

Entomological evidence of misdemeanour

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The face of publishing is indisputably changing. As a print-on-demand publication, *Insect Evidence* is interesting for reasons besides its content. The Internet has freed us of many constraints when it comes to publishing – a situation that is exemplified by the popular fanfiction and academic open-access movements. Fanfic has an effective quality-assurance mechanism, because poor writing receives no encouragement from its reading community, while academic publishing has a two-stage system in which peer reviewers and editors perform an initial gatekeeping role, and the citation system is a secondary mechanism that functions more like that of fanfic. The print-on-demand publishing service industry allows authors to be their own publishers, thus bringing the fanfic model to academic publication.

Under this print-on-demand publication model, the publisher supplies information about a client's opus on their website and on the sites of large online book suppliers, and when a copy is ordered online, they reproduce and deliver it. The author receives a royalty and retains control of the design and rights to their work, which can be ordered at any time, from anywhere, more or less in perpetuity. Some online book suppliers allow you fanfic-like means to submit voluntary reviews on each item, and provide links to cognate works based on keywords and customers' buying patterns. The missing ingredients are the editing services and pre-publication review of traditional academic publishing, but it is not clear if that matters. Various authors¹⁻³ have raised alarm about the reliability of the peer-review and editorial processes of academic publishing, and there is a voluminous literature about what citations might actually indicate about academic merit.⁴

Bishop is qualified in his topic by both experience and training. He graduated from the Virginia Forensic Science Academy and has done research on nocturnal oviposition of blowflies under artificial lighting at the Department of Entomology, University of Nebraska. He is now a forensic consultant who retired with 23 years of service as a Master Police Officer and Forensic Technician with the Charlottesville VA Police Department. He has assisted with forensic entomology in more than 70 criminal and civil cases between 1995 and 2003, although reportedly rarely travels to the scenes. He taught forensic entomology to graduate and professional audiences in Virginia and Florida, which is reflected in the approach of this book.

This book is effectively a concise, illustrated training manual, along the lines of Catts & Haskell's⁵ longer, spiral-bound classic. It contains chapters on the nature of forensic entomology and of death scenes; general etiquette, protocols and equipment for approaching and sampling outdoor death scenes for insect evidence and environmental conditions; additional considerations for indoor and mortuary cases; the general life cycle of blow flies; and layman's accounts of the flies and beetles that one may expect to collect in North America. The presentation is process oriented and includes mnemonics for the stages of the protocols. The science is informal and monochrome photographs (some reproduced in colour at <http://www.forensic-topics.com/>) clarify explanations. As a training document, this book has a very clear target audience which it addresses with the right tone and level of detail. It is available in three formats – hardcover, softcover and e-book. My well-printed and robustly bound softcover arrived directly from the publisher by post unscathed and promptly. Prices vary by format and some suppliers undercut the publisher.

This book is ideal for its purpose, and yet it is not cited in the rapidly growing literature about forensic entomology. To be fair, the subject is specialised, but even so, there have been citation opportunities. I discovered this book about 5 years after it was published, on a tangentially related Internet search. Although it is marketed by, among others, Amazon and Barnes & Nobel, the book did not appear within the first 10 pages of hits generated by their search engines. Clearly, one of the biggest challenges of publishing academic works privately lies in advertising.

If the possibilities of print-on-demand publication inspire you, there is a caveat: do your homework. While *Insect Evidence* is a wholesome example of print-on-demand, there are counterexamples with a different reputation. Some publishers using print-on-demand take advantage of permissive Creative Commons and ShareAlike licences to sell anthologies of articles from *Wikipedia*, *Wikia* and even the *South African Journal of Science* as books through well-known online book suppliers. The cover of one book on forensic DNA analysis (selling for US\$56) announces boldly "High quality content by Wikipedia articles!". Authors publishing privately on demand should weigh up the advantages of professional editing, peer review and marketing.

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