about silk, it is about the way different spiders use it.

My first impressions were that *Spider Silk* is a very quirky book, it is very anthropomorphic, meanders constantly, presents very little data, makes a lot of assumptions, and expects the reader to understand what is being said. Regardless of whether these are criticisms or not, I missed the point.

The book is really a collection of snippets from the literature, although not Australian despite being published by CSIRO. The authors are clearly arachnophiles but the book probably gives more insight to their thinking than it does in giving new data.

Personally, I was disappointed with the book, as I had expected more. It is really written for those who know nothing about spiders or general biology, but this is not obvious. It meanders and assumes too much and for these reasons the Disney-esq approach does not help. Maybe I am wrong, but I don't think that this book works at either the amateur or professional level.

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