

**ALIENS FROM EARTH: WHEN ANIMALS AND PLANTS INVADE OTHER
ECOSYSTEMS
BY MARY BATTEN**

**Louisiana Young Readers' Choice Award Nominee 2006
Grades 3-5**

Submitted by Martha Jordan, Children's Services Coordinator
Ouachita Parish Public Library, Monroe

Title: Aliens From Earth: When Animals and Plants Invade Other Ecosystems

Author: Mary Batten

Illustrator: Beverly J. Doyle

Publisher: Peachtree Publishers, Ltd., 2003

Pages: 32

Summary

Batten, an award-winning science writer, offers a fascinating look at what can happen when a foreign (alien) plant or animal enters an ecosystem where it doesn't belong. Striking double-page spreads of beautiful artwork add visual excitement to Batten's text. In all ecosystems, the plants and animals are interconnected and depend on each other for food or other life-sustaining elements. When another organism enters that ecosystem, it can upset the balance. Batten discusses the problem of alien invasion in general and also gives several specific examples. Some of the invasions were accidental, as when a plant or animal was present on a ship and introduced into the environment upon arrival at the ship's destination. Some were the result of intentional transplanting of an organism to solve a problem; but in solving one problem, another was created. One example that has occurred here in Louisiana that she describes in the introduction of kudzu into the United States. Kudzu, which is a fast-growing vine, was introduced by the Japanese at their exhibit in the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Americans began planting the vine in their gardens and later it was used to prevent erosion of farmland. Now it is causing severe damage to forests in the southeastern U.S., including Louisiana, where it can grow up to a foot a day covering trees and keeping them from getting needed sunlight.

Author's Biography

Mary Batten, an award-winning science writer, has written numerous children's books, many of which focus on environmental problems. She also writes for television and film and was nominated for an Emmy for her work with *3-2-1 Contact*, a science series produced by the Children's Television Network. Born in 1937 in Smithfield, Virginia, her first "field station" was the peanut farm where she grew up. As a child, she played in the woods and waded through forest streams, learning much about nature and gaining respect and appreciation for all living things. In her own words, she tries "to convey the excitement I feel about our extraordinary planet, the diversity of life, and the

responsibility that humans have to care for the other species with which we share our global habitat." She lives in Smithfield, Virginia with her husband, Ed Bland, who is a composer. They have two grown children, Robert Bland, a writer, and Stefanie Bland, a dancer.

Illustrator's Biography

A nature-lover all her life, Beverly Doyle earned a degree in fine arts from Framingham State College, then continued her studies at Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, California. She specializes in wildlife illustration. She currently lives in Morrison, Colorado.

Other Titles by Mary Batten

Nature's Tricksters. Sierra Club Books/Little Brown, 1992
Baby Wolf. Grosset & Dunlap, 1998
Hungry Plants. Golden Books, 2000
The Winking, Blinking Sea. Millbrook Press, 2000
Extinct! Creatures of the Past. Golden Books, 2000
Anthropologist: Scientist of the People. Houghton Mifflin, 2001
Hey Daddy!: Animal Fathers and Their Babies. Peachtree, 2002
Wild Cats. Golden Books, 2002
Who Has a Belly Button? Peachtree, 2004

Related Titles

Ecosystems and Environment by Ann Fulick
Exotic Species: Invaders in Paradise by Brenda Z. Guiberson
Food Chains and Webs by Holly Wallace

Classroom Connections

- Examine several alien invasions that have impacted Louisiana.
 - Kudzu: A fast-growing vine, kudzu was introduced by the Japanese at their exhibit in the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Americans began planting the vine in their gardens and later it was used to prevent erosion of farmland. Now it is causing severe damage to forests in the southeastern U.S., including Louisiana, where it covers trees and keeps them from getting needed sunlight. The vine is right at home in the warm climate and can grow up to a foot a day.
 - Nutria: These large rodents were brought to Louisiana in the 1930's to boost the fur industry. Later, they were introduced into the wild, where they have caused widespread damage to Louisiana's coastal wetlands by eating wetland plants.
 - Grass carp: Grass carp was introduced into Caney Lake in northeastern Louisiana to control the growth of the hydrilla, a plant which threatened to

cover the lake, causing problems for recreational activities. But this worked so well that now the carp population needs to be reduced so that all needed vegetation can grow back.

- Water hyacinths: Water hyacinths, like the hydrilla, cover a body of water and not only hinder boat travel but also affect the oxygen level in the water.
- Pick an ecosystem and prepare a chart showing the interrelationships among the various plants and animals.
- Have students pick an animal or plant discussed in the book and prepare a report about it.

Web Sites

Invasive Species

<http://www.invasivespecies.gov/>

This is a great website that has information about the federal government's activities and programs related to invasive species – impacts, responses, species profiles, related agencies and organizations.

Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries: Nutria

<http://www.nutria.com/site.php>

The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries site has information on the nutria, the fur industry, and the state's nutria control program.

Mary Batten

<http://www.marybatten.com/>

Mary Batten's site includes reviews of the book, a summary, bibliography of the author, and links to other information on other books by the author.

National Science Teacher Association - Recommends

<http://www2.nsta.org/recommends/product.asp?id=13772>

Contains a review of the book by a science teacher.