Organization of Insect Societies
- From Genome to Sociocomplexity

Edited by Jürgen Gadau and Jennifer Fewell
Foreword by Edward O Wilson.

“A major theme of biology in the present century, perhaps the major theme, is the nature and evolutionary origin of the transition across levels of organization. The most transparent of the transitions, greater than that, for example, from molecule to cell or species to ecosystem, is organism to superorganism, the level reached when societies are tightly bound by altruism and division of labor. One of the major advances of the past half century has been the demonstration, well illustrated in the present volume, of how the transition is made through the emergence of colony-level traits.”

So writes Edward O Wilson in the foreword to this seminal textbook. It is indeed a landmark volume where an international group of scientists have come together to synthesize their collective expertise, knowledge and insight into a new vision of insect societies. In so doing they succeed in revealing much about the way in which the development of such social behaviour has arisen as an evolutionary strategy.

The book is divided into four roughly equal parts each with its own introductory chapter:

- Transitions in Social Evolution, introduction by Jürgen Gadau
- Communication, introduction by Thomas D Seeley
- Neurogenic Basis of Social Behaviour, introduction by Robert E Page Jr.
- Theoretical Perspectives on Social Organizations, introduction by Jennifer Fewell

To achieve the depth, detail and accuracy of reportage that is the hallmark of the book the editors have then assembled, under the above headings, a galaxy of international writers from the fields of: molecular biology, evolutionary genetics, neurophysiology, behavioural ecology and evolutionary theory to re-examine the question of sociality in insects. This in itself shows how the study of colony organization, perhaps more than any other area of study, requires researchers to draw on all facets of biology.

It is now standard practice to bring in techniques and ideas from areas previously considered as separate disciplines. Genomics through ecology onto palaeontology and back through many more, all the disciplines are here and all in one book that should be on every nature scientist’s bookshelf.

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