

LITERATURE REVIEWS

THE NEW NATURALISTS

By Peter Marren

304 pages, with 16 plates providing 58 colour illustrations, and many half-tones. 15.5×23.5 cm. Harper-Collins, London and Glasgow. 1995. Hardback, ISBN 000-21998, £30.00. Softback, ISBN 000-21997, £14.99.

Anyone with an interest in natural history will know of the Collins New Naturalist series even if they have acquired only a few of the titles for themselves. Eighty-one volumes concerned either with part of the flora and fauna of Britain or with one of its natural regions are complemented by twenty-two monographs, each devoted to an individual plant or animal species. I have become the proud owner of fifty of these since the first, *Butterflies*, appeared in 1945; the latest, *Ladybirds*, was published in 1994.

The work reviewed here has been published to celebrate this fifty years of natural history publishing and describes how it was started by the publisher Sir William Collins and an editorial board consisting of Sir Julian Huxley, James Fisher, John Gilmour, Eric Hardy and Sir Dudley Stamp.

This delightful book gives both the formative history and contents of each volume, and provides a great deal of biographical information about each of the authors. These include past members of our Society: W.S. Bristowe (*The World of Spiders*); C. G. Butler (*The World of the Honey Bee*) and, with J. B. Free, (*Bumblebees*); and E. A. Ellis (*The Broads*). Information provided by other members of the B.A.S. is acknowledged, and there is a fine photograph of Bristowe taken by David Nellist in 1977.

When Bristowe's manuscript, with illustrations by Arthur Smith, came before the Board it created a sensation and James Fisher exclaimed: 'This is the best N.N. book we have ever had.' It was published as Volume 38 in 1958. When a second edition appeared in 1971, Bristowe rather spoiled it with a carelessly constructed three-page addendum, intended to update the book without a full revision. Bristowe tended to get bored unless he was in the limelight.

Each chapter is full of compulsive reading, written in great style, with history combined with amusing anecdotes about the quirks of the individual authors. For example, Wilfred Blunt 'His life fascinated with flowers, but not one to dirty his hands weeding'; W. S. Bristowe 'Ploughed a lone furrow as a naturalist; non-arachnological interests, mainly in retirement, included antiquities, gipsy caravans, and Sherlock Holmes'; W. G. Hoskins 'Retired from university life to escape from the growing lunacy of administrative chores'; not forgetting H. W. Swinnerton 'Age did not weary him; he wrote the New Naturalist book (*Fossils*) when in his 80s.' He died at 91.

Because he was so remarkable, E. B. Ford (1901-1988) gets a full chapter to himself. He introduced genetics into the study of Lepidoptera in the first volume of the series, *Butterflies* (1945), a bestseller which ran to eight editions and a total printing of 93,500 copies. Later, he wrote Volume 30, *Moths*, published in 1954. Although he was born in Cumbria, I never met him. But I knew his father, the Revd H. D. Ford, a village vicar and also a lepidopterist, who was President of Carlisle Natural History Society when I served on the Council in 1933. The book is worth reading for this chapter alone.

A unique feature of the N.N. series has been the

unusual and distinctive dust-cover designs by Clifford and Rosemary Ellis. Peter Marren has been able to include many of them, including some which were not used, or were intended for volumes which were never published. No less than three very attractive covers were designed for *The Broads* by E. A. Ellis, which in the end was provided with nothing better than a photographic cover. Miriam Rothschild did not get the 'pretty jacket' for *Fleas, Flukes and Cuckoos*, featuring a Cuckoo, which she hankered after, and had to be content with a plain printed cover, even though she had commissioned and paid for the cover design she wanted.

I am so excited by this book that I started this review before I had finished reading it. If I have allowed myself to be carried away by my enthusiasm for it, it must be because many of the authors of the volumes were my generation: it is in effect a recent history of natural history. I realise that people younger than myself may not find it quite so enthralling, but this is a book I just had to buy.

J. R. P.

ARACHNOLOGISCHE MITTEILUNG

Two issues a year of about 60 pages each. 21.0×14.8 cm. Published by Arachnologische Arbeitsgemeinschaften Deutschlands. Subscriptions (DM 20 for individuals) to Franz Renner, Sonnentauser 3, D-88410, Bad Wurzbach, Germany. ISSN 1018-4174.

This journal was started in 1990 by arachnological study groups in Germany to provide an outlet for short, primarily German-language, arachnological reports which previously had to be published in non-German publications such as our own *Newsletter*. *Arachnologische Mitteilung* concentrates on faunal and ecological papers on all arachnids (excluding mites) of Central Europe, for example: local lists, behaviour, history of arachnology, new literature, geographical and taxonomic problems (but excluding taxonomic revisions). Numbers 5 to 9 (June 1993-July 1995) and Special Issue 1 (July 1995) are reviewed here.

The five issues average 66 pages, but the last two are close to 80 pages long. The later issues carry an English Contents page; longer articles (about two per issue) have English summaries; short communications (5 to 15 per issue) have English subtitles; and, occasionally, an article is wholly in English. Species lists, maps and diagrams are, of course, understandable without translation. Amongst the longer papers are (edited titles): *Comaroma simoni* as an example of the use of Ellenberg's indicator value system for autecological characterization of spider species; Supplement to the Catalogue of Swiss spiders (new records 1990-1993); Checklist of the spiders of Lithuania; Feeding biology and prey of *Pisaura mirabilis*. Short communications over the last few issues have included: Distribution and habitat of *Pocadicnemis pumila* and *P. juncea* in Sweden [in English]; Overwintering spiders in snail shells; *Erigonella subelevata*, *Coelotes solitarius* and *Xysticus gallicus* new to Germany; A handy vacuum collector for catching spiders and insects; Records of new or rarely encountered arachnids in Slovakia. Most short articles, to be honest, are about new German records (Issue 8 consisted almost entirely of new German records), and, since the climate is warming at present, it is usually of southern European species expanding their ranges northwards. These articles often include reasonable drawings of the spiders and their genitalia, so they can be very useful for identification of spiders collected on continental holidays or of difficult

specimens which might be new to Britain. Two sections at the back of each issue, Book Reviews and Diversa, review books and announcements, respectively, of interest to Central European arachnologists.

The Special Issue (55 pages) is a Checklist of arachnids (excl. Acarida) of Germany (Arachnida: Araneida, Opilionida, Pseudoscorpionida) compiled by eight authors. This lists 956 spiders, 45 harvestmen and 45 pseudoscorpions. Usefully, there is an introduction which discusses the status of debatable records, taxonomic problems and earlier literature. In the checklist, a citation of the record is given, and a full reference list, thus making this an extremely useful publication for those interested in German arachnids. Interestingly, many of the citations are to papers in *Arachnologische Mitteilung*, and no doubt future issues will continually update the checklist.

The journal is well produced, with a bright yellow cover, strongly bound and in A5 format. The back cover gives the contents, and inside covers give addresses of editors etc. and notes for prospective authors. A Helvetica font is used and the drawings are clearly printed (some even from scanned pencil drawings). Twenty DM is about £9.30 at current rates of exchange, which may seem a little steep for 120 A5 pages, but I doubt if there is a better way of getting hold of this information. I would certainly recommend a subscription to anyone interested in the arachnid fauna of Central Europe.

Paul Selden

NOTES AND COMMENTS

Aerial Dispersal: The unusually fine mild weather of October 1995 produced some very extraordinary aerial dispersals of linyphiid spiders in this part of England. The field layer and the hedgerows were swathed in gossamer and this stimulated a lot of local interest and comment. A farmer at Kirby Lonsdale telephoned me to ask the reason for and cause of the phenomenon and, at a meeting of the Reserves Committee of the Cumbria Wildlife Trust, another farmer asked me about it and said he had taken photographs which he will let me see at a future meeting. Both events took place in SE Cumbria, but there was no evidence of similar dispersal near my home in Keswick. Was this then restricted to a small part of Cumbria or were there similar noteworthy dispersals elsewhere in Britain at that time? I would be most interested to hear about other records either directly or through the columns of the Newsletter.

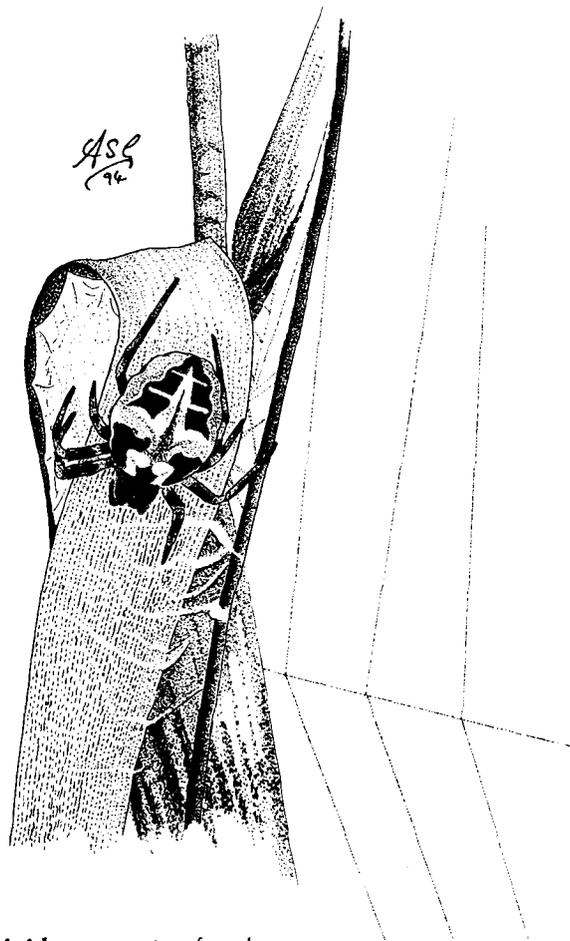
J. R. P.

Help! 1995 was a record year for the Newsletter: 40 pages of Newsletter proper, 6 pages of Supplement and 14 pages of Index—a grand total of 60 pages. But if more material does not come in soon, we will not be able to produce any 'bumper' 16-page editions this year. So please help, by finishing off that Newsletter article that you have been writing for some time and sending it as soon as you can. We are always short of illustrations, but two members have kindly made some fine line-drawings which are just waiting for articles to illustrate. For example, if somebody had mentioned *Larinioides cornutus* (Clerck) in an article, then they could have had a very pleasing illustration by Anthony Griffin to accompany it—too late now, but there are others in stock!

J. E. D.

Council Meeting, October 1995: After dealing with the standard items on the agenda, Council members spent several hours discussing a range of longer term issues. One such issue had in fact been identified in the Secretary's report: arachnology and the Internet. It was felt that much of the material had a strong US influence and there was an opportunity for the B.A.S. to increase the European perspective. It is hoped that a demonstration illustrating the new technology will be set up at the forthcoming A.G.M. weekend. The identification and establishment of national projects to which individual members could all make a contribution was a topic enthusiastically discussed. Ideas and comments should be sent to Dr Paul Selden, Earth Sciences, Williamson Building, The University, Manchester, M13 9PL, who is co-ordinating action in this area. Catering for the interests of young people [in arachnology!] has been piloted in the South-West by Peter Smithers and, in close co-operation with Watch, it was hoped to extend activities nationwide. Our Society's role in conservation was the subject of the liveliest debate of the whole meeting with several contrasting, though not necessarily contradictory, viewpoints explored. No doubt further discussions will take place after members of Council have attended the Joint Committee for the Conservation of Invertebrates conference at Peterborough in February.

Francis Farr-Cox



Larinioides cornutus female.

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