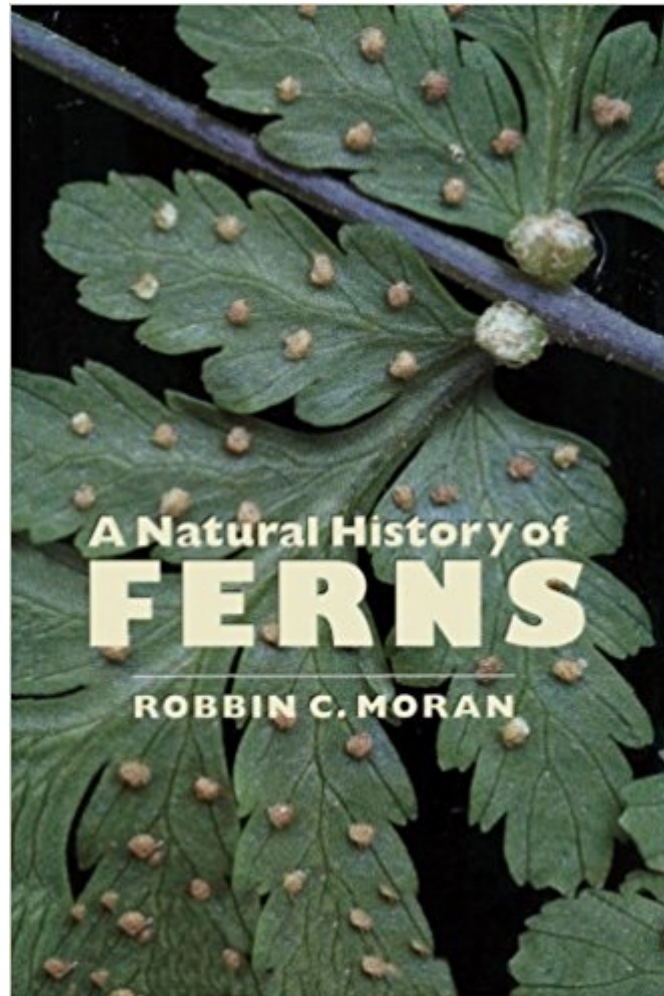




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A Natural History Of Ferns



Synopsis

A Natural History of Ferns is an entertaining and informative look at why ferns and their relatives are unique among plants. Ferns live in habitats from the tropics to polar latitudes, and unlike seed plants, which endow each seed with the resources to help their offspring, ferns reproduce by minute spores. There are floating ferns, ferns that climb or live on trees, and ferns that are trees. There are poisonous ferns, iridescent ferns, and resurrection ferns that survive desert heat and drought. The relations of ferns and people are equally varied. Moran sheds light on Robinson Crusoe's ferns, the role of ferns in movies, and how ferns get their names. A Natural History of Ferns provides just what is needed for those who wish to grow ferns or observe them in their habitats with greater understanding and appreciation.

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Customer Reviews

From the curator of ferns at the New York Botanical Garden comes a meticulously researched, soundly organized, and entertainingly written treatise on the biology of one of nature's loveliest--and often most misunderstood--plants. Ferns, for all their cool beauty and exotic allure, are anomalies of the plant world because of their distinctive form of reproduction, by spore rather than seed. Moran examines this and other essential processes in a scholarly manual that sets forth in a single volume the wealth of material usually accessible only through intricate research. As opposed to field guides focusing primarily on identification, this history explains the unique life cycle and explores the evolutionary adaptations that have occurred throughout the species' 340-million-year history.

Exhibiting a storyteller's flair, Moran opens each chapter with an engaging vignette or anecdote to instantly engage the reader, thus elevating what could be a pedantic discourse into an enjoyable discussion. Carol Haggas Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

“These masterfully written tales and the solid science behind them make this a terrific book for fern enthusiasts or anyone interested in our natural world.”
•American Gardener “The author has presented his topics with a fresh approach, so that even seasoned fern-lovers will see events from new vantage points.”
•Pacific Horticulture “This book is like nothing else on the subject. First, it’s not a field guide. . . . Secondly, it’s fun to read.”
•The Los Angeles Times “Most gardeners suspect that there is something very complex about ferns, but few of us have the chance to delve into their mysteries. Robbin Moran’s book makes their magic accessible in all its strange detail.”
•Horticulture “A joy to read, this book features science writing that goes beyond description, revealing patterns and mechanisms of the essence of natural history.”
•Choice “The structure of the book, a series of essays, allows Mr. Moran to make full use of his ability to render understandable the complexities of nature and to draw in the reader as a storyteller does.”
•American Rhododendron Society Journal “Educators need this book.”
•Plant Talk “Here is an author who plainly delights in his subject and one needn’t be a fern aficionado to share his enthusiasm.”
•California Garden “This is science writing at its best.”
•New Scientist “I learned in botany classes that ferns reproduce by spores, but I never really understood what makes a spore so different from a seed until I read A Natural History of Ferns.”
•Columbus Dispatch “Here is science writing at its best; one simply must have this book.”
•Hardy Fern Foundation Quarterly

Many of the chapters in this captivating book on the many aspects of ferns I first read as articles written for the American Fern Society newsletter ‘The Fiddleheads Forum’. It was wonderful to have these articles expanded and offered in book form and to have easy access to enjoy them over and over again. I have been fortunate to get to know the author thru visits to New York Botanical Garden. I bought this copy to pass along to a young man who was our translator on a fern tour to Japan. I believe he has found another facet to add to his interest in Japanese culture!

This is a highly readable introduction to ferns by Robbin Moran, a botanist at the NY Botanical Gardens. The book is at once literate, anecdotal, and scientific. You can read it for information, for instruction, and for entertainment. How many books on botany cite both Shakespeare and a Walter Matthau movie in furthering the story of ferns? Moran spends a good part of a chapter discussing the movie, *A New Leaf*, which deals with Elaine May, as a botanist, discovering a new species of fern and naming it after her true love, Matthau. Indeed, Moran's enthusiasm for the movie shows no bounds--he presented it one evening at a summer workshop in Maine that I attended. But don't get me wrong--the book is serious science with a sense of humor, sort of like a more focused version of a Stephen Jay Gould book.

What a wonderful, clear, interesting, beautifully written book. Dr. Moran is the curator of botany at the New York Botanical Garden, and has such a great understanding of the natural world, and more importantly how to communicate that so people become enthused about it too.

This book is a great scientific reference book while weaving in the history of how people discovered what we know about ferns. It has wonderful illustrations which are very detailed. It is also an interesting read even if you don't need it for a research paper. It is the most comprehensive book on the topic of ferns which we could find and one of the few which can be used extensively for a botany class.

Robbin C. Moran looks like the quintessential nerd: bad haircut, huge eyeglasses, boyish look despite being a scholar. Unsurprisingly, he has written a nerd book about - wait for it - ferns! Thank God for Robbie, I don't necessarily mind ferns. Quite the contrary. In Sweden, we call them "snake plants" (or something to that effect), so I was fascinated by them already as a kid. Still today, I get an uncanny feeling walking in a forest where the ground is covered by ferns. After all, you never know what might lurk below them. Snakes, perhaps? (A clue: mostly mosquitoes!) One of the fern species growing around here has edible roots. *Polypodium vulgare*, I believe. Still, a small word of warning might be in order. If you want to read "*A Natural History of Ferns*", you need to be very enthusiastic about the subject. Moran writes about fern taxonomy and the exact shape of fern buds with that nerdie kind of enthusiasm some people might find very annoying. In other words, you need to be a fern-lover already before you pick up this book, to really appreciate the author's efforts! Like those ferns, Moran covers a lot of ground in his book. There are basic chapters on fern

reproduction, hybrids, taxonomy and evolutionary history. Much of this information was new to me, for instance that lycophytes aren't fern allies, or that horsetails are ferns! I belong to the generation whose field guides were still made according to the old taxonomy. The most interesting chapters, however, are those who deal with more human-related information. Did you know that Shakespeare mentions ferns in one of his plays? Or that fern "seeds" are supposed to have magical properties, according to some old wives' tale? Apparently, you are supposed to collect them on June 23, so I guess I just blew it. That was yesterday! Moran also mentions a modern Hollywood comedy about ferns, "A New Leaf". He discusses Arthur Conan Doyle's book "The Lost World". The plot of the novel is set on a mysterious hill in South America, known as tepui. Such hills actually exist, and are real havens for scientists interested in ferns. We further learn about an ill-fated expedition to the Australian hinterland, in which delicious but poisonous ferns played a part. And then there's the "Victorian fern craze" (pteridomania) in 19th century England, when English collectors almost drew ferns extinct in some regions. The author also mentions "the molesting salvinia", a dangerous weed that threatened entire regions in Sri Lanka, southern Africa and New Guinea, until scientists discovered a new species of beetle that only consumed salvinias, thus saving humanity from yet another environmental hazard. Sounds like the perfect topic for a Hollywood comedy..."The Natural History of Ferns" also contain intriguing chapters about cryptid ferns, fern bulbs inhabited by really nasty ants, iridescent ferns that look blue (a photo is included), and the "fern spike", a fossil layer of fern spores which confirm the theory that the dinosaurs went extinct due to a meteorite impact. Moran also discusses the rather curious fact that the fern flora of the *eastern* United States is virtually identical to that of East Asia. He also takes us to the Juan Fernandez Islands, home of 54 fern species, 25 of which are endemic. The weirdest piece of information in this book is the revelation that scientists who describe a new species have to do it in...Latin. Still today, over 200 years after Carolus Linnaeus. If I ever discover a new species of Polypodium, I guess I would have to keep it to myself! I didn't take those Latin classes in senior high, you see...In sum, "The Natural History of Ferns" by Robbin C. Moran is exactly what you've been looking for - if you suffer from pteridomania.

Robbin C. Moran's "A natural history of ferns" takes as its subject both the ferns and the lycophytes, a group which includes the club mosses as well as Selaginella and Isoetes. He fills us in on the details of fern reproductive strategies, the latest breakthroughs in how ferns are classified, the fossil history of ferns, some fascinating physiological and structural adaptations of ferns, the surprising patterns of fern geographical distribution and the impact of ferns on human life. He never

stints on important and interesting complexities but still succeeds in making everything clear to a reader who has had first year biology. Mr. Moran has an almost uncanny knack for selecting topics that the reader already wants to know more about (or would be curious about if he had heard even a little about them) and knowing what extra information the reader would like to have. In places it is also a good travel book, good enough to make me nostalgic for the Danish countryside.

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