

BOOK REVIEWS

CASTNER, J. L. 2000. Amazon insects. Feline Press; Gainesville, FL. 160 p. ISBN 0-9625150-1-9. Paperback, 5.75" × 5". \$15.00 (Available from Feline Press, P.O. Box 357219, Gainesville, FL 32635; shipping and handling \$3 via book rate or \$5 via priority mail within the U.S.A.; \$5 via surface mail or \$10 via airmail overseas).

This little book (14.7 cm w × 13.8 cm h) is a photographic treasure which contains 75 full-size (14.7 × 13.8 cm) close-up color photographs and 125 small size (3.7 × 2.4 cm or slightly larger) color photographs. Very nearly all of them look as if they had been taken of living insects in nature, and the quality of reproduction is excellent. This book therefore is very different from recent, expensive, large-sized books showing color plate after color plate of pinned, dead butterflies. The text accompanying the pictures is necessarily brief, but factual, and I was hard-pressed to find any errors of any sort in it. At the foot of each text page are a few lines of text in Spanish, presumably in deference to any Spanish-speaking readers. I have only two criticisms. First, why is there no Portuguese text when so much of the Amazon is in Brazil? Second, why are indications of size of insects (at top of each text page) given only in inches, when measurements in millimeters could so easily have been added for the benefit of South American readers?

This book portrays insects that the author/photographer encountered in numerous journeys to the upper Amazon. It reflects his interests in Orthoptera which are well represented, and portrays other large insects (and a few arachnids, a diplopod, a chilopod, a planarian, and an onychophoran). Small insects are ignored, although they are the majority in the Amazon as elsewhere. But, as the author points out, why should such a book offer a balanced selection of insect photographs—balanced so as to show representatives of the 75 most speciose insect families, or balanced to show the 200 most abundant insect species in the Amazon region? The non-entomologist who buys this book won't even notice the vast majority of small insects unless they bite or sting or otherwise annoy. The specialist who visits the Amazon to look for (say) termites will find this book no use for termite identification. This termite specialist may pay no attention to the small insects belonging to other taxa, but will surely notice the large and spectacular insects that this book illustrates—and will surely want to know a little more about them, so even to this specialist the book is useful.

I don't know of any comparable book. **Latin American insects and entomology** (Hogue, C. L. 1993. University of California Press; Berkeley) offers a general introduction to insects in Latin America, has far more text (and more errors), lots of references, and only 32 color photographs. **Insects of an Amazon forest** (Penny, N. D. 1982. Columbia University Press; New York) is data-rich in ecological analysis of ecosystems, but at the level of higher taxa. Neither of these books is helpful to the traveller in identifying the oh-my! insects that he or she may encounter. There is no "Field Guide to Amazon Insects." Perhaps the closest thing is the series "A Golden Nature Guide" of little books (Golden Press; New York) on various topics, which are aimed at rough identification of some of the commoner spiders and their kin, insect pests, butterflies and moths, etc. in America north of Mexico, but which lack color photographs. If you think **Amazon insects** is expensive compared with a "Golden Nature Guide", think instead of the number and quality of the photographs and the more limited market: I think it is a bargain at \$15.

J. H. Frank
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