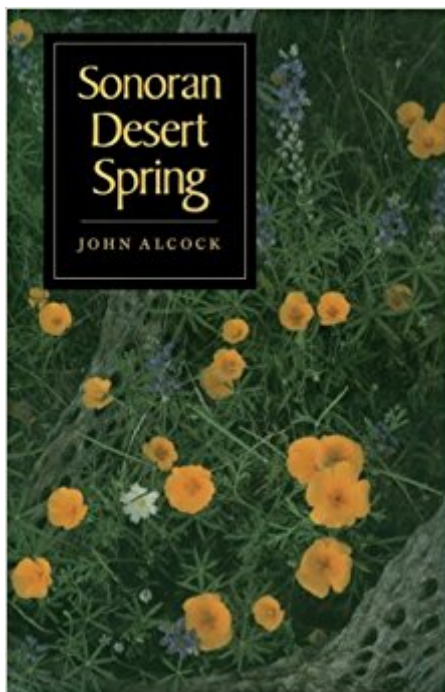


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# Sonoran Desert Spring



## Synopsis

"Spring on the Sonoran Desert can be a four-month-long spectacle of life and color. Within these well-written pages, Alcock exposes us to the plant and animal life of a land many regard as desolate. To Alcock, the desert has a constant evolutionary beauty he never seems to tire of. Alcock's approach to his subject is an elegant combination of science and literature. Only the desert itself, arrayed in its April apparel, can rival the beauty of this book." —Arizona Highways "Deserts are not as bereft of life as they seem; their barren landscapes can support a remarkable variety of plant and animal life, though it may require a patient and skilled naturalist to reveal its mysteries. John Alcock is just such a naturalist. . . . Alcock provides delightful insights into how insects provision their developing young, how parasites find their victims and how flowers attract pollinators. A book of this kind allows its author, more accustomed to the rigours and constraints of writing academic papers and books, to relate revealing anecdotes and simply to express their fascination for natural history. . . . Books such as this serve a vital function in bringing the mysteries of the desert to the attention of a wider public." —Times Literary Supplement

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Lyrical ruminations on plant and animal life . . . witty and insightful, [Alcock] pries under rocks and peers around saguaro and brittlebush to explore a world teeming with activity and color. There is magic here, and Alcock conveys the wonder and mystery of seasonal change in a way that will appeal to newcomers and natives alike." —The Journal of Arizona History "The story of how a zoologist has made this particular place his laboratory for both ecological and philosophical

inquiry." •New York Times Book Review "Depending on your perspective, you may view the rocky uplands of the northern Sonoran Desert as either a forlorn wasteland to assiduously avoid, or an intriguing realm teeming with biological puzzles to solve. Alcock, an insect behaviorist at Arizona State University, takes the latter view. . . . All readers . . . will undoubtedly appreciate the poignancy with which Alcock portrays his love of desert life and landscape." •Bioscience "Sonoran Desert Spring is about the evolutionary significance of behaviour. . . . Holiday reading for all zoologists and a must for the desert specialist whose entomological knowledge is restricted to the performance of locusts and black beetles." •Journal of Biogeography

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John Alcock has done it again. He has taken the Sonoran Desert and made it come alive. Read this book carefully and you will know what it is like to live here. I live in the Sonoran Desert and get out in it a lot. However reading this book opened my eyes to many of the things happening here. A great read for the folks who want to know about the Sonoran Desert here in sunny Arizona.

Beautifully written. Full of fascinating information.

Beautifully written essays. A homage to the Sonoran Desert and its inhabitants.

I illustrated this book and wanted extra copies for my family. An interesting study of the behavior of

animal and insect species in the Sonoran Desert of Arizona..

The common view of deserts as "barren" places empty of life is firmly laid to rest by this excellent collection of essays. Alcock's relation demonstrates the wide variety and diversity of lifeforms found in the Sonoran Desert of Arizona. Plants, insects, birds and other animal life abound if you take the trouble to find them. The author is an expert at observing all this life. Better, he's adept at showing you how to follow in his footsteps to see what he sees. "Footsteps" is the significant term in this book. Not ATVs, aircraft, nor other vehicular means, but walking quietly is the method to employ in beholding the desert. Alcock provides examples of his techniques in researching various aspects of life. Surprising wasps in their rituals requires finesse and timing. Seemingly, he moves directly from office to landscape - one of his marking tools being a bottle of Liquid Paper. With this "paint" he can identify individual insects - male wasps and butterflies seeking mates. This technique lapses with rattlesnakes and coyotes, however. More easily identified subjects are the palo verde trees and giant saguaro cactuses. His palo verde trees are numbered [in his memory], but the saguaros are often elusive. Not because these ancient, giant cacti are mobile, but because his urban neighbours see fit to use them for target practice. Many of his jaunts confront him with spent shells, pock-marked rocks and shattered giant cactus plants. Desert soil pockets, often the home of slumbering spade-foot toads are riven with vehicle tracks. Their passage disturbs the dormant toads who believe the noise presages water-delivering thunderstorms. Awakening, they emerge in the belief the water is signalling the time for courtship and reproduction. The disappointment is greater than simply mating deferred. It may mean the toad has expended its resources. It will dry out and expire. In describing how the details of desert life is seen today, Alcock muses on the roots of life's processes. Why do the Tarantula Wasp and the Great Purple Hairstreak butterfly [which displays nothing visible that's purple] evolve parallel mating rituals? How can some species successfully deal with the spines of the cholla cactus when a human stuck with the spines must endure a full day's pain? Why do some bees fly in solitude while others are flock in swarms? Alcock examines these and similar questions with sound evolutionary logic. He stresses that simple or apparent solutions often require re-examination. Horned lizards only take a few ants from a nest entrance. Are they "prudent predators" saving prey for later exploitation? Alcock reflects on possibilities to arrive at a solution Darwin would have admired. As do we. [stephen a. haines - Ottawa, Canada]

John Alcock brings us with him on a tour of the Usery Ridge (north of Mesa, near Phoenix, Arizona) after the winter rains, but before the harsh heat of summer. The book mostly discusses evolutionary

behavior of plants and animals found there. There are a few humorous passages which add an unexpected laugh. Dr. Alcock is concerned with the disappearance of the desert and its treasures.

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