

Non-fiction

Food

Tascoe: Lost supper

A bit of a romantic view about how we should eat, but very enjoyable

Wolke: What Einstein told his cook, vol. 1 and 2

A chemist answers readers' questions – my favourite being: if nothing sticks to teflon, how does teflon stick to the pan? Comes with recipes.

Nature

The seabird's cry

Bird books need no justification

John Reilly: Ascent of birds

Bird books need no justification

Futuyma: How birds evolve

Bird books need no justification but... the author has birds as a hobby and non-avian evol biol as his job. Explains key concepts of evolution via avian examples. Works well!

Aldersey-Williams: Tide – the science and lore of the greatest force on earth

This I read in the mountains during the pandemic, wondering when I'll ever see a tide again...

Flotsametrics

Similar to the Tide. Ocean currents.

Snakebite survivor's club

Taipans are a good choice if you want to die that way (or live to tell the tale)

Any book by Mary Roach

My favourites are the ones about what actually happens to bodies donated to science, and the one about the hygiene issues etc that astronauts face. After the toilet chapter I was for about a month elated thanks to the amazing fact that my work is all on this nice planet with gravity

The cloudspotter's guide

This started as a cloud appreciation society (necessary if you live in the UK) and grew into a book

What if? and How to? 2 books by Randall Munroe

the same author as xkcd comics, explaining absurd but physically accurate answers to absurd questions

P. Hoare: The whale

OMG the history of whaling is crazy.

Helen Macdonald: H is for hawk & Vesper flights

Probably the most talented nature writer ever. Could also be in the fiction category below, not sure what best applies

Alistair Bonnet: Off the map

This planet has various weird places.

E. Thompson: Infinite life

Is about eggs. I have bought it but not yet read it.

History (mostly science, incl scientist biographies)

Brookes: Extreme measures

If you don't know much about the life of Francis Galton, you'll be in for a surprise. Or two. Or three.

A history of the Roman empire in 21 women

Chatty and sometimes annoyingly ranting style but - the stories...

Infinitesimal

The church did not just hate Galileo but also the idea that a finite line could contain infinitely many points. And the superiority of Italian universities died & has never recovered.

Calculus wars

Newton & Leibniz really did try to get along at first.

e: the story of a number

This is about the 2.71828... Yes I read these kinds of books

Quammen: The kiwi's egg

this is a metaphor – the egg was the Origin and the kiwi was Darwin. The idea was almost too big to deliver

M. Cobb: Generation

It took a long time for people to understand sperm & eggs.

Andrea Wulf: A. v. Humboldt and the invention of nature

I read it because Humboldt funds me, but it would have been worth reading even if not

Ullica Segerstrale: Defenders of the truth

Emotions about sociobiology.

Tony Horwitz: Blue latitudes

The author and a funny character Roger Williamson (whose real life name is Roger Williamson) travel the route of Captain Cook. To equal measure hilarious & informative.

The feather thief

True crime – you could not make this up. From Wallace to museums to the weird subculture of fly-fishing where the fly is the collectable.

Fiction

Any book by Kazuo Ishiguro

They are all so different. The one about the pianist is great. And the Buried Giant is awesome. So is Clara and the sun. And Never let me go ... you won't forget that one.

Almost any book by Ian McEwan

Some old ones are great (the one that starts with the hot air balloon), then some small ones in between that got a bit gimmicky (the one told from the fetus' perspective was not so great), the most recent 2 I've enjoyed again: Lessons, and What can we know.

Life: a user's manual

The one about the Parisian apartment building. Comes with a vast index of all the sidetracks included.

Tove Jansson: all the moomin books

Children's literature that adults like too. Most kids' books are some sort of good vs evil stories. Here, differences might create conflict / sorrow but nobody is really bad. Author was more or less the 1st publicly lesbian figures in Finland. Moomins have later become commercialized & simplified but the original books are wonderful.

Any book by Stefan Zweig

The world of yesterday (Memoirs of a European), or the collection of short stories, or whatever... The author observed life in Europe with an incredible writing talent before WWII made him commit suicide (but not before finishing his memoirs & sending it to a publisher explaining that he'll be dead by the time the package arrives). All stories are profound, not all are depressing

King: Euphoria

A book exchange shelf yielded this. Fiction, but inspired by Margaret Mead's anthro work

I. Turpeinen: Beasts of the sea

"A heartbreaking elegy" it's said to be, and it is, on the nature of extinction, inspired by a Steller's sea cow skeleton that is in the building where I did my PhD in. When I read it I was sure that the author must have studied biology, but no, she just saw the skeleton and started thinking, reading and writing. I am very happy that it has been translated.

Keun: Child of all nations and Kingsolver: Poisonwood bible

Important themes, written from a child's perspective in a way that makes you think.

Mitchell: Cloud atlas

I have not enjoyed all books by D Mitchell but this one I did. Centuries change, authors' writing style changes, the fact that humans exploit each other doesn't.