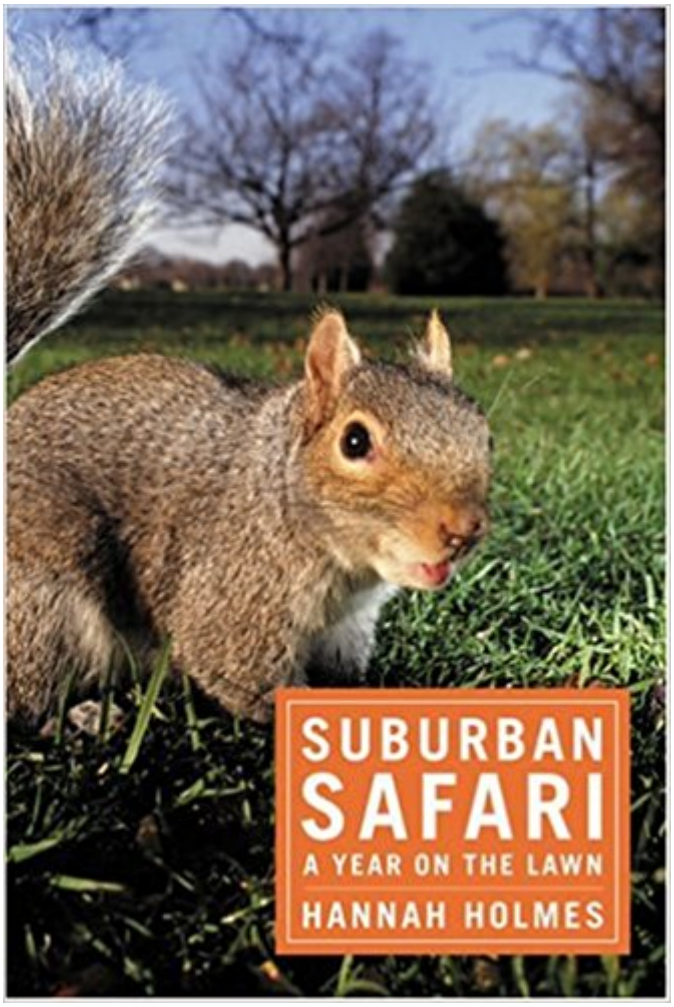
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Suburban Safari: A Year On The Lawn



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Synopsis

Who knew that an investigation into that patch of grass in our backyards could be so fruitful-and so funny?More than 550 square miles of new lawns unfold each year in the U.S. alone. Although new research shows that these lawns aren't nearly as "unnatural" as ecologists once thought, no one has offered an accessible exploration of this novel habitat. Until now...Equipped with a lawn chair and her infectious curiosity, science writer Hannah Holmes spends a year on her lawn hoping to discover exactly what's going on out there. Under her examination, the lawn teems with life, populated by a bewilderment of birds, a mess of mammals, and a range of plants that record the history of this little piece of ground. As the seasons progress, she guides us through this bustling community, inviting over biologists, ecologists, botanists, entomologists, and energy experts to further unveil the complexities of life in the 'burbs. Through this investigation, we encounter life-and-death dramas and mysteries that would make a rainforest blush-everything from the behavior of suburban crows and raccoons, to the way plants wage war, to the puzzle of baby pigeons (where are they?).Funny, smart, and refreshing, Suburban Safari introduces us to a world so extraordinary it's hard to believe it's been right in front of us all along.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

When science writer Hannah Holmes decided to spend a year studying the inhabitants of her 0.2-acre patch of ground in suburban Portland, Maine, she went about the task with an ecologist's enthusiasm and a scientist's compulsive eye for detail. The result is an entertaining and effortlessly compelling examination of nature's stubborn (and successful) struggle to exist in the face of

daunting manmade challenges. Holmes's lawn, unfertilized and rarely mowed, turns out to be a surprisingly diverse ecosystem of bird, mammal, and insect life--a self-perpetuating, constantly evolving community of chipmunks, ladybugs, spiders, slugs, and crows. These creatures, and the complex relationships between them, are the raw material for Holmes's incisive reflections on natural history, urban ecology, and the ignominious story of the over-irrigated, pesticide-laced American lawn--rolling out, Holmes notes, at a rate of one million acres per year. What drives Holmes is not just concern for the natural environment but a ravenous curiosity about every aspect of the world around her, from the sex lives of dragonflies and squirrels, to the murderous tendencies of the English sparrows that have colonized her land, to the survival strategies of the mosquitoes, sow bugs, and slugs that inhabit her yard by the hundreds. Holmes is an environmentalist to the core, but she never sermonizes. With Suburban Safari, an intimate, wry, and often challenging look at a world most of us never bother to notice, she ably demonstrates humanity's responsibility to a natural world that exists all around us--even in our own backyards. --Erica C. Barnett

When science and travel writer Holmes (The Secret Life of Dust) turned her attention to her suburban backyard, she discovered a community of wildlife desperately trying to survive in a sprawling world of "Wal-Marts and White-Crowned Sparrow Estates." Holmes manages to find signs of hope and humor amid the spread of civilization, and she reports animal activities in her yard with the fervor of Wild Kingdom's Marlin Perkins and the laconic glee of Garrison Keillor. "I'm a bit embarrassed to report that Cheeky has become the sun around which my world revolves," she confesses about her resident chipmunk. That small mammal is just one of the many creatures to whom Holmes gives names and personalities, but she keeps her naturalist credibility intact by inviting scientists and other experts to join her in her lawn chair vigil. With their help, she includes plenty of facts about the habits of common crows, insects, squirrels and even trees. Science and humor serve as well-managed launching points for environmental lessons. By the end of her year, Holmes has gently taught us that the American lawn is a pesticide-laden patchwork that's increasing by a million acres every year, that heating a house can produce five tons of pollutants annually and that stewardship of our own backyards is our responsibility. Copyright Ã Â© Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Ms. Holmes's home is probably a fifteen-or-twenty-minute drive from my house in Gorham, Maine. She lives near the ocean. I'm more inland but our habitats are likely very similar. My family lives in a neighborhood but with plenty of wildlife between most of the homes for animals to have an

unnoticed keg party. 'Suburban Safari' was published in 2005. It's a lighthearted presentation with loads of interesting information and personal insights by the author. Even when she is writing about life-and-death situations, Ms. Holmes interjects some light wordplay. The book never had me laughing out loud but her presentation is far removed from some boring academic composition. Like most people, we take for granted the familiar. The author's book reminds us that there are loads of interesting ongoing happenings just outside (hell, and inside) our door.She begins her year-long investigation during the Spring and concludes the book during Winter. The work describes various birds such as the highly intelligent crows, hummingbirds, Maine's state bird the chickadee, and the invasive species known as starlings and English sparrows. The lady certainly has an especially poor opinion of starlings and English sparrows which she explains. There's enough of a dark side to the author that she seems to relish the deaths of these two birds by other animals and isn't shy about killing mice in her basement to rid her home of them. She serves the mouse corpses to the animals, especially crows, who've come to view her place as the local neighborhood's free buffet. As the self-deprecating Ms. Holmes acknowledges, she chooses what she loves. The author names some of the crows, a hawk, some squirrels, a few spiders, and a chipmunk named Cheeky who she trains to come into her home at its leisure for food and affection. Some of the other topics Ms. Holmes covers include the various plants and trees, water, insects, the history of the lawn, various Maine mammals, the evolution of New England's topography, invasive species both plant and animal, pollution, and how humans affect their surroundings. She evens taste-tests some of the greenery. Unless one of our trees starts growing bottles of French salad dressing, I'll leave the taste-testing for the female Euell Gibbons from South Portland. The author also avoids sanitizing the more brutal aspects of nature where death is a daily companion. Also, small portions of the book seem to have Ms. Holmes channeling the late Rachel Carson but not in some off-putting lecture sort of way.'Suburban Safari' is an intimate work that has the reader becoming more aware of their immediate surroundings. It's not a bad thing, especially as society becomes evermore addicted to twenty-four-hours news stations, the Internet, and their cell phones. The book is a mixture of her personal journey of discoveries and adventures as well as many interesting facts about her little slice of nature. Now, go out there, read the book, and hug a skunk if you dare.

I've read this book three times over the past few years and have found it to be interesting and informative in a new way each time (or maybe I'm just not a very thorough reader). Hannah Holmes writes engagingly - I felt like I was having coffee with her as she chatted about what she'd discovered. Her discoveries are well researched and honest. The book has inspired me to be more

observant of my own little yard and the safaris I've taken have been most pleasurable. Thank you for giving us this delightful series of observations, Ms. Holmes.

Hannah Holmes takes an ordinary subject: the yard surrounding her home, and turns it into an extraordinary treatise on the carbon footprint we are all leaving on the earth. Holmes splits her book into four sections, each one covering a season. She explores all the forms of life in her yard: insects, mammals, birds, even the native and invasive plant life. Her investigation uncovers the natural interdependence of all the various lifeforms and discusses the impact of our human lives on both our personal environment and as a species on the earth's ecology.The book contains lots of interesting facts about the insects, animals and plant life we see every day, and Holmes writes with a lively and easy prose. She makes an intensely scientific subject a fun educational adventure as she describes the daily activities of her paranoid crows, randy squirrels, cheeky chipmunk, industrious ants, fighting beetles and sentient trees that will make you look twice at your everyday surroundings.

This is a book to make anybody who lives in a house with a yard (or near a park) stop yearning for distant wilderness, and realize that NATURE lives where you do. Science writer Holmes not only observed her local plants and animals, she researched their background, history, interconnections. Those supplemental detours are as fascinating as the critters whose antics she reports.

Ah, my kind of nature nut, or so we're called, those loving the planet and its animals, birds and other live stuff. Well, maybe not mosquitoes. Who cannot be pleased with a chipmunk as a friend?

A very fine and informative book by an excellent writer.

If you, as I am, happen to be a nature geek, this book will wow you. I loved it and learned from it- and laughed, as well. Hannah Holmes is an intelligent and endearing writer. I look forward to all her books.

Learned about freedom lawns and other facts about the critters here in NH! Holmes combines scientific studies with her own observations in a seamless way that was enjoyable to read!

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