

BOOK REVIEWS

Naked Ape to Superspecies: A personal perspective on humanity and the global eco-crisis 2nd Edition

H. Dressel and D. Suzuki, 2004
Allen & Unwin,
Crow's Nest, New South Wales
416 pp., ISBN 1-74114-337-3
RRP AUD\$24.95

MONICA RUSSELL¹

THE book *Naked Ape to Superspecies* outlines some of the most disturbing issues associated with the environment on a world scale and highlights the constant growing pressure we are placing on our environment. David Suzuki (Canadian science broadcaster, geneticist, public lecturer, and environmental and civil rights activist) and Holly Dressel (environmentalist and writer/researcher), authors of *Good News for a Change* (1997) imply that the human species is at a turning point in time so significant to our existence that if changes are not made now, not only in our way of thinking but in our underlying economical, social and political decision making, we will ultimately destroy the environment.

This edition, which includes a new introductory chapter, describes our progress from living alongside

the environment to trying to live above it and warns us of the devastating effect each decision has on our surroundings. The recurring theme is that nature is complex and robust and we must find our niche within it if we are to survive.

The authors have taken quite a pessimistic stand on the past, present and future state of our environment and how we have changed it, showing many sides of the nature debate. Suzuki and Dressel say that the extinction of nature will in turn mean extinction for the human species. However, the book gives multiple reasons as to why these errors were made and how they could have been avoided and in doing so suggests some hope for the future.

Overall, *Naked Ape to Superspecies* is an interesting read and an update on the global eco-crisis. It is a comprehensive review of our influence on natural systems which divides the information into appealing, readable and clearly organized chapters. Assuming a basic knowledge of ecological and biological systems, this book provides in-depth examples of the global eco-crisis and is suitable for both university students and the scientific community.

Deep Simplicity: Chaos, Complexity and the Emergence of Life

J. Gribbin, 2004
Penguin Books,
80 Strand, London
251 pp., ISBN 0-141-00722-2
RRP AUD\$21.55

MONICA RUSSELL¹

THE book *Deep Simplicity* is an introduction to chaos theory and the complex systems of the world. This book explains many concepts and physical laws associated with natural systems in a simple way. The author, Dr. John Gribbin, graduated with a degree in astrophysics from the University of Cambridge and is currently a visiting Fellow in astronomy at the University of Sussex. He has worked for the science journal *Nature* and the magazine *New Scientist* (for which he is now a physics consultant); some of his books include *In search of Schrödinger's Cat* (1984), *In Search of the Big Bang* (1986) and *Fate of the Universe* (1987).

This book describes the deep simplicity or order which lies beneath the chaos that we observe. Its purpose is to make chaos theory accessible to everyone which it does by telling a story based on

fundamental building blocks. The recurring theme is the inner simplicity of systems which is hidden behind their complex outer design.

This book includes diagrams which help the reader visualize the content which ranges from the Sierpinski gasket, patterns on the bodies of animals to the Koch curve and snowflakes. The book takes the reader through the scientific history of chaos discoveries, theory by theory.

This book is well-written; Gribbin breaks down the subject making it understandable and appealing to a wide audience. The consistent use of clear yet descriptive language supported by expressive diagrams and models creates an informative book that is enjoyable to read.

Overall, *Deep Simplicity: Chaos, Complexity and the Emergence of Life* is an appealing and comprehensible book presenting the major concepts associated with chaos and complexity theory. For those who have studied this science or are familiar with it, it is also a useful book for revision. Previous knowledge of the theory or terminology is not required as the content and language is suitable for most readers.

¹School of Natural Sciences, Edith Cowan University, Joondalup, Western Australia, Australia 6027.