

The Book Review:

The Smaller Majority

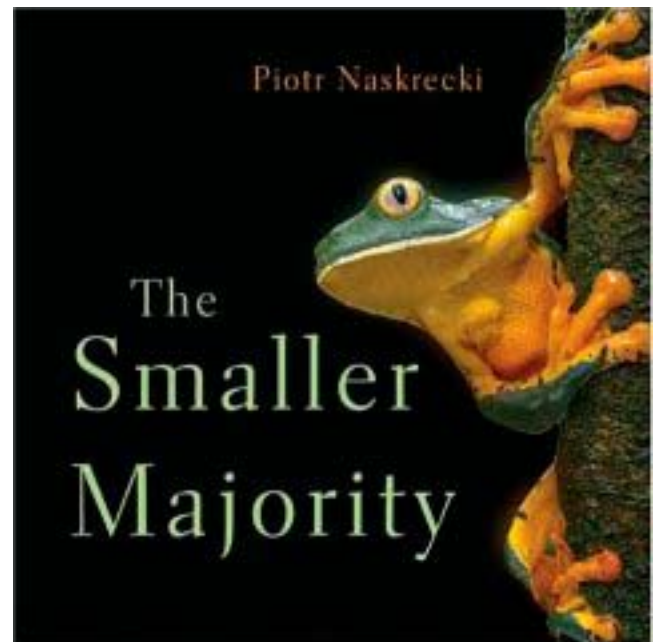
Review by Author and Photographer Michael Lustbader

The Smaller Majority by Piotr Naskrecki
The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005

What occurs when you couple a meticulous scientist's the awareness of detail with the eye of an artist? It seems that you wind up with Piotr Naskrecki, Director of the Invertebrate Diversity Initiative of Conservation International and Research Associate with the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard University. Unlike many who learn about our subjects in order to obtain better photographs, Neskrecki is a working entomologist who learned photography in order to advance his research and study.

What started as an attempt to simply document some of these organisms with a camera my wife had surprised me with one Christmas day quickly developed into a photographic passion for capturing all things small and overlooked by many nature photographers. Very early on I discovered that it gives me immensely more satisfaction to lower my lens and look for animals hiding on the forest floor than to take a picture of an elephant or toucan, subjects that have already been expertly photographed.

Naskrecki's chosen subjects are small "match-box sized" creatures; insects and other invertebrates (animals who wear their skeletons on the outside) that make up over 90% of the visible animal species populating this planet. In fact, by sheer numbers, it is more their planet than ours.



"This book is a treasure house of images and information about a world most of us are barely aware of."

--Frans Lanting

"The best kind of nature writing: by a scientific expert of the subject, beautifully illustrated, and with striking, original examples."

--Edward O. Wilson

Warning: This is not truly a “photography book” per se, and certainly not a photo-instruction book, in the sense of multi-page discussions of pixels, cameras, or lenses. Even the one chapter specifically on photography deals mostly in generalities; there is more discussion of plastic bags than tripods. I doubt, however, that you could find better macro work anywhere, and if you can learn from examining superb examples, the lessons on these pages will not be wasted. Naskrecki has a fine awareness of composition and lighting (not many black backgrounds in his flash shots, and the ones that are present are mostly nocturnal.) Flash is used expertly, and is unobtrusive. His use of very wide-angle lenses up-close shows off his subjects like diamonds in the settings of their proper environments.

How could you not love a book whose first bit of advice for dealing with the overwhelming sensory overload of a first trip to the tropical rainforest is to leave your camera behind. Just walk, observe, and acclimate your vision to a new perspective.

Naskrecki discusses species lost to us forever, even over the past few years, but also leaves us with hope by including images of animals newly discovered, some never before photographed. No, the book is not just about bugs—there are also plenty of frogs, geckos, and other small creatures.



Five Stars out of Five--Highly recommended.

To read more about this book visit:
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