

Perceptions of Insects

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History

A common theory is that humans sometimes hate insects (entomophobia) because they are different from us. These perceived differences in appearance, intelligence, and sentience (the ability to feel), known as speciesism, allow us to justify the inhumane treatment of animals.

Anthropomorphism refers to our preference for animals most like us. Monkeys are a good example. We love seeing monkeys with individual faces. Because we love seeing certain “charismatic megafauna”, conservation strategies are enacted to protect them. However, these biases cause other animals, such as insects, to be left out.

Humans have a natural tendency to care about things we encounter more. If we encounter animals in these conservation settings, we will care more about those animals. Therefore, if our encounters with insects are limited, negative stereotypes and prejudices are reinforced.

However, not every culture has a fear of insects. Our preferences and aversions to insects are primarily social constructs. Our perception of insects is based on our experiences with them, and our primary experiences with insects often come from ads from the pesticide industry.

Methods

This study critiques how the concepts of anthropomorphism and entomophobia limit our understanding of human-insect interactions. The study refers to the concentric circles of leisure, or how human activities are influenced by our senses, cultural ideas, and our need for safety and comfort.

The author visited eight insectariums and butterfly pavilions, published three papers on human-insect interactions, and conducted interviews and surveys.

Challenges

A lot of the disgust or fear towards insects is formed by false images in the media, and by the pesticide industry (if people are scared of insects, they will buy more pesticides.) Many of the technologies used to keep mosquitoes out of yards, such as ultraviolet, sonic, and ultrasonic repellents have very little effectiveness in killing female mosquitoes. The use of pesticides has been linked to health concerns in humans, environmental degradation, and negative effects on beneficial insects such as ladybugs.

There is overwhelming evidence that our bonds with nature and animals are formed through learning and experiences. However, increased interaction with insects doesn't always lead to increased bond, as we tend to be more disgusted by insects in our own backyard.

Conclusion

The “concentric circles of leisure” argues against the idea that we inherently dislike insects because of their dissimilarity to humans. The leisure perspective explores the social, cultural, economical, and geographical forces affecting interactions with insects.

Wildlife documentaries, insect pavilions, and other exhibitions can help change the public perspective of insects. Citizen science can help increase the support for insect conservation efforts.

There is little public awareness about pest management strategies, which suggests that speciesism and negative attitudes towards insects partially stem from a lack of education. Different education programs can help inform people about pesticides and offer alternatives, such as biocontrol programs in gardens.