LINDA FRANK
VON FRISCH’S TEN LITTLE HOUSEMATES

He explores their existence, examines their exuberance, exalts in their extravagance.

The housefly he calls a trim little creature. A man would have to leap from the Westminster Bridge to the top of Big Ben to compete with the flea. All living creatures are equal in the great law of life, he writes. Even bed bugs. Lice can carry two thousand times their body weight with their forefeet.

He says cockroaches are a community that has come down in the world. Silver fish, entirely harmless sugar guests.

The spider’s actions differ in detail according to the weaver’s character. We cannot blame the tick for her bloodthirstiness.

Anyone who has to hatch a few thousand eggs deserves a good meal. In gnats, the organs of flight have reached a high level of perfection. Moths are useful scavengers. What else would happen to all the decaying hair and feathers that disintegrate so slowly?

Von Frisch’s little housemates are extraordinary, in their own way exceptional. At the end of each affectionate chapter he recommends in equally good natured tone and detail how each could be best be exterminated.