

An introduction to parasitology

by B.E. Matthews. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998, 202 pages, £30.00 (US\$ 59.95) hardback, £10.95 (US\$ 18.95) paperback.

Parasitology is the study of how one living organism depends on another. It has many separate branches, which are becoming increasingly specialized and consequently more and more disparate. Clinical parasitology is about the parasites of humans and their medical significance. Parasite epidemiology is about the distribution and determinants of parasitic infections in hosts. Parasite immunology is about immunity to parasitic infections. This aspect of parasitology is especially concerned with new immunological techniques, and has developed so quickly that it has become increasingly remote from the parasite itself and more akin to a branch of molecular biology.

The book begins by describing the basis of animal-to-animal associations as an introduction to the concept of parasitism, which, as the author explains, has been defined in a wide variety of ways in the past. He then introduces the reader to the terminology of parasitology through a series of examples, and goes on to describe the different phyla and classes of parasites and

their characteristics. The chapters are illustrated clearly with the life cycles of individual parasite species. Throughout the book the author uses practical examples from a broad range of animal and human parasites. The various host-to-host transmission cycles are explained with simple examples and well-prepared schematic figures.

There is a chapter on the host immune response and one on the damage that parasites can do to their hosts. The latter starts with the classic binomial distribution of helminths in hosts. The example is used, very appropriately, to explain the intensity-related morbidity associated with heavy worm burdens, and to introduce the subject of damage. The last chapter is about the problems of controlling parasites.

This is a straightforwardly written textbook which successfully introduces the undergraduate and the nonspecialist to the more arcane literature. It presents the material clearly, interestingly and with a typically British sense of humour, all of which makes it a pleasure to read. ■

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