



# Do Lemmings Commit Suicide?: Beautiful Hypotheses and Ugly Facts

By Dennis Chitty

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In 1929, a group of scientists, including the author, working at the Bureau of Animal Population, Oxford University, began "the pursuit of the ecological Holy Grail", a scientific endeavor devoted to the search for the secret mechanisms behind biological life cycles as they occur in many animal populations. The results are presented here, in an account of science, not as it should be, but as it really is. Unlike nearly all science books which tell of successful ventures and satisfactory conclusions, this book reveals the harsher story of a scientific question left unanswered. Written by one of this century's most distinguished small mammal ecologists, it is both a personal history of and an apology for a life in science spent on research for which no final dramatic closure was reached. Included along the way are important anecdotes and history about Charles Elton and his pioneering work, from which much of modern population has grown, and insights on the philosophy and practice of science. Whether readers have an interest in population cycles, life sciences, or the history and philosophy of science, they will walk away with the inspiring notion that a life in science without a Nobel Prize is still well worth living.

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

"Since this is the story of the career of most scientists, it needs to be told. I am sure that [Chitty] can speak for the majority that a life in science without a Nobel Prize is still worth living." --*David Hull, Dept. of Philosophy, Northwestern University*

"Chitty's saga will be of value to historians and philosophers of science as well as to ecologists generally." --*Ecology*

"Chitty, who is 84, has written a scientific autobiography, and combined it with a treatise on how science is really done. He has interwoven his summary of a career-long pursuit of learning how small mammal populations are regulated in nature (we still do not know how) with a case history of how to work with colleagues, how to design experiments, what observations to gather, and some of the things that can go wrong. . . Required reading for field zoologists." --*Choice*

"An autobiographical account of a life's work in scientific research. . . . The book begins with a thorough debunking of the popular mythology surrounding lemmings. . . . This book is somewhat unusual for its genre, in that the author has chosen to emphasise the disappointments and false starts inherent in scientific research, including all the frustrations familiar to anyone who has ever engaged in the rustic alchemy of field ecology. . . . For philosophers of science and population ecologists who wish to know more about the history of small mammal ecology, this book may illuminate past advances in, and setbacks to, the understanding of population cycles. The references and insights into the practice of science will also be helpful to those unfamiliar with the literature on this subject."--*Discovery*

"spirited, often amusing book"--*The Sciences*

#### From the Back Cover

In 1929, a group of scientists, working at Oxford University, began "the pursuit of the ecological Holy Grail", an endeavor devoted to the search for the secret mechanisms behind biological life cycles as they occur in many animal populations. By 1935, the group had become the Bureau of Animal Population and was joined for one year, part-time, by a newly minted graduate of the University of Toronto. Twenty-six years later, when he returned to Canada. Dennis Chitty had learned much about cycles and even more about the process of science. The results are presented here in an intriguing and often irreverent account of science, not as it should be, but as it was and is. Unlike many science books which tell of successful ventures and

satisfactory conclusions, this book reveals the harsher but more common story of a scientific question left unanswered. Written by one of this century's most distinguished small-mammal ecologists, it is both a personal history and a vigorous defense of a life in pure science - even when no final dramatic closure was reached. Included along the way are important accounts of the pioneering work of Charles Elton, from which much of modern population biology has grown, and insights on the philosophy and practice of science.

#### **About the Author**

Dennis Chitty is a Professor Emeritus at the University of British Columbia.

### **Users Review**

#### **From reader reviews:**

##### **Lamont Williams:**

Do you certainly one of people who can't read satisfying if the sentence chained inside straightway, hold on guys this specific aren't like that. This Do Lemmings Commit Suicide?: Beautiful Hypotheses and Ugly Facts book is readable by means of you who hate those straight word style. You will find the data here are arrange for enjoyable looking at experience without leaving possibly decrease the knowledge that want to supply to you. The writer connected with Do Lemmings Commit Suicide?: Beautiful Hypotheses and Ugly Facts content conveys prospect easily to understand by most people. The printed and e-book are not different in the information but it just different in the form of it. So , do you continue to thinking Do Lemmings Commit Suicide?: Beautiful Hypotheses and Ugly Facts is not loveable to be your top record reading book?

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##### **Shirley Vega:**

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