

# 'Insects' by Jay Griffiths.

Imagine if our food were brought to us by dedicated and almost invisible angels. Imagine them flying, effortless and iridescent, with a beauty more extraordinary than any art of ours can ever replicate. Imagine if those mysterious beings worked freely to keep alive almost the entire living world, including birds, animals and ourselves, offering us a myriad of flowers and the feast on feast of exuberant life. Imagine if these angels also gently and tactfully disposed of the dead, unobtrusively cleaning corpses, tucking the dead back into a deep bed of earth so they can rebecome life in another form. Without insects, we would wade through corpses with every step we took.

I wish that everyone who said they believed in angels would actually believe in insects. They do not take the title of angels, being by nature bashful and unassuming: they go by other names: firefly, bee, ant, caddisfly. We humans, it seems, value unreal angels more than the priceless reality of insects.

A secret commonwealth, the insect realm encompasses more species than we have identified. The insects: hallowed be thy names, some of which are pure poetry: the orchid bee, coloured in bronze and ultramarine, purple and gold; the glowing firefly, the ladybird; the purple emperor and the emerald swallowtail.

Recent studies are clear about the collapse of the insect world. We know it directly from our own experience: gone is the windshield phenomenon whereby, driving in summer, it would be necessary to stop frequently to clean the insects from the windscreen, while the 'moth snowstorm', a blizzard of moths in the headlights, was the experience of every night drive.

Hidden in their very multitudes, insects are, together, a gigantic collective of kindness, dancing in constant attendance to living things. The insects pollinate three quarters of our food crops and 80 per cent of wild-flowering plants and keep the soil healthy, constantly recycling nutrients.

From their actions flow the countless forms of life, from the apple blossom to bread and roses and the silver salmon, indeed everything that has ever flowered and ever will. And from physical life flows everything to be treasured in human life, from existence itself to the highest of the arts.

It is ultimately thanks to the insects that we owe the flowering of plants and the flowering of culture alike. Michelangelo salutes them. Notre-Dame bows in thanks. No insects, no Mozart. No art, no music, no beauty, no love.

Imagining a world without wings fills me with inconsolable sorrow. A wren, hungry and songless; a swift dropping to its death; the air emptied of life. Without insects and birds, we rob ourselves of all that flight represents: the wings of mind, the flight of imagination, that mother of empathy.

They give us choirs of insects, flights of insects sing thee to thy rest. Without them, there would be no chorus of frogs or birdsong: for how would a bird sing without insects to give it life and music? To them we owe everything: my life and yours and yours and yours. Without them we would lose the gold day dust gecko, and the thorny dragon, the sea turtle and the rainbow boa, iridescent and nocturnal. What is the point of listing what would be lost? We would lose, to put it bluntly, almost everything. Starvation would stalk the land for almost every kind of creature, including ourselves.

Please tell me you understand the immensity of this. And if you don't, please think, alone and quietly perhaps, of the unfolding ending. Let me speak simply into the simplicity of your heart, then, and let me just ask you what you love, what makes you happy. Is it a child? Is it your partner? Do you love your friend or, Little Prince, do you love your rose? Do you love your dog, your cats, your church, your home, your garden? Your books, perhaps, or the poetry you make, or the music? The pub? Chess? And this love, then, this happiness that you hold so dear, tell me how it will even exist without the tiniest of beings, the insects, against which we have been so utterly pitiless?

It was the studies of insect collapse reported late in 2018 that first made me cry for insects. The horror of it swept over me: I cried for three days. I hate all kinds of bullying, and the fact that the insects are the tiniest creatures, bullied by humans acting as monsters, gave the facts an edge of

very personal pain. It was of course infinitely more than this: I saw in one awful moment a vision of the desolated world, a devastated wasteland.

I don't want to be lyrical now. I just want to swear. The collective stupidity renders all my craft useless. What writer's art can ever convey the vast, deadly and deliberate slaughter, with all its consequences that are, in sum, the sum of it all. The Everything. Where to go with this gigantic stupidity? What the fuck did we think we were doing? Why the fuck are we still doing it? Intensive agriculture is killing us by killing the insects.

If I sent a tweet, I would write only this: Mass use of insecticides leads to mass death of insects. Insecticides should be made illegal overnight. Every scrap of land turned to organic agriculture. Every shred of mental energy requisitioned for love, essentially, the love of life.

Writers sometimes tell their readers when they struggle for words, when they experience writer's block or when their psyches demand a fallow period. That admission is a touching one, a truth so precious that I do not use it lightly. I use it now. The magnitude of this situation silences me. The words I lean towards are not enough. Tears, maybe. The raw scream of rage and pity, perhaps. But what words do you suggest I use here? Annihilation? The end of worlds? The last generation? Absolute apocalypse? If you were looking this full in the face, what expresses it sufficiently? And a savage anger overcomes me. This is not a game. Nature is not a hobby. It is the life on which we depend.

Credits - 'INSECTS' Words by Jay Griffith  
As read by Sir John Lister-Kaye  
at 'IF NOT NOW,WHEN?' Symposium presented  
by [www.keepitwild.uk](http://www.keepitwild.uk)  
Article to coincide with Glow Worm release  
24/08/23 at [www.rewildingcoombeshead.co.uk](http://www.rewildingcoombeshead.co.uk)  
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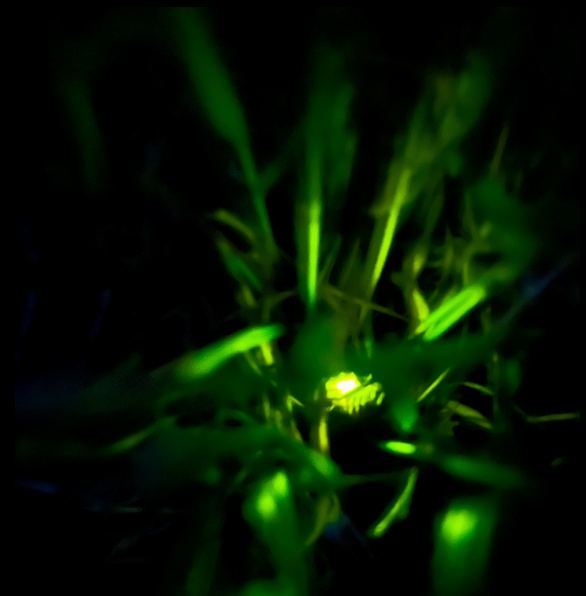


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