

Values and Perceptions of Invertebrates

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Abstract: In this paper I explore the value of invertebrates to human society. I initially examine various ecological, utilitarian, scientific, and cultural benefits provided by invertebrate organisms. I then explore the extent of appreciation and understanding of these values among the American public. This assessment was based on a study of residents of the state of Connecticut, including randomly selected members of the general public, farmers, conservation organization members, and scientists. The general public and farmers were found to view most invertebrates with aversion, anxiety, fear, avoidance, and ignorance. Far more positive and knowledgeable attitudes toward invertebrates and their conservation were observed among scientists and, to a lesser extent, among conservation organization members. I finally examine the motivational basis for hostile attitudes toward invertebrates, particularly arthropods, among the general public. Important factors include the possibility of an innate learning disposition, the association of many invertebrates with disease and agricultural damage, differences in ecological scale between humans and invertebrates, the multiplicity of invertebrates, the apparent lack of a sense of identity and consciousness among invertebrates, the presumption of mindlessness among invertebrates, and the radical autonomy of invertebrates from human control.