

BOOK REVIEW

Le Peru, B. 2011. The spiders of Europe, a synthesis of data: Volume 1 Atypidae to Theridiidae. Mémoires de la Société linnéenne de Lyon 2: 1-522. ISSN 0366-1326. ISBN 978-2-9531930-3-9. To be obtained from the Société linnéenne de Lyon (€35).

This undoubtedly is a very important contribution to the set of identification tools for European spiders. According to the introduction this is the first volume of a series of four and comprises 28 families, from Atypidae to Theridiidae as the title indicates. It is neither clear why the families in the present volume were selected nor in which order the remaining families will be spread over the three volumes still to be published. In the Introduction (p. 3) it is stated that “The families are presented in accordance with the order used in main current catalogues of spiders.” but most of them are now on the internet and in alphabetical order. We have to exercise patience and await the next volumes.

It is impossible to review the whole book in all its aspects and I will restrict myself here to the most important features of the book and comment on the contents which will be consulted by most users.

Contents. An introductory part – bilingual, French and English, the rest of the book is in English – explains the structure of the book, the geographic coverage and the structure of the maps, the literature and general sources used, the taxonomic principles employed in this book, and the composition of the descriptions of the species and the illustrations.

The introductory part is followed by a long and well-illustrated chapter on morphology, including a glossary of scientific terms. This is followed by the taxonomic part, which starts with the diagnoses of all spider families occurring in Europe with supporting illustrations, a list of the families treated in this volume and a checklist of the European species included in these families. The chapter “Diagnoses of the families” does not only give the diagnoses, but also has the character of an identification key to the families with the use of simple characters, such as the number of eyes, the number of tarsal claws, leading to groups of families. This is the classic method of Simon and his contemporaries! Within these groups the traditional characters are used for the recognition of families, such as presence or absence of a cribellum, of trichobothria or of peculiar characters. No group is based on the presence of RTA. Inevitably this ends up with inconsistencies, of which I will give just one example out of several. On p. 39 the family Agelenidae (“tarsi with a row of trichobothria; posterior spinnerets long; ecribellate”) has to be distinguished from the Hahniidae (“tarsi with a row of trichobothria; posterior spinnerets long”). People who are familiar with spider classification will not be misled because they will not use this part of the book, people who are new in the world of spiders will not be helped.

Nomenclature and taxonomy. To begin with, the author makes it clear that he is averse to changes in nomenclature for the sake of priority and cites article 23.2 from the 4th edition of the International Code of Zoological Nomenclature to explain his preference for stability over priority. Although he states to generally follow Platnick’s Catalog (last version consulted is 10.5 of 2010) he clearly states to make exceptions for the sake of priority. An overview of the accepted and non-accepted synonymies suggested in Platnick’s Catalog is presented in the “Taxonomic notes” at the end of the checklist (p. 57). I hope the author realizes that his decision leads to instability rather than stability and certainly is not user-friendly. As example, all recent taxonomic and nomenclatorial changes in the Theridiidae are neglected: the genus *Rhomphaea* is again synonymised with *Argyrodes*, *Phycosoma inornata* (O. P.-Cambridge, 1861) has returned to *Dipoena*, species of *Parasteatoda* are back in *Achaearanea*, *Neospintharus syriacus* (O. P.-Cambridge, 1872) is again *Argyrodes syriacus* O. P.-Cambridge, 1872, *Laseola* is back in *Dipoena*, species of *Cryptachaea* were returned to *Achaearanea*, and *Asagena phalerata* (Panzer, 1801) is called *Steatoda phalerata* (Panzer, 1801). More recent revisional work on the genus *Theridion* is not followed. No other argument is presented than the author’s preference for stability in nomenclature. This example shows how difficult it is to work with the contents of the book, the checklist, and the descriptions and maps of the species. Luckily the index has species names as entry. Whatever the future will make of the changes of the last decade, it would have been wiser to follow the widely accepted Platnick Catalog, or present solid arguments to deny progress in taxonomy.

Two new synonymies are proposed in a rather hidden way (p. 57). *Sardostalita* Gasparo, 1999 is synonymised with *Kaemis* Deeleman-Rheinhold, 1993 (see also p. 208). No arguments are presented and Platnick has not followed this suggestion in his 2012 Catalog, Version 13.0. The other one is *Synaphris saphrynis* Lopardo, Hormiga & Melic 2007, which was suggested to be a synonym of *S. lehtineni* Marusik, Gnelitsa & Kovblyuk, 2005 (see also p. 345-346), but the arguments were, again, too weak for Platnick to follow the proposal and he only refers to it.

Maps and distribution. Here we have to note a number of remarkable features. Europe is modified, apparently for personal, practical reasons, in that the European part of Russia is excluded and the European part of Turkey as well. *De facto*, the title of the book is not correct. The European part of Russia is certainly not a minor part of

Europe. Moreover some smaller countries or regions with an official national status, such as Andorra, Gibraltar, Liechtenstein, Monaco, and the Vatican are fused with neighboring countries: Andorra and Gibraltar are included in Spain, Monaco belongs to France, the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg is part of Belgium(!), Wales is incorporated in England but Scotland is not, Liechtenstein and the Vatican are not mentioned at all. Ireland includes both the Irish Republic and Northern Ireland. For Greece no distinction is made between the different zoogeographical areas such as the mainland, Crete, and some distinct archipelagoes. On the other hand, some western Mediterranean countries like Spain, France, and Italy are subdivided into zoogeographical provinces (atlantic, mediterranean, central). This probably demonstrates the author's personal sphere of interest and also his access to detailed data for those countries. The exclusion of Madeira, the Canary Islands and the Azores is understandable and is not really detrimental to the users.

If we compare this with the system used in *Fauna Europaea*, the recognition of countries and zoogeographical areas differs substantially and is disturbing and impractical in some cases but more detailed in others.

Main body of the book. The main body of the book runs from p. 58-487 and deals with the families selected for this first volume, their European genera and species. A list of references and an index close off the volume. This part comprises the descriptions and distributions of the European species (genera in alphabetical order within the family, species in alphabetical order within the genus) together with relevant references and remarks on habitat and period of adulthood. For each species a distribution map is provided for which the *Fauna Europaea* database on the internet was used. All species are depicted, and here we come to the most important and useful part of Le Peru's contribution to arachnology: the illustrations. All illustrations are original. He does not follow the traditional way of depicting epigyne, vulva, male palp in retrolateral view and maybe a detailed figure of an important element for each species – if either sex is known – but provides a figure of the epigyne or vulva, sometimes both, and a figure of the male palp from the side where the shape of the most useful distinguishing character is best visible. The angle of view is kept constant within a genus so as to make comparison as successful as possible. This is real support for identification efforts and is very helpful for species which had not been depicted before, such as species described by Simon in the late 19th and early 20th century. I look forward to the illustrations of the Linyphiidae! For many species an additional figure of a diagnostic somatic feature is presented.

This drawing technique used is not explained, but the figures look as if made in a computer-supported process. The illustrations, therefore, are not made to look "drawn from nature" but aim at providing an illustration which stresses the characteristic, diagnostic elements. Of course this harbors some danger in that possible differences in other elements - of the male palp especially - between the illustration and the specimen one tries to identify escape discovery.

How to obtain the book. It proved to be strangely difficult to buy a copy of the book. The Société linnéenne de Lyon is easily located through the internet, but the society is not actively promoting the first issue of this book series – an understatement really. Only after repeated messages I was able to obtain the bank account number and could place my order by paying the amount indicated on their website. One should ask for that! It finally arrived two months after the first efforts.

Despite the above critical remarks we should praise the initiative to deal with the complete European spider fauna in this clearly structured way. There is nothing of this sort available as yet. If the set is completed we have an important tool for the identification of spiders in Europe. The disadvantage of publishing such a huge work as a series of books is its fixed state which means that it is out of date on the day it is published. On the Internet it could have regular updates and easily follow the latest changes in nomenclature and distribution. It would be of permanent use and not lose its value. Taxonomy and faunistics are dynamic!

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