

THE TARANTULA SCIENTIST

Louisiana Young Readers' Choice Award Nominee 2007 Grades 6-8

Submitted by Gale K. Criswell, Children and Teen Services Consultant, State Library of Louisiana

The Tarantula Scientist by Sy Montgomery. Photographs by Nic Bishop. Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004. 80 p.

Summary

This excellent addition to Houghton Mifflin's Scientists in the Field series focuses on arachnologist Sam Marshall's study of tarantulas in the rainforest of French Guiana in South America. The lively prose and astonishingly clear full-color photography combine to make this an outstanding nonfiction book that will appeal to a broad range of students interested in nature. Even those who are repelled by spiders may find themselves fascinated by the incredibly detailed close-up photographs of the tarantulas. This is not your ordinary fact-laden nonfiction book. A friendly, informal narrative conveys Marshall's enthusiasm while he endures the discomforts of crawling on the floor of the rainforest to find the elusive Goliath birdeater tarantula. Fascinating facts about the tarantulas are interwoven with the descriptions of Marshall's activities in the field. Readers are also provided with information about what goes on "back home" in the spider laboratory at Hiram College in Ohio. Sam explains, "It is the only comparative tarantula lab in the world that is global in reach." The book includes a glossary, plus a list of books and web sites. The detailed, conversational writing and the outstanding photographs make this an exceptional book.

Author's Biography

The *Boston Globe* called Sy Montgomery "part Indiana Jones part Emily Dickinson." Sy Montgomery goes into the wild to research her books, films and articles. She has written numerous nonfiction books for adults and children. Her first children's book, *The Snake Scientist*, won an International Reading Association award. She lives with her husband and many animals in New Hampshire.

www.authorwire.com

Other Books by Montgomery

Search for the Golden Moon Bear

Encantado: Pink Dolphin of the Amazon

The Man-Eating Tigers of Sundarbans

Journey of the Pink Dolphins; An Amazon Quest

The Snake Scientist

Walking with the Great Apes: Jane Goodall, Dian Fossey, Birute Galdikas

Photographer's Biography

Nic Bishop grew up in New Zealand. He now lives in Massachusetts with his wife and several animals, including a flying squirrel named Amelia. Nic is both a photographer and an author of numerous children's nonfiction books. *The Snake Scientist* won the 2000 IRA Children's Book Award. *The Red-Eyed Tree Frog* won the Boston Globe Hornbook Award.

www.eduplace.com/kids/hmr/mtai/bishop.html

Books written and photographed by Bishop

Backyard Detective: Critters Up Close

Digging for Bird Dinosaurs: An Expedition to Madagascar

Forest Explorer: A Life-Sized Field Guide

The Secrets of Animal Flight

Books with photographs by Bishop

Chameleon, Chameleon by Joy Cowley.

Looking for Life in the Universe by Ellen Jackson.

The Red-Eyed Tree Frog by Joy Cowley.

The Snake Scientist by Sy Montgomery.

Related Titles: Spiders

Tarantulas and Other Arachnids by Sam Marshall.

Spiders and Their Kin by Herbert W. and Lorna R. Levi.

Florida's Fabulous Spiders by Sam Marshall and B.B. Edwards.

Tarantula Shoes by Tom Birdseye.

Spiders and Their Webs by Margery Facklam.

The Tarantula in My Purse and 172 Other Wild Pets by Jean Craighead George.

Classroom Connections

Science

- See **Houghton Mifflin Teacher's Guide**
<http://www.houghtonmifflinbooks.com/librarians/teacher.shtml>
This site has a Teacher's Guide with activities related to spiders.
- Have the students research different types of spiders and describe their habitat, diet and anatomy.
- Have the students research different creatures that live in the rainforest.
- Not all tarantulas live in rainforests. Have the students research different types of tarantulas and their habitats.
- Some people have tarantulas as pets. Have students research and report on the pros and cons of owning a tarantula.

Art

- See **Education World: Lesson Plan: Picture a Tarantula**
http://www.education-world.com/a_tsl/archives/05-1/lesson016.shtml
This is a teacher-submitted lesson plan specifically based on *The Tarantula Scientist*. Students are asked to draw a tarantula based on the description in the book. The teacher reads first eight pages of the book and then has the students draw.

Social Studies

- Have the students do a report on a career. They may read other books in the Scientists in the Field series or other books about careers.

Geography

- Have students research French Guiana.
- Have students research other areas with rainforests or where tarantulas live.

Web Links

Book, Author and Photographer

Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books: Nic Bishop "Rising Star"

<http://bccb.lis.uiuc.edu/0400rise.html>

This site includes biographical information about Bishop and critical acclaim for his work.

Hornbook: Bishop and Cowley

www.hbook.com/publications/magazine/articles/

http://www.hbook.com/publications/magazine/articles/jan00_bishop_cowley.asp

This article includes Bishop and Cowley's acceptance speech for the award for *The Red-Eyed Tree Frog*.

Houghton Mifflin Reader: Meet Nic Bishop

www.eduplace.com/kids/hmr/mtai/bishop.html

Biography of Nic Bishop.

Howard Mansfield and Sy Montgomery

www.authorwire.com

This site includes biographical information about Montgomery and a list of her books.

Suzy Red: Kids Wings: Tarantula Scientist

www.suzyred.com/2005tarantulascientist.html

Summary of book with links to related topics.

Tarantulas

About.com: Tarantulas as Pets

<http://exoticpets.about.com/cs/tarantulas/a/tarantulasaspet.htm>

This site gives advice to those who are considering a tarantula as a pet.

Education World: Lesson Plan: Picture a Tarantula

http://www.education-world.com/a_tsl/archives/05-1/lesson016.shtml

This is a teacher-submitted lesson plan specifically based on *The Tarantula Scientist*. Students are asked to draw a tarantula based on the description in the book. The teacher reads first eight pages of the book and then has the students draw.

Enchanted Learning: Tarantulas

<http://www.enchantedlearning.com/subjects/arachnids/spider/Tarantulaprintout.shtml>

This site includes basic facts about tarantulas, plus an excellent diagram of a tarantula's body.

LessonPlansPage.com: Where Spiders Live

<http://www.lessonplanspage.com/LAScienceArtCharlotteSpidersFindWhereLive45.htm>

This is a detailed lesson plan on spiders developed according to the Illinois State Goals.

National Geographic: Tarantulas

<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/tarantulas/index2.html>

Photographs and basic information about tarantulas.

PBS: Nature: “The Adventures of the Ultimate Spider-Hunter”

www.pbs.org/wnet/nature/spiderhunter/index.html

Information about the PBS TV show about Marin Nicholas, who, like Sam Marshall, traveled to French Guiana to search for tarantulas. Excellent photos included.

Rick C. West, Arachnologist: Tarantulas

<http://www.birdspiders.com/main.html>

Rick West is one of the leading authorities on tarantulas in the world. His site includes an extensive photo gallery of tarantulas.

Scott’s Photographs of Tarantulas

<http://www.animalpicturesarchive.com/list.php?qry=tarantula>

A photo gallery of captive-bred tarantulas.

French Guiana

Wikipedia: French Guiana

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_Guiana

Basic facts about French Guiana.

Galen Frysinger’s Photographs

www.galenfrysinger.com/cayenne.htm

Wonderful photographs of French Guiana.