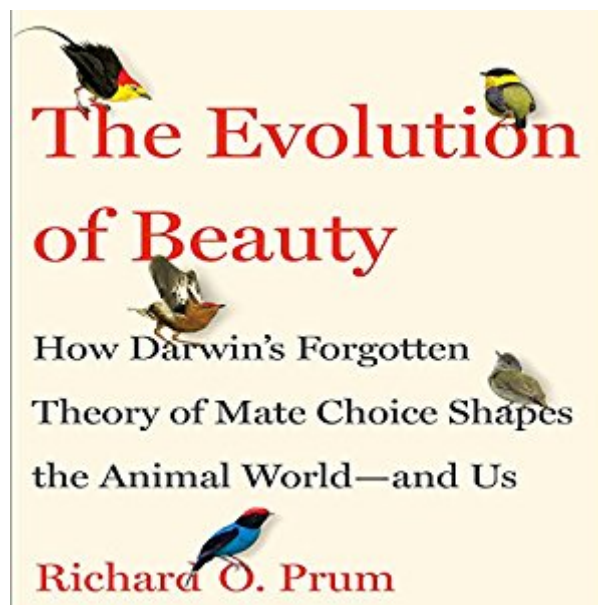




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The Evolution Of Beauty: How Darwin's Forgotten Theory Of Mate Choice Shapes The Animal World - And Us



Synopsis

A major reimagining of how evolutionary forces work, revealing how mating preferences - what Darwin termed "the taste for the beautiful" - create the extraordinary range of ornament in the animal world. In the great halls of science, dogma holds that Darwin's theory of natural selection explains every branch on the tree of life: which species thrive, which wither away to extinction, and what features each evolves. But can adaptation by natural selection really account for everything we see in nature? Yale University ornithologist Richard Prum - reviving Darwin's own views - thinks not. Deep in tropical jungles around the world are birds with a dizzying array of appearances and mating displays: club-winged manakins who sing with their wings, great argus pheasants who dazzle prospective mates with a four-foot-wide cone of feathers covered in golden 3-D spheres, red-capped manakins who moonwalk. In 30 years of fieldwork, Prum has seen numerous display traits that seem disconnected from, if not outright contrary to, selection for individual survival. To explain this, he dusts off Darwin's long-neglected theory of sexual selection, in which the act of choosing a mate for purely aesthetic reasons - for the mere pleasure of it - is an independent engine of evolutionary change. Mate choice can drive ornamental traits from the constraints of adaptive evolution, allowing them to grow ever more elaborate. It also sets the stakes for sexual conflict, in which the sexual autonomy of the female evolves in response to male sexual control. Most crucially, this framework provides important insights into the evolution of human sexuality, particularly the ways in which female preferences have changed male bodies, and even maleness itself, through evolutionary time. *The Evolution of Beauty* presents a unique scientific vision for how nature's splendor contributes to a more complete understanding of evolution and of ourselves.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is the most significant book about human evolution to come along in a very long time. Most popular classics in the genre are by very good science writers, like Matt Ridley (Red Queen), Robert Wright (The Moral Animal), or even Richard Dawkins (Selfish Gene). The Evolution of Beauty easily matches the popular appeal of those books, but it is also in a class with E. O.

Wilson's Sociobiology (which ultimately opened up Darwin's other taboo idea of group selection) for opening up the field of sexual selection. Here is a first rate naturalist (ornithology) authoritatively sweeping all the accumulated detritus off of Darwin's most brilliant deduction: that the peacock's tail has nothing to do with natural selection, but is solely driven by the peahen's evolved desire for the tail. Then Dr. Prum takes you on a fascinating journey demonstrating the thrilling power of this long-suppressed idea to enlighten disparate aspects of human nature. Some might think his ideas might go over the top in the second part of the book, but in my judgement, Prum doesn't even scratch the surface of the depth to which sexual selection has influenced human evolution. John V. Wylie

An extraordinary footnote to Darwin's concept of "sexual selection" as being a recognition of beauty. The descriptions of the bower birds in particular give ammunition to me when I talk about the communication between members of other species.

The aesthetic view of life here has a curious overlap with the thinking in the book, Worm at the Core by three social psychologists. Here, aesthetics forms the core of human agency. In Worm at the Core, human culture (proxy for aesthetics?) functions as a terror management system to help humans navigate awareness of mortality. What if aesthetics performs both as platform for human agency and steadying grace in face of uncertainty? Intrigued by the parallels.

Profoundly interesting and important book. The impact of aesthetics on our everyday world cannot be underestimated. As we learn more about the neuroscience of aesthetics we understand why we love beautiful things...all kinds of beautiful things, ranging from an iPhone to a vase of flowers. Charles L Mauro CHFP President / CEO MAURO Usability Science

Such a great book!! This book is about the theory of sexual selection and how that drives evolution alongside natural selection. The argument for sexual selection was well-reasoned and compelling. This perspective on evolution helps to explain social dynamics and culture in our species and among other sexual species as well.

Well written, and thought provoking.

Amazing book! Prum has picked up where Darwin left off in emphasizing the importance of female choice in mating. He has opened up a fascinating line of inquiry for biology, psychology and sexuality studies. Wonderful writing and fascinating science. Highly recommend !

Provocative and readable. Has as much to say about our society as evolution and birds

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