



## **BOOK DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

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### **Fuzz: when nature breaks the law**

**By Mary Roach**

1. In *Fuzz's* first chapter, Mary Roach is already on the move, attending a Wildlife-Human Attack Response Training course in Reno, Nevada. How does Roach's experiential approach to research—her commitment to seeing (and doing) everything firsthand—define her as a writer? What would *Fuzz* look like without it?
2. Roach distinguishes the felony crimes that form the focus of the book's first half from the "less grievous but more widespread" (p. 3) crimes (like jaywalking) that she explores in the second half. Do the punishments that species face throughout *Fuzz* match the severity of the crimes committed? If the magnitude of a crime doesn't determine the penalty, then what does? Do you think animals can be punished for following their instincts?
3. Roach mentions that she worked at a zoo in her twenties. How do you think that experience might have shaped her understanding of animals in the wild?
4. Roach comes across a number of highly unusual job titles throughout her travels (monkey capturing team, certified danger-tree assessor, and human bird scarer are just the tip of the iceberg). Which unconventional job did you find most appealing? Which would you least like to do?

5. Roach's exploration takes her outside of the United States, particularly to India and New Zealand. How do the approaches to wildlife management in those countries differ from those taken in the United States? Which country's philosophy makes the most sense to you?

6. Roach writes, "There are other ways to perceive the world. If you want to communicate something to an animal, you may need to translate your message" (p. 205). Where do you see this translation in action in *Fuzz*? How do the specialists Roach meets "read the natural world" (p. 129)? What are the consequences of not doing so?

7. *The Washington Post* calls Roach "America's funniest science writer." What role does humor play in *Fuzz*? How does it help Roach (and us as her readers) confront some of the more "heartbreaking" (p. 256) realities of human-wildlife relations? Are there moments in the book where Roach sets humor aside?

8. Hunters and more conservation-minded specialists have an uneasy relationship throughout *Fuzz*; yet Roach also notes, "Naturalists were the original biologists, and hunters and trappers were the original naturalists" (p. 130). Where in the book do hunters and conservationists butt heads, and where are they unexpectedly aligned? How do farmers fit into the equation? And how are the perspectives of all three rooted in what Roach calls "the inside-out history of conservation in America" (p. 172)?

9. Animal ethicist Bruce Warburton develops and tests humane traps in the belief that humans have "a duty of care" (p. 261) to minimize the suffering of the animals caught in them. How do other specialists that Roach introduces balance ethics with effectiveness in their approach to human-wildlife conflict? Can the two go hand in hand, and are there instances in which it's particularly difficult to reconcile one with the other?

10. National Wildlife Research Center Public Affairs Specialist Gail Keirn reflects that, "When it comes to wildlife issues, seems like we've created a lot of our own problems" (p. 248). What does Keirn mean by this, and does Roach agree? Where in *Fuzz* do humans seem to be at the root of the wildlife problems Roach discusses?

11. Speaking in 1958 of the US navy's albatross conundrum on Midway Atoll, an airman characterized himself and his fellow aviators as "only transients subject to the whims of a bird that refuses to be conquered" (p. 184). Why do you think that so many of the human efforts to control nature that Roach chronicles ultimately end in failure?

12. From a trip down the hatch into the alimentary canal to an exploration of the science that keeps soldiers protected, Roach's previous books always reveal something fundamental about their human subjects. What does her investigation of the natural world in *Fuzz* tell us about ourselves as human beings?

13. After visiting Roger's Colorado feedlot, Roach writes, "I'd like to end this book right here" (p. 288). Why does she feel this way? How do the gene drives that Roach discusses earlier in the chapter complicate her hopeful ending?

14. In the book's final pages, Roach returns from her two-year exploration and encounters a roof rat on the deck of her home. Though her immediate impulse is to drive to the hardware store for a rat trap, she thinks twice. Has *Fuzz* changed the way you think about the natural world? In future, will you approach your interactions with wildlife—even common household pests—any differently?

*Questions courtesy of the publisher:*

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