



Animal Architecture (Oxford Animal Biology Series)

Mike Hansell

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Construction behaviour occurs across the entire spectrum of the animal kingdom and affects the survival of both builders and other organisms associated with them. "Animal Architecture" provides a comprehensive overview of the biology of animal building. The book recognizes three broad categories of built structure - homes, traps, and courtship displays. Even though some of these structures are complex and very large, the behaviour required to build them is generally simple and the anatomy for building unspecialized. Standardization of building materials helps to keep building repertoires simple, while self-organizing effects help create complexity. Some builders exhibit learning and cognitive skills, and include some toolmaking species. In a case-study approach to function, insects demonstrate how homes can remain operational while they grow, spiderwebs illustrate mechanical design, and the displays of bowerbirds raise the possibility of persuasion through design rather than just decoration. Studies of the costs to insect and bird home-builders, and to arthropod web-builders provide evidence of optimal designs and of trade-offs with other life history traits.

As ecosystem engineers, the influence of builders is extensive and their effect is generally to enhance biodiversity through niche construction. Animal builders can therefore represent model species for the study of the emerging subject of environmental inheritance. Evidence that building has facilitated social evolution is mixed. However building, and in particular building with silk, has been demonstrated to have important evolutionary consequences. This book is intended for students and researchers in comparative animal biology, but will also be of relevance and use to the increasing numbers of architects and civil engineers interested in developing ideas from the animal kingdom.

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