

Fuzz Discussion Questions

by Mary Roach

Author Bio: (from website)

Mary Roach is the author of seven New York Times bestsellers. Mary's books have been published in 21 languages, and her second book, *SPOOK*, was a New York Times Notable Book.



Mary has written for *National Geographic*, *Wired*, *The New York Times Magazine*, and the *Journal of Clinical Anatomy*, among others. She was a guest editor of the Best American Science and Nature Writing series and an Osher Fellow with the San Francisco Exploratorium and serves as an advisor for Orion and Undark magazines.

Characters:

- **WHART** – Wildlife-Human Attack Response Training. Trainers are Canadian because most North American wildlife attacks happen there.
- **Stewart Breck** – Aspen, Colorado. Employed by the National Wildlife Research Center. Teaches a course in wildlife-human conflict at Colorado State University. Co-founded the Center for Human-Carnivore Coexistence.
- **Kurtis Tesch** – District Wildlife Manager Aspen, Colorado.
- **Mario Klip** – Bear specialist with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife
- **Dipanjana Naha** – Researcher. Runs an “Awareness Camp” in India.
- **Officer Saroj Raj** – India. A member of the Elephant Control Squad.
- **Justin Dellinger** – California Mountain Lion & Grey Wolf researcher. PhD in wildlife biology.
- **Naha & Shweta** – Biologists for the Wildlife Institute of India.
- **Dave “Dazy” Weymer** – Blows up dangerous trees.
- **Virginia Roxas-Duncan** – Supervisory biologist with the US Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases. Researches biowarfare countermeasures.
- **Plum Brook Station** – Nasa tests rockets at this facility. They also have the “National Wildlife Strike” database which tracks bird (and other animal) hits on airplanes, rockets, and shuttles.
 - **Travis DeVault** and **Tom Seaman** (wildlife biologists) work here.
- **Gene-Drive** – Changing the genetics of a few members of a species (ex. mice) so that offspring is only male.
- **Jane Goodall** – Famous biologist who studies Gorillas. She is against genetically modifying (gene-drive) animals.

Animals/Nature featured in this book:

- Bears
- Elephants
- White Tailed Deer/Moose
- Macaques (Monkeys)
- Leopards
- Mountain Lions/cougars
- Trees
- Plants
- Birds (lots and lots of birds)
 - Blackbirds
 - Turkey Vultures
 - Gulls
- Penguins
- Stoats
- Mice

Discussion Questions:

1. Did you like the book? Why or why not?
2. Has **Fuzz** changed the way you think about the natural world? Will you approach your interactions with wildlife any differently?
3. What does Roach's investigation of the natural world in **Fuzz** tell us about ourselves as human beings?
4. What did you learn that surprised you about a specific animal? Did it change the way you see/feel about/interact with that animal?
5. In researching this book, Mary Roach comes across a number of highly unusual job titles throughout her travels. Which unconventional job did you find most interesting or appealing? Which would you least like to do?
6. One wildlife official says he had to put down a black bear sow and her baby. So, he tranquilized the baby, then shot the sow, and then put down the baby so they would not see the other get killed. What do you think of that? What does that say about both the wildlife official and how he sees bears and other animals?
7. The money to pay wildlife officials often comes from hunting licenses. So, the people who's job it is to protect both people and animals are payed for by those who are hunting the animals. What do you think of that irony?
8. Often hunters and conservationists butt heads, but sometimes they are unexpectedly aligned. Why do you think that happens? 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?"
9. Roach's exploration takes her outside of the United States, particularly to India and New Zealand. Did it surprise you how differently other parts of the world see animal/human conflicts? 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?"

10. Roach distinguishes the felony crimes that form the focus of the book's first half from the "less grievous but more widespread crimes 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? Can animals be culpable for the "crimes" they commit? Do you think animals can be punished for following their instincts?
11. Humans almost wiped out bears and other large animals in the move West. But now, due to conservation efforts, many of those populations are recovering. So, we are now seeing a surge in human animal conflicts as the animal populations recover. People love animals but don't want to see them in their homes. What is the answer?
12. "Natality is more effective than mortality." Killing off large numbers of animals does not significantly impact the conflicts that occur between humans and animals. Why is this true? If we know it won't work, why do you think people continue with the "population reduction" strategies?
13. National Wildlife Research Center Public Affairs Specialists Gail Keirn reflects that "When it comes to wildlife issues, seems like we've created a lot of our own problems." 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?
14. Why don't deer get out of the way of a car on a highway? Do you think evolution will change this behavior in the future?
15. The danger of moose/car accidents caused Saab and Volvo to change the way their car's windshields and roofs are designed. Does knowing that make you more likely to buy one of their cars? Why do you think other car companies haven't redesigned their vehicles?
16. What do you think about the research into gene-drive and changing the genetics of certain animals to only produce males? Jane Goodall is against gene-drives. Does that change how you feel about it?
17. 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?
18. What do you think we (as humans) can do about animal-human conflicts?
19. Mary Roach has written other books. Will you read any of them?

References:

- GoodReads – <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/56769577-fuzz>
- Mary Roach – <https://maryroach.net/>
- Novelist – <https://web-s-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.clevnet.org/novp/detail?vid=5&sid=7bf373dd-70f5-4ccb-8775-29f6bacbfa49%40redis&bdata=JnNpdGU9bm92cC1saXZI#UI=11006225&db=neh>
- Pittsburgh Freethought Community – <https://pghfreethought.org/event-5240737>

Mary Roach's Books

Nonfiction

- Stiff: The Curious Lives of Human Cadavers (2003)
 - Spook: Science Tackles the Afterlife (2005)
- Bonk: The Curious Coupling of Science and Sex (2008)
- Packing for Mars: The Curious Science of Life in the Void (2010)
 - Gulp: Adventures on the Alimentary Canal (2013)
- My Planet: Finding Humor in the Oddest Places (2013)
- Grunt: The Curious Science of Humans at War (2016)
 - Fuzz: When Nature Breaks the Law (2021)

If you liked Fuzz, try...

- Animals Strike Curious Poses – Elena Passarello
 - Are We Smart Enough to Know How Smart Animals Are? – FBM de Waal
 - Poached – Rachel Love Nuwer
 - An Immense World – Ed Yong
 - The Hidden Life of Trees – Peter Wohlleben
-