

Slime: A Natural History

Susanne Wedlich

Ayca Turkoglu, Translator

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Slime is Susanne Wedlich's lively scientific study that underscores the importance of the slimy life forms and inert viscous interfaces that enervate the biosphere.

"Slime" is the catchall phrase for all the slippery, gooey hydrogels that grease biological engines in living organisms, that help to move tectonic plates, and that play vital roles in the carbon and nitrogen cycles. And Wedlich's wonder-filled appreciation for all things slimy is edifying and contagious, whether she's rhapsodizing about how cellular organelles defend against pathogens and communicate with each other through their sticky pores or describing how masses of tiny ocean creatures knit coastal environments together with dabs of slime when they moor ashore at night, adhering to grains of sand.

Stunning forms of marine life, often laced with bioluminescence, take center stage here: fire salps, hagfish, glass squids, and comb jellies are among the slippery creatures whose propulsion, defenses, and reproduction are described with admiration and sometimes humor. The chapters on other animals, plants, and fungi are also diverting.

The book's discussion of slime in the history of scientific thought and reports of current research is comprehensive and orderly. There are fascinating sections about humans' slimy anatomy and the potential for new hydrogel technologies, medical treatments, adhesives, and the remediation of plastic and nuclear waste. And the book's literary references—to H. P. Lovecraft, Rachel Carson, and Hans Christian Andersen among them—and philosophical analyses of why humans find slime so repugnant are intriguing. Wedlich concludes by considering how the Anthropocene era damaged ecosystems everywhere, perhaps ushering in a human-made "backwards step in the story of evolution."

Slime is a meditative and rewarding work in popular science concerned with the "dripping and oozing glory of slime."

RACHEL JAGARESKI (January / February 2023)

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