

BOOK REVIEWS

ARNETT, R. H., JR. 2001. American insects. A handbook of the insects of America north of Mexico. Second edition. CRC Press; Boca Raton. xvii + 1003 p. ISBN 0-8493-0212-9. Paperback. \$99.95.

Over the years, Ross Arnett's "American insects" has become a standard reference for professional entomologists. A formidable manual, American insects is the place to go for a quick check on species richness, and a list of all genera found in America north of Mexico. Over 17,000 species reportedly are referenced. For common and pest species, geographic distribution is given. Keys for family level identification also are included.

The author died in 1999 at the age of 80, still vigorous in mind but frail in body. He had essentially completed the task of revising this popular book, but it fell to Mike Thomas and Paul Skelley of the Florida State Collection of Arthropods to fine-tune the manuscript prior to publication. Collectively, they made numerous improvements that make this important manual even more useful.

The second edition is substantially the same as the earlier version in organization, scope, and detail. As before, the contents are arranged taxonomically, though one additional order (Strepsiptera) now occurs, having been elevated from a family of Coleoptera. Some of the orders (e.g., Coleoptera, Lepidoptera, portions of Hemiptera and Homoptera) have been revised with the assistance of specialists, though the changes are principally nomenclatural. The order name "Hemiptera" is conserved, but the order names of diplurans, bristletails, and silverfish have been changed. Extinct orders have been elevated (as judged by font characteristics) to the status of living orders, but they are not numbered (as are living orders) and are not included in the table of contents.

The major benefits to the revision, other than updating the nomenclature, are changes designed to make the handbook more "user friendly." For example, in the first edition the index referenced book sections rather than page number, and I always found it difficult to navigate through this large tome. Also, the figures now have descriptive labels instead of only figure numbers. I found it most annoying to have to search the page (or pages) seeking an identity for the numerous illustrations. These are significant and greatly welcomed improvements.

Not all the changes are improvements, however. The first edition bore an impressive index, which has been markedly reduced in scope. For example, the entries listed under "Y" have been reduced from 63 to 4. The insect common names

have been deleted from the index, as have species entries. I think this is unfortunate. Many of the users will be economic entomologists and students, and more familiar with "Mexican bean beetle" than "*Epilachna varivestis*." Some users now will need another book to reference the scientific name in order to assess the contents of "American insects." Similarly, genus designations change much more frequently than species designations, and it now will be difficult to find information on species where such changes have occurred without first knowing the old genus name. I also was surprised to see a slight deterioration in quality of the line drawings. The photograph quality was not significantly affected, but some line drawings now have a fuzzy appearance.

Preparation of this monumental reference was undoubtedly a Herculean task for a single author, so it is not surprising that a number of errors in spelling, and underestimates of geographic range, have crept into the document. Unfortunately, most of these seem to have been preserved in the revision. The author is not solely at fault for this situation. It is difficult to acquire good editing and proofreading; friends quickly become former friends when you ask them to read such an enormous work, and publishers don't care to expend the funds to hire experts. I admit to being aware that the specific designations of several of my "favorite" insects such as asparagus beetle, lubber grasshopper, and eastern lubber grasshopper (common names which you can't look up in the index of the second edition!) were spelled incorrectly in the first edition. I should have notified Ross so corrections could be made in the second edition. Collectively we need to notify the publisher of such errors so as to enhance the future value of this important reference.

Overall, an immensely valuable book has been improved in the second edition. If you don't own a copy, give serious consideration to purchase of this book. If you own the first edition and you use it only occasionally for reference, the changes are not so great that you need to rush out to acquire a new version. If you are like me, however, and can't navigate effectively without page numbers, upgrading to the second edition will make an already useful reference even more handy.

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