I am delighted to introduce “Life in the Soil” by James B. Nardi. This book fills an important niche missing in the soil science lexicon, that being an academic treatment of soils for a more wide ranging audience than most soil texts with special attention paid to soil macrofauna. This book could be the missing link for introductory soils courses for non-majors, fish and wildlife programs, soil biology courses specifically looking for a text on macrobiota, forestry, natural resources, landscape ecology, horticulture, serious gardeners and a general audience looking for more than the usual light treatment of soils typically seen in the popular press. It is a thorough and careful work within a particular slice of soils knowledge that deserves such a book.

The book starts out with the standard soils cannon on soil formation but with fresh eyes and written from the slightly different perspective of a naturalist. The book rapidly moves to the contribution and use of soils by plants and soil animals large and small. A fine group of illustrations showing plants in soil is used to great effect and clear, concise language is given to the many fascinating symbiotic relationships that exist between plants and microbes—some really great and inspiring prose. The remaining ~2/3 of the book is dedicated to discussing specific soil biota (44 invertebrates and 8 vertebrates) with each group of organisms introduced in a quick-facts box that gives phylum-family information as well as place in food web, impact on gardens, size and numbers, etc. Great illustrations throughout (drawings!) as well as some photos really capture the use of soils as a 3-dimentional habitat by soil organisms. The last part of the book gives good information on human soil use with practical, garden-scale information on fertilizer use, exotic species, and a pretty good treatment of home composting. Also included at the very end of the book is an “amateur naturalist” short section on collecting and observing soil life. Instructions on building cheap and effective tools for collecting and observing soil organisms with special emphasis on using household materials and readily found objects is wonderfully disarming and makes the reader feel empowered to see for him or herself that soil is the ultimate habitat and not the exclusive domain of the “expert”—soils for all!

This is not an extensive soil science treatment (293 pages) but it is a fresh and much needed “bridging-text” that can bring soils to related studies. I love this book and hope to incorporate it into my soils for non-majors class and at only $25 I think my students will really appreciate it.

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