

What the humble fruit fly has taught us about human genetics

I came to [First in Fly](#), a new book about fruit-fly research, with perhaps some special interest. In fact, a popular appreciation of fruit flies has seemed long overdue to me. No single animal has contributed as much to the field of genetics as the ordinary and ubiquitous *Drosophila melanogaster*.

These tiny, winged, exoskeleton-ed creatures—so different from us in appearance—have led to research illuminating a surprising amount about the human body: The genes that tell a fruit fly where to sprout its legs are quite similar to the ones that tell our bodies where to sprout limbs. As are the genes that form the pattern of fine hairs on a fly's wing and the ones that orientate the tiny hairs in our ears. As are the genes that govern a fruit fly's circadian rhythm and the ones that give us jet lag. And so on. Research into *Drosophila* has resulted in at least [five Nobel Prizes](#).

First in Fly by Stephanie Elizabeth Mohr is a thorough chronicle of the contributions of these creatures to science over the past century.

...

In total, *Drosophila melanogaster* has 14,000 genes, 8,000 of which have human analogues. To read *First in Fly* is to appreciate the full scope of fruit-fly research and to understand the intimate connections in the DNA of every human cell and *Drosophila* cell.

Read full, original post: [Consider the Fruit Fly](#)