



Lives of a Biologist

John Tyler. BONNER

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Beginning with the discovery of genes on chromosomes and culminating with the unmasking of the most minute genetic mysteries, the twentieth century saw astounding and unprecedented progress in the science of biology. In an illustrious career that spanned most of the century, biologist John Bonner witnessed many of these advances firsthand. Part autobiography, part history of the extraordinary transformation of biology in his time, Bonner's book is truly a life in science, the story of what it is to be a biologist observing the unfolding of the intricacies of life itself.

Bonner's scientific interests are nearly as varied as the concerns of biology, ranging from animal culture to evolution, from life cycles to the development of slime molds. And the extraordinary cast of characters he introduces is equally diverse, among them Julian Huxley, J. B. S. Haldane, Leon Trotsky, and Evelyn Waugh. Writing with a charm and freshness that bring the most subtle nuances of science to life, he pursues these interests through the hundred years that gave us the discovery of embryonic induction; the interpretation of evolution in terms of changes in gene frequency in a population; growth in understanding of the biochemistry of the cell; the beginning of molecular genetics; remarkable insights into animal behavior; the emergence of sociobiology; and the simplification of ecological and evolutionary principles by means of mathematical models. In this panoramic view, we see both the sweep of world events and scientific progress and the animating details, the personal observations and experiences, of a career conducted in their midst.

In Bonner's view, biology is essentially the study of life cycles. His book, marking the cycles of a life in biology, is a fitting reflection of this study, with its infinite, and infinitesimal, permutations.

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Preface

1. The World of My Elders: 1900-1920
2. Becoming a Biologist: 1920-1940
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5. Coming Together: 1980-2000

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Reviews of this book:

A charming memoir combining autobiography and a 20th-century history of biology. "A gentleman and a scholar" aptly describes Bonner...Bonner's own lifecycle makes for pleasant reading and inspires a new respect for slime molds.

--Kirkus Reviews

Reviews of this book:

Bonner has devoted much of his imaginative and creative biological research of the intervening years to cellular slime molds, which lead fascinating and, before Bonner's work, previously largely unexplained lives.

His accounts of his and his graduate students' thinking and experiments convey much of the scientific approach to problems lucidly, and those of his travels, his vacations in Nova Scotia over the course of 40 years, and the many amusing and illuminating incidents in his life reflect a refreshing open-mindedness. This is one scientist's autobiography that manages to be simultaneously delightful and strikingly informative.

--William Beatty, Booklist

Reviews of this book:

This charming and unduly modest book is part memoir, part distillation of 20th-century biology, as told by an eminent researcher, writer and teacher who witnessed much of it firsthand. Bonner...invokes life cycles and development, his specialties, to talk about the last century's gigantic steps forward in biology. He covers advances in biochemistry, population genetics and embryology; the discovery of DNA structure; and the human genome project. Against this parade of discoveries, Bonner considers his own career, which included everything from animal social behavior to evolution.

--Publishers Weekly

Reviews of this book:

John Tyler Bonner had the luck to be born into a family that lived a charmed life, the fortune to find a lifelong passion and the timing to live at the heyday of his favorite subject. In his autobiography,...

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From reader reviews:

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Elizabeth Ramsey:

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