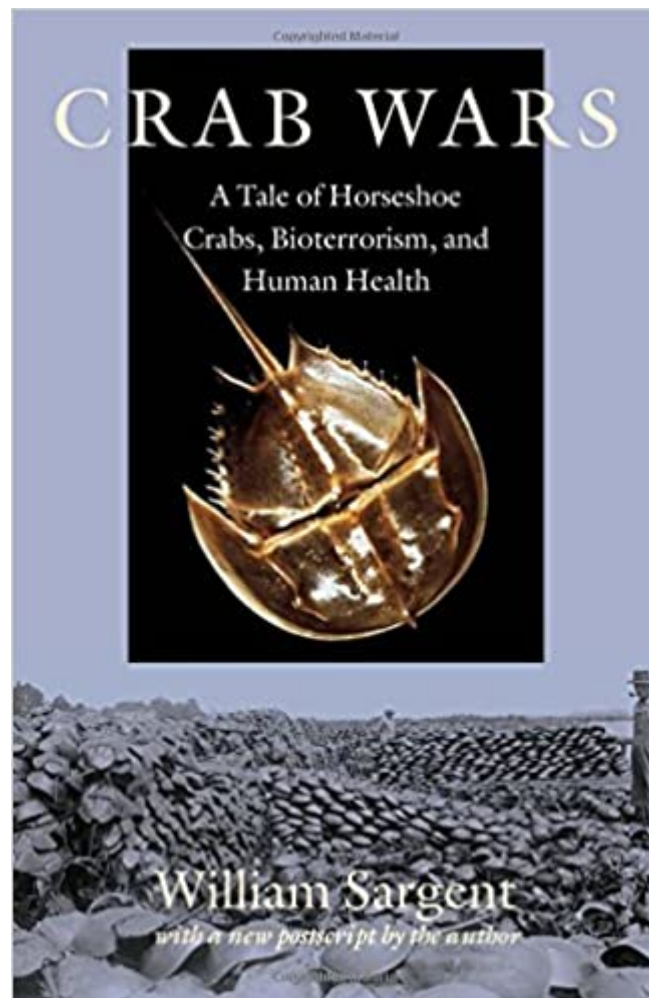




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Crab Wars: A Tale Of Horseshoe Crabs, Bioterrorism, And Human Health



Synopsis

Surviving almost unmolested for 300 million years, the horseshoe crab is now the object of an intense legal and ethical struggle involving marine biologists, environmentalists, US government officials, biotechnologists, and international corporations. The source of this friction is the discovery 25 years ago that the blood of these ancient creatures serves as the basis for the most reliable test for the deadly and ubiquitous gram-negative bacteria. These bacteria are responsible for life-threatening diseases like meningitis, typhoid, E. coli, Legionnaire's Disease and toxic shock syndrome. Because every drug certified by the FDA must be tested using the horseshoe crab derivative known as Limulus lysate, a multimillion dollar industry has emerged involving the license to "bleed" horseshoe crabs and the rights to their breeding grounds. Since his youthful fascination with these ancient creatures, William Sargent has spent much of his life observing, studying, and collecting horseshoe crabs. As a result, he presents a thoroughly accessible insider's guide to the discovery of the lysate test, the exploitation of the crabs at the hands of multinational pharmaceutical conglomerates, local fishing interests, and the legal and governmental wrangling over the creatures' ultimate fate. In the end, the story of the horseshoe crab is a sobering reflection on the unintended consequences of scientific progress and the danger of self-regulated industries controlling a limited natural resource.

Book Information

Paperback: 208 pages

Publisher: UPNE (February 28, 2006)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1584655313

ISBN-13: 978-1584655312

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.4 x 8.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 4.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.9 out of 5 stars 6 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #808,334 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #16 in Books > Medical Books > Pharmacology > Product Development #395 in Books > Science & Math > Biological Sciences > Animals > Marine Life #931 in Books > Science & Math > Biological Sciences > Animals > Wildlife

Customer Reviews

Horseshoe crabs have lived on the earth 300 times longer than human beings, and ever since the

1956 discovery of an invaluable property in its blood, this ancient species has saved millions of human lives. In a just and reasonable world, the horseshoe crab, which can be bled and returned to the water unharmed, would be treated with the utmost respect. Instead, crabs are caught in massive quantities and smashed for use as bait, seriously depleting a population essential not only for a pharmaceutical test called limulus amoebocyte lysate, which is used the world over to detect the lethal gram negative bacteria, but also for sustaining migrating bird populations. Sargent, a Cape Cod native who has been wild about horseshoe crabs since boyhood, is intimate with every aspect of the species' life and the lysate industry now irrevocably connected to it (horseshoe crab blood is worth \$15,000 a quart), a many-faceted story he illuminates by profiling fishermen, biotech entrepreneurs, politicians, and environmentalists. Our dependence on this amazing animal will only increase, Sargent observes, as must our vigilance in protecting it. Donna Seaman Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

“In this unusual alert to species depletion, Sargent's heartfelt concerns for the horseshoe crab illustrate the human side of scientific inquiry.” —KLIATT “A popular interest book about how a 300 million year old organism became essential to the modern pharmaceutical industry. Sargent traces the discovery of horseshoe crab blood as the perfect in-vitro test for gram-negative bacteria through the development of a multi-million dollar business. He recounts the battles between multinational pharmaceutical companies to “bleed” enough crabs for Limulus lysate and the demand for crabs by the bait fishery. Regulation of the fishery by individual states complicates the issue of preserving this natural resource.” —Northeastern Naturalist “[M]akes for fascinating reading . . . Crab Wars offers a compact introduction to the horseshoe crab and the controversy it has recently engendered.” —Journal of the History of Biology “Sargent...has crafted a surprisingly engaging tale ... Crab Wars makes for a helpful and entertaining case study.” —nationaljournal.com

Very interesting, had know idea there blood was used for medical testing. When I was a kid we would go see an uncle on the cape . He would use the horseshoe crabs to scratch his back!

Just plain vicious, they attacked Red Lobster

The previous reviewer must have a big ax to grind! His ad hominum attack on the author is outrageous, and ridiculous! I have both a medical research background, and lived many years near

the Atlantic Ocean. Horseshoe crabs were once so common, you practically tripped over them, now they are virtually nonexistent! Horseshoe crabs are in such big trouble that the Governors of New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland and Virginia have drastically reduced the allowable catch off their shores! The situation has deteriorated to the point that the Audubon Society is concerned about the potential extinction of certain migrating birds, which are dependent on Horseshoe crab eggs! Should we just sit on our hands in order to keep one tiny, and economically insignificant industry - whose sole purpose is to turn these ancient, and medically priceless, creatures into bait - happy? Sorry! No way! These offshore waters belong to all of us! They are not anyone's private domain to destroy at one's leisure for monetary gain!

could have used a bit more history with the book but good background on how the biomedical industry developed on the east coast

What if there was a special formula for a product that would detect Gram-negative bacteria (many of these bacteria cause disease) that was easy to use and make? What would this formula be worth, and how important would it be it preserve all the ingredients so that it can be used in perpetuity? The formula exists: *Limulus* amebocyte lysate, a compound found in the blood of the horseshoe crab. In *Crab Wars*, author William Sargent reviews briefly the history of the discovery of this lysate, the emerging industry associated with bleeding horseshoe crabs for medical research and public health, the ongoing harvesting of crabs for bait, and especially the legal wrangling of those making money (lots of it) from crab harvesting and bleeding, the state and federal regulators and managers of the ocean regions home to horseshoe crabs, and (even more briefly) the role of horseshoe crabs in ecosystem processes. Sargent is a horseshoe crab advocate, and the flavor of the book is one that discourages overexploitation (he believes in exploitation, particularly because of the importance of the lysate in medicine). As sympathetic as I am to ocean conservation issues, I have to admit that *Crab Wars* was uneven in its approach to horseshoe crab conservation. It really didn't make a case for the importance of horseshoe crabs in oceanic and terrestrial ecosystems (mentioning it isn't the same as making a case). It seemed to vilify horseshoe crab users while making conservationists saintly. There are many, many ocean species being overexploited. To delve into the horseshoe crab story, I expected a deeper, richer review. Books like *Voyage of the Turtle* (by Carl Safina) and *Cod* (by Mark Kurlansky) come to mind. *Crab Wars* was not of this caliber. However, if you look at the websites of horseshoe crab exploitation apologists, you certainly won't find a balanced discussion of the issues. In fact, apologists state "The companies that produce [lysate] go to great lengths to

ensure that the animals used in the making this valuable, life-saving test are handled with care and respect." When Sargent discusses bled crabs leaving the labs and heading right to the fishing boats to be chopped up for bait, the "...handled with care and respect..." statement doesn't ring true (although I certainly have no idea whether this practice continues today). So Crab Wars is an imperfect start in learning more about the use, and abuse, of horseshoe crabs.

This book appears to be largely the product of one man's personal agenda. Readers should use extreme caution in reading and using the "information" in this book. I encourage every reader who is seriously interested in horseshoe crabs to follow up by fact-checking with research scientists, biologists, and local conservation groups-there are many involved with horseshoe crabs. Hence, there is information available on horseshoe crabs from reliable and reputable primary sources. Before spending your money here..do your homework! and before acting on anything in this book, find the truth for yourself from those who do scientific research, who have dedicated their lives to studying these unique animals, and who take a pragmatic and scientific approach to conservation without manipulating the public with overly emotional and inflammatory propaganda. After that, if you are still curious, check it out from the library first...you'll thank me later.

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