

## BOOK REVIEWS

### SPIDERS OF NEW ZEALAND AND THEIR WORLDWIDE KIN

By Ray Forster and Lyn Forster

270 pages, 300 illustrations. 22 x 29 cm. Soft covers. University of Otago Press, P.O. Box 56, Dunedin, New Zealand (e-mail: university.press@stonebow.otago.ac.nz). 1999. NZ\$79.95. ISBN 1 877133 79 5.

Ray and Lyn Forster are to the New Zealand spider world what Bristowe was to that in Britain: the first popularisers of spiders through their writing of well-illustrated books for the general naturalist. Readers may be familiar with their *New Zealand Spiders: An Introduction*, published by Collins in 1973, and sometimes available through second-hand booksellers. The book reviewed here is an update to the 1973 work. Unlike Bristowe, however, Ray Forster has been at the forefront of the scientific study of spiders of his country, and the series of publications by the Otago Museum, *The Spiders of New Zealand Parts I–VI*, by Forster and a number of other authors, contains not only important work on the New Zealand arachnofauna but also far-reaching conclusions concerning spider systematics and functional morphology. Ray Forster's works are illustrated throughout by the most stunning drawings, and the present book is no exception.

The cover of *Spiders of New Zealand* is eye-catching, and features a typical South Island scene of a distant mountain range beyond the plains, seen through a dew-laden orb web. About half of the pictures in the book are superb colour photographs, and many of the illustrations are multiples, sometimes stretching over two pages, but labelled 6.4 a, b, c, d, for example. The text is equally clear, combining a narrative style with solid scientific knowledge. Readers familiar with the 1973 book will find the text of the new one remarkably similar, but updated. The book resembles Brunet's *The Silken Web. A Natural History of Australian Spiders* in overall size and shape, but in no other way.

The chapter arrangements also closely follow those of this book's 1973 predecessor. After preliminary matter, chapters one, two, and three cover structure and behaviour of spiders, the life of a spider, and spider relatives, respectively. The remainder of the book divides all 55 families of spiders found in New Zealand into fourteen groups: mygalomorphs, living fossils (hypochiloids), free-living spiders (lycosids and pisaurids), crab spiders, hunting spiders (*clubionoids*, *gnaphosoids*, etc.), jumping spiders, six-eyed spiders, orbweb spiders, spaceweb spiders, midget spiders, seashore spiders, hackled-silk spiders, four families which don't fit anywhere else (*Zodariidae*, *Ctenidae*, *Psechridae*, and *Huttoniidae*), and harmful spiders. The main difference from the 1973 book is that the cribellates no longer form a group of their own. Chapter eighteen describes methods of studying and identifying spiders; there are appendices listing world spider families and historical notes on early arachnologists with New Zealand connections, a selected bibliography and a comprehensive index.

From the foregoing, it should be obvious that this is a book firmly in the mould of the authors' 1973 *New Zealand Spiders: An Introduction* and is aimed at the same readership: the interested amateur at home. It is far too big to carry in the field and does not pretend to be an identification guide. Having said that, however, it is a mine of information for anyone needing to know anything about New Zealand spiders and some of the unusual (from a palaeartic viewpoint) families found around the antipodes. For spider identification it is also extremely useful; a

good colour picture can save hours chasing wild geese through original descriptions with only drawings of palps and epigynes. Furthermore, like Bristowe's *World of Spiders*, this book is eminently readable, and from it one can learn so much about the history of spider research and the secret lives of the spiders themselves.

On the scientific front, the book is pretty much up to date, though it makes no mention of my subject area (fossil spiders). The chapter entitled *Living Fossils* describes araneomorphs with primitive traits whose ancestors, it is presumed, were around much earlier than other araneomorphs, though no fossils of these have yet been found. Perhaps the biggest surprise comes on page 166, where a new family (*Nanometidae*) is proposed, without the usual formalities, for a group of orbweavers from Australia and New Zealand, type genus *Nanometa*. Despite the sound of their name, these spiders are not all that tiny (though none of the pictures in the book gives a scale), and resemble tetragnathids, differing from that family in their branched tracheal systems, genitalia, and stridulating structures in the males.

Whether or not you have visited or intend to visit New Zealand, if you like spiders, delight in reading about their habits, and enjoy seeing beautiful pictures, then buy this book for sheer pleasure.

Paul Selden

### TOP WILDLIFE SPOTS: 200 WILDLIFE RESERVES IN THE UK Edited by Geoffrey Young on behalf of the Wildlife Trusts

256 pages, with maps, line drawings and half-tones. 15 x 21 cm. HarperCollins, London. 1999. Softback. ISBN 0-00-220178-X. £6.99.

During the lifetime of this reviewer (born in 1912), 46 County Wildlife Trusts have been established in the UK. Most are for single counties such as Cheshire, Surrey, and Yorkshire, or for larger areas incorporating several of the 'old' counties and/or parts of others, Cumbria, Dyfed and Gwynedd being typical examples. Scotland and Northern Ireland each have a single Trust covering their entirety.

This useful guide provides information about 200 Wildlife Trust Nature Reserves, up to six for each Trust, with the emphasis on recently acquired sites, and gives a contact address for each Trust. It could not, of course, include all the Nature Reserves (over 2,300 in the UK), nor does it feature any of those owned by the National Trust, the R.S.P.B., or the Slimbridge Wildfowl Trust.

The location of each featured Reserve is described, indicated on a map and pinpointed by an Ordnance Survey National Grid Reference. Details of facilities for visitors are given: access points, parking places, provision for disabled visitors, refreshments, shops, and toilets, where available. The presence of uncommon mammals, birds, invertebrates or plants is indicated by a series of symbols. Another important section of the book, which is entitled 'Conservation in Action', describes the management of local biomes, under the following headings: Woodlands, Grassland, Wetlands, Heaths and Moors, Bogs, and Coastal Sites. However, there is little about regulations governing the collecting of specimens. This is rather unfortunate because, whilst it is important to record the diversity of sites, uncontrolled collecting can defeat the objectives of conservation.

J. R. Parker