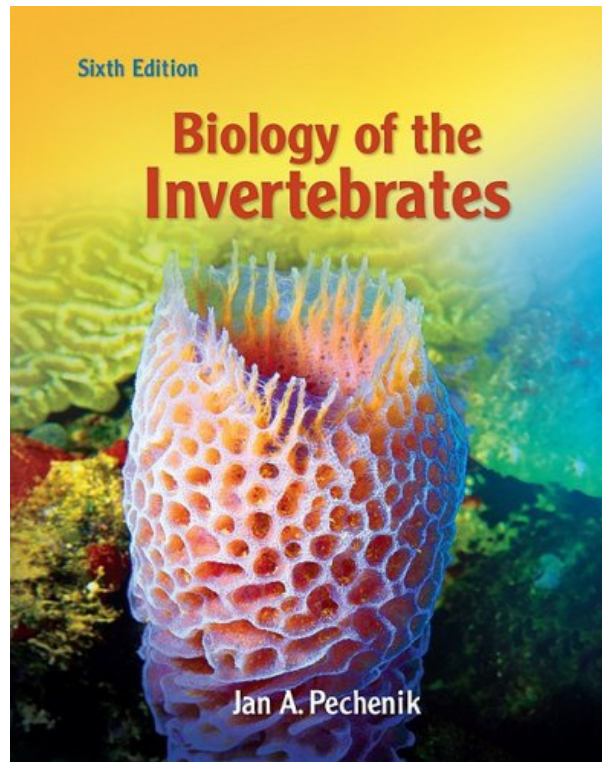


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# Biology of the Invertebrates

Jan A. Pechenik

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This textbook is the most concise and readable invertebrates book in terms of detail and pedagogy (other texts do not offer boxed readings, a second color, end of chapter questions, or pronunciation guides). All phyla of invertebrates are covered (comprehensive) with an emphasis on unifying characteristics of each group.

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37 of 38 people found the following review helpful.

Up to date, but some areas lack depth

By Alan R. Holyoak

I have used this text for an undergraduate invertebrate zoology course. I selected the text for two reasons: 1) the book is current, with a publication year of 2000; and 2) the author made an effort to address not only major phyla but smaller phyla as well.

This is a good book for a one-semester undergraduate course in invertebrate zoology, but if you are looking for anything more, you ought to consider other options, such as books by Ruppert and Barnes, or Brusca and Brusca, or Pearse and Pearse.

Pechenik does a good job in covering the water front of invertebrate diversity, though there are places where depth is somewhat lacking. As I taught my course using this book as the primary reference, I realized that Pechenik is more of a taxonomic lumper than I am. If you are a lumper you will enjoy this book's treatment of various groups (e.g., pentastomida, asteroids and ophiuroids, etc.). If you tend to be a bit more of a splitter, then you will find areas where you are not in line with the text's information.

The supporting illustrations are fine, though I wish there were a few more there. I understand that the author's goal was to produce a shorter book that is still rigorous enough to support college-level courses. He did an admirable job of that, but I found myself looking time and again to other sources for additional information for class.

A good book, but not one that "has it all."

20 of 20 people found the following review helpful.

A succinct overview of invertebrate diversity

By Eric E

Jan Pechenik's *Biology of the Invertebrates* (BoI) is a significant, succinct contribution to invertebrate biology. I'll make the case for this textbook by first introducing and outlining two different approaches to teaching invertebrate biology, and then I'll outline BoI's positives. Finally, I'll end by confronting the criticisms from a practical perspective.

When becoming acquainted with the unfathomably vast world of invertebrate biology (invert), you have to first decide how to approach it. There are two dominant ways instructors of invert approach this. I will call these two approaches the deluge approach and the tributary approach. The deluge approach compiles as much information as possible about every major group of invertebrates (phyla) and reproduces this information in book form. This approach requires the student to commit vast amounts of time, neurons and caffeine to learning particular organisms in and specific idiosyncrasies of every phylum. The end result is a highly stressed, temporarily knowledgeable student who knows many facts about invert and who can regurgitate these facts on final exams of epic proportions. The second approach, the tributary approach, is that of BoI. This approach recognizes that students will not be able to recapitulate those very useful facts even a few weeks after the exam; it recognizes that the Linnaean System is built around the idea that morphological and developmental characteristics can be frequently utilized to unite broad classes of organisms; and, perhaps most importantly, it recognizes that semesters and quarters are inherently short periods of time.

The analogy of tributaries flowing into a river is very useful. Students learn the basic aspects of many tributaries (phyla). These tributaries flow into the river of invertebrate biology. And like all rivers, invert has a source or point of origin, which is what unites all of biology: the theory of evolution. Once students become familiar with the many tributaries of invert, they are equipped with the ability to identify organisms from many phyla, to discuss how major phyla are related and to discuss points of contention and controversy within invert systematics and phylogeny. BoI exposes students to a broad range of phyla with a limited commitment and provides a springboard to further exploration.

Pechenik's book is masterfully laid out and remarkably succinct. Designed for a class that Pechenik himself teaches, BoI approaches invert with students, contemporary research, and the limitations of the semester-system in mind. An introductory chapter stresses the importance of learning how to think about invertebrates, life in the sea and other various pedagogical concerns. Thereafter, phyla and their basic morphological and developmental idiosyncrasies are introduced and reinforced throughout each subsequent chapter. Chapters are broken down into major taxonomic classes and their particular characteristics ("Taxonomic Detail" sections), which affords Pechenik the opportunity to discuss and cover a wide array of taxa. Short tangents are afforded to peculiar organisms and points of contention within each class. Each chapter ends with suggested further reading ("Topics for Further Discussion") for those readers whose interest has been piqued by certain aspects therein discussed. For the research-oriented reader, Pechenik introduces a wide range of contemporary research questions in disparate scientific fields. By expanding on research approaches and questions, Pechenik downplays rote memorization and "fact osmosis" and thereby brings to the table puzzling evolutionary and environmental issues, e.g. speculating on the implications of the increasing acidity of seawater. What's more, Pechenik's witty personality is on display throughout the book, which lends an air of levity and joviality to the learning experience. (Corny, invert-related jokes are spattered throughout the questions at the end of each chapter. For instance, "Where does the annelid go when his feet hurt? The parapodiatrist." Ha! If you didn't get it, I suggest you get the book.) Thus with humor, knowledge and practical experience from the classroom, Pechenik brings both practicality and fun to the student's desk. I am aware of no other textbook that presents such an interesting combination of pedagogy to both the students and the instructor. For these reasons, Pechenik's BoI is highly recommended if you prefer the tributary approach.

For those instructors that prefer the deluge approach, the tome written by Brusca and Brusca is probably best. (For comparison, BoI is about one-third the size.) The criticisms and drawbacks that are inherent to BoI, even though it is now into its sixth edition, have been cited elsewhere. Among them are that BoI "lacks depth", doesn't treat each phylum thoroughly, fails to represent the rich diversity of invert, etc. First and foremost, we, as students and instructors, should be honest with ourselves: We can not hope to become acquainted with this vast subject in the few months allotted to us by the quarter or semester system. From this perspective, it is exceedingly impractical and tedious to be charged with the duty of conquering the invert kingdom in this short period of time. This is especially true from a pedagogical, long-term perspective, which indicates that retention of the vast majority of invert minutiae will not occur, i.e. students are temporarily full of knowledge, but little big picture details stick. Students learn for the final exam, empty their brains onto white pages of a blue book and leave the room feeling exhausted and wondering what exactly they've learned. The deluge approach, which has haunted hallways of American universities for years, does prepare students for a meticulous final exam, but we should ask ourselves if the long-term benefits are any different from the tributary approach. In addition to pedagogical differences, Brusca and Brusca contains taxonomic inaccuracies that Pechenik's frequently-revised text avoids.

It is my firm belief that students take from each class only broad concepts and details, and it is those details that should be stressed in the course and on the final exam. Jan Pechenik's *Biology of the Invertebrates* does just that--and triumphantly succeeds in nearly every way.

10 of 11 people found the following review helpful.

Only Biology Course Text I ever read cover to cover

By Geoffrey R. Balme

While Pechenik may have his faults - his prose is not one of them. There are times when his jokes are a little silly, but he's fresh and interesting.

This is a great book of the invertebrate phyla and was excellent for my intro to invertebrate zoo some years ago.

I later moved into Entomology, but only because the entomologists were so charismatic! Not to say that the Malacologist teaching this course wasn't - he just didnt have any money for me!

I've given my original third edition away - and will be replacing it with a 5th shortly. It's just a nice reference to keep, along with Brusca and Brusca.

See all 25 customer reviews...

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