

# Preface

**B**eer is possibly the world's oldest alcoholic beverage, and it is certainly the most important historically. What is more, although beer has tended to lag behind wine in public esteem, in its more inspired manifestations it has at least as much to offer as wine does to our five senses, and to our human capacity for aesthetic appreciation. Indeed, it has been argued that beer not only is both conceptually and operationally more complex than its rival, but also can offer a more complete expression of its makers' intentions. None of this means, of course, that we lack enthusiasm for wine — as we hope any reader of our book *A Natural History of Wine* will immediately understand. Wine occupies a unique and important place in human experience, and in our own lives. But then again, so does beer; and it is clear to us that the two beverages, while complementary, are wholly distinct. If one of them merits consideration from a natural history perspective, so does the other.

Hence this book, which appears in a golden age for beer drinkers virtually everywhere. True, the recent excitement in craft brewing has unfolded against a monolithic backdrop of rather uniform mass-market beers, produced and sold in mind-numbing quantities by international giants. But at the more innovative end of the market, beers have never been produced in such variety and with such amazing inventiveness. The abundance of creative new offerings has had the effect of making the world of beer not only an exciting place but a rather confusing one as well, with an almost incomprehensible riot of consumer choice available through an archaic distribution system that makes many well-reputed beers hard to find. But sometimes a bit of anarchy can be exhilarating.

There are plenty of publications that will help you navigate the chaos, though frankly the craft is developing so fast that it is a full-time job just to keep up. Our intention here, though, is very different. Our

goal is to show just how complex the identity of beer is, by situating it first in its historical and cultural contexts, and then in the setting of the natural world from which both its ingredients and the human beings who make and drink it have emerged. In the process, we traverse evolution, ecology, history, primatology, physiology, neurobiology, chemistry, and even a bit of physics, in the hope of offering a more complete appreciation of the wonderful pale-straw-to-blackish-brown liquid that reposes in the glass in front of you. We hope you will find the journey as enlightening as we did.



This book was enormous fun to write, and even more fun to research. For help with the latter, we must thank many good friends and colleagues. Among them we wish particularly to mention Heinz Arndt, Mike Bates, Günter Bräuer, Annis Cordy, Mike Daflos, Patrick Gannon, Marty Gomberg, Sheridan Hewson-Smith and the University Club of New York City, Chris Kroes, Mike Lemke (who originally taught RD to homebrew, two decades ago), George McGlynn, Patrick McGovern, Michi Michael, Christian Roos, Bernardo Schierwater, and John Trosky. We also want to express our appreciation to our favorite drinking establishments in New York City. There are many, but among them ABC Beer Company, The Beer Shop, Carmine Street Beers, and Zum Schneider come particularly to mind, just as the old West 72nd Street Blarney Castle and its incomparable host Tom Crowe remain a fond memory.

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