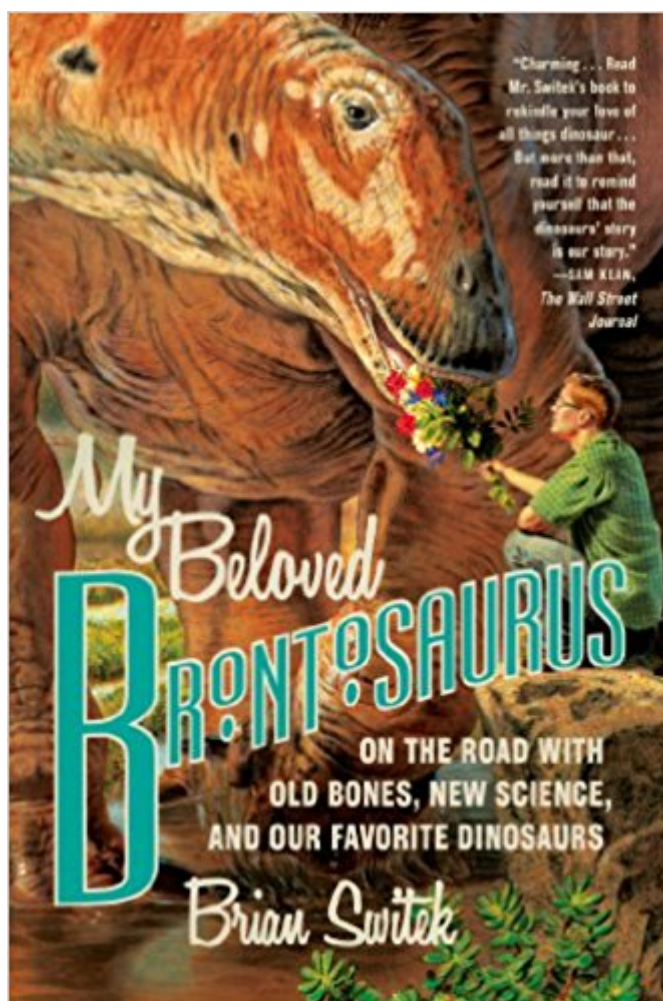


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# My Beloved Brontosaurus: On The Road With Old Bones, New Science, And Our Favorite Dinosaurs



## Synopsis

One of 's Best Science Books of 2013A Hudson Booksellers Staff Pick for the Best Books of 2013One of Publishers Weekly's Top Ten Spring Science BooksSelected by Apple's iBookstore as one of the best books of AprilA Bookshop Santa Cruz Staff PickDinosaurs, with their awe-inspiring size, terrifying claws and teeth, and otherworldly abilities, occupy a sacred place in our childhoods. They loom over museum halls, thunder through movies, and are a fundamental part of our collective imagination. In *My Beloved Brontosaurus*, the dinosaur fanatic Brian Switek enriches the childlike sense of wonder these amazing creatures instill in us. Investigating the latest discoveries in paleontology, he breathes new life into old bones. Switek reunites us with these mysterious creatures as he visits desolate excavation sites and hallowed museum vaults, exploring everything from the sex life of *Apatosaurus* and *T. rex*'s feather-laden body to just why dinosaurs vanished. (And of course, on his journey, he celebrates the book's titular hero, "Brontosaurus" — who suffered a second extinction when we learned he never existed at all — as a symbol of scientific progress.) With infectious enthusiasm, Switek questions what we've long held to be true about these beasts, weaving in stories from his obsession with dinosaurs, which started when he was just knee-high to a *Stegosaurus*. Endearing, surprising, and essential to our understanding of our own evolution and our place on Earth, *My Beloved Brontosaurus* is a book that dinosaur fans and anyone interested in scientific progress will cherish for years to come.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Switek, a journalist who digests technical literature on paleontology for mass-market publications,

presents dinosaurs through his own experience of enthusiasm, from childhood to his late-twenties present, for these giants of the earth. As a kid, his favorite behemoth was brontosaurus, which still inspires his adult imagination, though he knows apatosaurus replaced it in dino taxonomy. Memory of his inspiration by an iconic if mistakenly named dinosaur echoes in his tour of changing interpretations of dinosaurs by paleontologists during the century-plus they have studied them. Switek's memories arise in descriptions of his visits to exhibitions of fossils, lending a road-trip tenor to a narrative that describes the up-to-date knowledge about dinosaurs, contrasting present views with previous caricatures of dinosaurs as solitary, oversize dimwits doomed to go down for the count in the evolutionary boxing match. Switek's chapters tout dinosaurs as colorful, feather- and fuzz-covered creatures. Consideration of social behavior, from herding to fighting to reproduction, has spawned scientific theories on which, as well as those that debate extinction, Switek reports. Writing with unaffected ardor, Switek will resonate with readers fascinated by dinosaurs. --Gilbert Taylor --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

"Charming . . . We are beneficiaries of Mr. Switek's undiminished passion . . . The book is a delight, coming along when so much has changed in our understanding of dinosaurs, ever since the beginning of a renaissance in dinosaur studies in the 1970s and '80s . . . This may be the one book for catching up on what has become of the dinosaurs you thought you knew from grade school." The New York Times "My Beloved Brontosaurus is, in many ways, science writer Brian Switek's love letter to his favorite animal . . . But the book is more than a personal ode to fossils. Switek meets experts, tours museums and visits excavation sites. He is searching no longer for preserved eggs that might one day hatch dino-babies but rather for an understanding of what life in the age of dinosaurs was like." The Washington Post "Switek geeks out gloriously on everything from the truth about Jurassic Park to the ugliest roadside dinosaurs he has ever seen. He's a friendly guide to the latest in dinosaur science, whizzing through journal article after journal article on how cross sections of dinosaur bone can tell us about their physiology, or how fossil olfactory lobes can reveal their sense of smell through time . . . Much has been written about the 'dinosaur revolution' of recent decades, in which the idea of sluggish, passive reptiles transformed into more active and engaging creatures. Switek takes the science a step farther and into the 21st century." The Dallas Morning News "Switek passionately and playfully explores scientists' evolving perception of the wild, wonderful dinosaur world, emphasizing at every turn the dynamic nature of their field despite its now inanimate subjects . . . Switek intersperses his rich, well-researched scientific and historical

discussions with personal anecdotes and cultural signposts, weaving together a narrative that reveals the current state of the field as well as some of the wrong turns along the way.

“Fortunately for us, Brian Switek has continued to channel the enthusiasms of his own inner five-year-old. In his zany, sometimes mind-blowing romp through the new science of old bones . . . you too can nerd out anew . . . the discoveries Switek shares fill the old world with new wonders . . . Switek rekindles that childhood amazement at how vast the dinosaur world really was.”

“My Beloved Brontosaurus should appeal not only to those interested in dinosaurs, but to anyone interested in science, the history of science, or the natural world in general. It will also provide essential crib notes for any parent struggling to keep up with their child’s encyclopedic knowledge of the beasts.”

“Science writer Brian Switek ‘breathes new life into old bones’ with this jaw-dropping book about dinosaurs. Forget everything you thought you knew about the brontosaurus, for example--turns out they never existed. And the T-rex might have had feathers. I couldn’t believe how much there was to learn in this book. If you were the kind of kid who watched Jurassic Park obsessively, My Beloved Brontosaurus will feel like Christmas morning.”

“[Switek] deftly brings the concerns of dinosaur fanatics regarding the dinosaurian public image to the popular culture . . . it’s always a treat to read someone so captivated by the romance of natural history . . . Switek’s message is that dinosaurs are a relevant, vital field of study because the illumination extends to broader issues of evolution and the fate of our world. In the same way, My Beloved Brontosaurus uses the engaging topic of dinosaur lives as a way to celebrate the ongoing exploration of science at large.”

“Cleverly written, well researched and sprinkled with lots of tidbits of information gleaned from dinosaur sites that include Utah’s wealth of material, Brian Switek’s My Beloved Brontosaurus: On the Road with Old Bones, New Science and Our Favorite Dinosaurs is a jewel.”

“Switek has a knack for finding fascinating specifics and presenting them in engaging ways. He excels at relating fossil finds to their once-living counterparts, giving these animals an awesome sense of reality. Even readers whose younger days of dinosaur frenzy are long extinct will find My Beloved Brontosaurus a fascinating read.”

“Fascinating . . . Switek’s scope of knowledge is awesome . . . This is in the classic ‘news you can use’ for nerds genre.”

“If you are itching to learn more about dinosaurs than just the bare bones, so to speak, then Brian Switek’s My Beloved Brontosaurus is a must-read . . . In addition to being packed with

fresh research, this book is just flat-out fun to read . . . Perhaps Switek's greatest triumph with *My Beloved Brontosaurus* is proving beyond a shadow of a doubt that dinosaurs are not some esoteric, irrelevant subject, but are deeply connected to our own human story.

*Mindhut* "Switek's dinomania is infectious. The book charms with the author's passionate curiosity . . . half guidebook, half love note. Switek lays out an accessible, rich history of these creatures, along the way meditating on the larger issues raised by their ancient lives and our modern study of them, including our evolving understanding of evolution, the role of personality and bias in the scientific process, and the psychology of just what we humans see in these fascinating monsters.

*The Boston Globe* "Switek's writing is crisp and clean, and he knows his dinosaurs . . . [He] does a good job of keeping up with the latest refinements in dinosaur science. Crucially, he shares his enthusiasm well, writing about the fun, the weird and the wonderful without the tall tales of the explorers of old.

*New Scientist* "Switek's book is a lifeline for the dinosaur enthusiast--an entertaining guide to the latest science of dinosaurs.

*ScienceNews* "[C]harming . . . Read Mr. Switek's book to rekindle your love of all things dinosaur: the cheesy movies, the action figures, the many happy hours spent wandering through imaginary Jurassic jungles. But more than that, read it to remind yourself that the dinosaurs' story is our story and that, as Mr. Switek writes, 'extinction is the ultimate fate of all species. Nothing so majestically encapsulates these simple, powerful truths of nature quite like a dinosaur.'

*The Wall Street Journal* "[Switek] offer[s] a compelling mixture of reliable information, personal experiences and thoughts, anecdotes about paleontological research and even science philosophy, delivered in a breezy and engaging style . . . [he] paints a comprehensive picture of how our understanding of dinosaur evolution gradually advances . . . Switek has succeeded in covering a wide range of interesting topics in dinosaur palaeontology with infectious enthusiasm.

*Nature* "A charming journey . . . Making scientific concepts accessible using a playful voice, in the manner of Neil DeGrasse Tyson and Malcolm Gladwell, Switek guides readers through the ever-shifting world of conventional dino-wisdom, from why they became the dominant life form of their time, to what they looked like outside those giant bones, and even covering how they might have had sex.

*Salt Lake City Weekly* "Switek's chatty, informative cross-country adventure is the perfect read for catching up on the latest, most fascinating dino science.

*Mental Floss* "Switek has the charm and knowledge to make what you thought you learned in 4th grade totally awesome again.

*Ryan Britt, The Barnes & Noble Book Blog* "[A] wonderful overview of current research and knowledge of dinosaurs, for both

lifelong dino-lovers and people who need an introduction to the prehistoric beasts . . . informal, often humorous (in the tradition of great nonfiction writers like Mary Roach and Bill Bryson), without sacrificing scientific detail. The result is both readable and highly entertaining . . . an excellent field guide to the real dinosaurs that walked the planet.

“In My Beloved Brontosaurus, the dinosaur fanatic Brian Switek enriches the childlike sense of wonder these amazing creatures instill in us . . . Endearing, surprising, and essential to our understanding of our own evolution and our place on Earth, My Beloved Brontosaurus is a book that dinosaur fans and anyone interested in scientific progress will cherish for years to come.

“Switek earned fame as the unabashed dinosaur advocate behind the fossil-focused blog Laelaps. He applies that same blend of boyish exuberance and serious science to this exploration of paleontology’s roots, revisions, and future course . . . his zeal is infectious . . . Switek fleshes out the monstrous skeletons that we all remember from childhood museum field trips with meaty new findings about their anatomy and behavior.

“A revealing work of pop paleontology . . . Engaging and accessible enough for the lay person, readers will readily agree when Switek concludes that ‘dinosaurs are better than ever.

“Writing with unaffected ardor, Switek will resonate with readers fascinated by dinosaurs.

“An enthusiastic account of the history, description, discoveries, ongoing controversies and inaccurate media obsession with these popular but extinct creatures . . . A genuinely informative introduction to [Switek’s] favorite subject.

“Brian Switek is my favorite dinosaur tour guide in the world-smart, funny, lyrical, and can’t-put-it-down readable.

“There are so many dinosaur books-but My Beloved Brontosaurus is something special. Brian Switek, a self-confessed dinosaur fanatic, imparts his enthusiasm in a lively, thoroughly entertaining and carefully documented way. It is a joy to read such a well-researched and contemporary account of dinosaurs written for non-specialists . . . This hard-to-put-down volume includes all manner of tidbits, from amorous penguins to alligators dying of sunstroke. Well written and creatively structured, this beguiling work is enriched with personal experiences. And when readers reach the end of the book they will feel a sense of loss, like the demise of the incredible creatures captured between its covers.

“Switek has a true passion for the giants of the ancient past! Whether you are new to the world of the ‘fearfully great lizards’ or are a lapsed dinosaur-fanatic, this book will help you understand how paleontologists bring fossils to life.

— Thomas R. Holtz, Jr., Department of Geology, University of Maryland; author of *Dinosaurs: The Most Complete Up-To-Date Encyclopedia for Dinosaur Lovers of All Ages* — “You won’t find a better guide to paleontology than Brian Switek, a fossil-crazed writer whose clear-eyed skepticism never dampens his boyish enthusiasm. And why should it? *Dinosaurs*, Switek shows convincingly, need no hype to blow your mind. The man is fearless. This book is splendid.” — David Dobbs, author of *My Mother’s Lover* and *Reef Madness* — “With this new book, Brian Switek reaffirms his status as one of our premier gifted young science writers. It’s an exciting time for dinosaur research, and Brian is the best guide I know.” — Kevin Padian, University of California Museum of Paleontology, Berkeley

The cover design and publisher hype about this book might make you mistakenly think that this is a kid’s book, which is tragic because 1. It’s not and 2. It might keep you from buying one of the best science books written this year, bar none-- for YOURSELF!! "kid" you not-- if you want a break from your favorite mystery novel series for a plane ride or night reading, THIS IS IT! The author is a young genius at pulling our heart and head strings and leading us along with... what will happen next? The book is as engaging as a novel, but filled with research, science, documentation, citations, etc. as if it were researched as a scholarly text, then written for fun, love and enjoyment. An amazing blend. If you’re a fan of "popular science books" you’ll be surprised that even though the read is fast, engaging and fun, the author doesn’t dumb down the material at all-- there is plenty of deep paleontology snuck in, and you get a sense not only of his love for these critters, but his respect and determination to understand them scientifically. Our struggles to survive as humans, our coping with tragedy, and our many talents, are subtly reflected in every page as we watch creatures who, like Scott’s "aliens," should be immune to extinction, then cope with situations nothing can handle. With Jurassic Park type genetic biologists telling us that we may indeed be able to bring these creatures back some day (assuming WE make it), without being preachy, the author gives us a lesson in how we should view our more fragile fellow inhabitants here. If you’ve ever seen ANY episode of the discovery channel that you enjoyed, you won’t be able to put this book down, even if you’re not a dinophile. If you are... what are you waiting for, go for it! Could you read this to a child who likes dinos? Probably not, you’d have to skip or explain too much. Could you read this as a fun project with your significant other on a nasty weather day, rather than going to a movie-- now you’ve got it!!! UPDATE NOTE ABOUT KIDS: To emailer with "bright child" -- I tried this on my 10 year old grandson (editing out the inappropriate sections) and he’s not as bright as your son, this text is filled with at minimum High School science if not undergrad and some grad! Don’t

get me wrong, if you even have a younger child and want to spend the money giving it a shot, go for it. My motive was just to warn shoppers who thought the cover picture meant it was for young kids like a storybook for "my pet Bronto..", and when they get it, be disappointed and have the hassle of returning it. To be honest, they'd probably keep it and enjoy it themselves if they were bright enough to want their kids, like you, to experience this level of Paleontology! No insult to your bright child intended... and thanks for the positive vote. As just one example, the "big bang" chapter is all about dinosaur mating, including a Paleontologist and his wife who give stage demos of the Jurassic Sutra... so to speak... (I'm writing in code here as also has young readers).Library Picks reviews only for the benefit of shoppers and has nothing to do with , the authors, manufacturers or publishers of the items we review. We always buy the items we review for the sake of objectivity, and although we search for gems, are not shy about trashing an item if it's a waste of time or money for shoppers. If the reviewer identifies herself, her job or her field, it is only as a point of reference to help you gauge the background and any biases.

As a life time dino-fanatic, this book called to me as soon as I saw the cover. It's a page-turner, as the author has the gift of popular science gab, to the max. My dinosaur interest began in childhood during the early 50's, so I've seen lots of theories come and go, as well as changes in the appearance, blood temperature, and carriage of my prehistoric buddies over the years. It's been a long time since I sat down with the subject, but it was a huge break for me at the end of this year, to open such a book and dive in for a refresher course. The dinosaur of the title, Brontosaurus, has always been my favorite, and I was (at first) happy to learn that she had been reunited with a more suitable head--although not so happy to learn, later on, that she has been taxonomically "disappeared." I believe we must now talk about Apatosaurus, Diplodocus, and assorted relatives, but never mind, because these ladies and gents are still mind-blowingly huge! After finishing this book, I felt refreshed, happy to see that science is still being pursued and skillfully written about by smart, eloquent people, and ever so happy to become reacquainted with these fabulous creatures and brought up-to-date. We, The Third Chimpanze, have been here such an eye-blink in time by contrast with these exotic, block-buster creatures, some more astonishing than any 21st Century CG fantasy. It was a pleasure to accompany the author as he rambled through the wilds of Montana and Utah and discover them all over again.

This is *\*THE\** book for layperson dino lovers who want something beyond kids books. Other than rather inadequate illustrations, the book is about the best I have read. Each chapter segues into the



next and we cover all the bases- including why the Brontosaurus is now Apatosaurus. Even includes a fascinating chapter on what color the dinos were, dino sex, and of course T-rex and what Killed them all (or did it?).

I have been reading Brian Switek's blogs for some time and knew I had to get this book. I didn't read all the previous reviews so I hope someone mentioned the foldout poster book cover. Hold it up to the light and the Apatosaurus skeleton shows through. That should earn an extra star in any review. Since I regularly keep up with the latest news in dinosaurs, nothing in here was remarkable for me but it was nice to have a refresher course. I did not know, however, that many fossil footprints show signs for limping dinosaurs. It was a tough world. I was doing a talk at our church (hey, we're Unitarian Universalists) on how much of what we know now about dinosaurs has changed in the 20 years since Jurassic Park (I would like to suggest that today Crichton would surely have filled in the missing DNA code with birds instead of frog DNA) and was reading this book at the same time. I opened my talk by saying how envious I am of Brian Switek who is living the life I might of if we had blogs and the internet and email 30 years ago. And major points to Brian for his references to Bob Bakker for getting all of this dinosaur revolution started. Bakker, incidently, has updated the "Golden Book of Dinosaurs" with Luis Rey as illustrator (available for pre-order). My Beloved Brontosaurus is a worthy dinosaur book to have on hand. Not the depth and scope of Dinosaur Odyssey by Dr. Scott Sampson but a good overview of our new views of dinosaurs.

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