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# The Superorganism: The Beauty, Elegance, and Strangeness of Insect Societies

By Bert Hölldobler, Edward O. Wilson



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**The Pulitzer Prize-winning authors of *The Ants* render the extraordinary lives of the social insects in this visually spectacular volume.**

*The Superorganism* promises to be one of the most important scientific works published in this decade. Coming eighteen years after the publication of *The Ants*, this new volume expands our knowledge of the social insects (among them, ants, bees, wasps, and termites) and is based on remarkable research conducted mostly within the last two decades. These superorganisms—a tightly knit colony of individuals, formed by altruistic cooperation, complex communication, and division of labor—represent one of the basic stages of biological organization, midway between the organism and the entire species. The study of the superorganism, as the authors demonstrate, has led to important advances in our understanding of how the transitions between such levels have occurred in evolution and how life as a whole has progressed from simple to complex forms. Ultimately, this book provides a deep look into a part of the living world hitherto glimpsed by only a very few. 110 color, 100 black-and-white



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### Editorial Review

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Social insects such as ants have long fascinated renowned biologist Wilson. With colleague Hölldobler, he presents this integrated look at social insects, from the genetic to the colony levels of analysis. Incorporating the evolutionary record into the text, the authors alert readers to the relentlessness of environmental pressures on everything that an insect is or does. The authors particularly theorize the adaptive advantages of a species whose members exist as part of a social organization, which emerges in their discussions of preconditions necessary for a transition from an individual to a communal life-cycle. This transition is rare in nature; adding to the amazement is the complexity of insect colonies, to which the authors devote most of their generously illustrated work. Divining how social insects divide into castes of workers, soldiers, and queens; explaining how castes communicate; and placing these successful species within the larger web of life, Wilson and Hölldobler, albeit fond of technical nomenclature, bring an alienlike world to the notice of interested nonscientists, in a volume with long-term library value. --Gilbert Taylor

#### About the Author

Bert Hölldobler is Foundation Professor at Arizona State University and the recipient of numerous awards, including the Pulitzer Prize and the Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Prize. He lives in Arizona and Germany.

Edward O. Wilson is widely recognized as one of the world's preeminent biologists and naturalists. The author of more than twenty books, including *The Creation*, *The Social Conquest of Earth*, *The Meaning of Human Existence*, and *Letters to a Young Scientist*, Wilson is a professor emeritus at Harvard University. The winner of two Pulitzer Prizes, he lives in Lexington, Massachusetts.

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