

Book review

NORDSIECK, H., 2007. Worldwide door snails: 1-214, pls 1-20, many figs. ISBN 978-3-939767-07-7. Published by: ConchBooks, K. & C. Groh, Mainzer Straße 25, D-55546 Hackenheim, Germany; <http://www.conchbooks.de>. Hardcover, € 60.

There can be no doubt: nobody these days knows more about the fascinating family of pulmonate land snails Clausiliidae than the author of this impressive book. The 12 chapters, some of which were partly published before, deal with many different aspects of the Clausiliidae: 1, 'Family Clausiliidae – general information, systematic position, subdivision, evolution'; 2, 'List of recent Clausiliidae'; 3, 'Tribe and genus systematics'; 4, 'Evolution of the clausilial apparatus'; 5, 'Important shell characters of Clausiliidae: G-type clausilial apparatus, inner lamellae endings'; 6, 'Subspecies patterns and hybridization in European Clausiliidae'; 7, 'AICC-group – problems of high diversity'; 8, 'Mating biology of Clausiliidae'; 9, 'List of fossil Clausiliidae'; 10, 'Pre-Pleistocene Clausiliidae of central and western Europe'; 11, 'Clausiliid faunas from Pliocene and Pleistocene of central and western Europe'; 12, 'Techniques'. Two more chapters are added as Appendix 1, 'New genus and species taxa', and Appendix 2, 'Terms'. The illustrations are very beautiful (which does not apply to the maps on pp. 101 and 104) and the many coloured photographs are superb. The general overview of both the Recent and the fossil taxa is extremely useful and will remain so for a long time.

This is not a regular book, as the clausiliids are not regular snails. There is a wealth of factual data in it, what makes this publication most valuable, next to very personal views, which are presented as the unshakable truth, sometimes without any argumentation. Therefore, this is indirectly also a book about the author, speaking about his favorite creatures, sometimes as if there is nothing else around. For example, despite the fact that there is an extensive literature on species concepts, Nordsieck presents his own definitions, without any reference to anything in that literature: species (p. 96) "differ from those other species by certain morphological characters, the essential taxonomic characters." Subspecies "are defined by the same taxonomic characters as the species." These definitions, also when cited more completely, are not really helpful. Knowing what is essential remains the privilege of the author. Consulting Appendix 1, in which new species and subspecies are described, does not solve the problem. It remains unclear why transitional forms are considered interspecific hybrids in one case and intraspecific elsewhere. The measuring rod used by the author remains unexplained. In many cases only its results are presented, i.e. the conclusions based on it. The conceptual basis of for example "hybrid subspecies" (p. 164) is not explained.

The author refuses to accept the results of molecular methods and phylogeny reconstruction when these data contradict his own views. The fact that there is no real conflict between molecular and morphological data, but only a shift in the weighing of the latter, is neglected. This results in a large step backwards in chapter 7, in which several biologically meaningful taxa are lumped together because (p. 110) they "cannot be used for taxonomic work." However, there have never been clear conchological diagnoses for the taxa involved. The anatomical criteria that were used simply turned out to be wrong. DNA sequences should not be used uncritically, but it cannot be denied that they have enabled relevant progress in "taxonomic work", as I see it.

The foregoing, critical remarks illustrate that this book may trigger discussions. There can be no discussion about one point, however: Nordsieck's opus is a masterpiece, which deserves a prominent place on the bookshelf.