2-1-1991

Book Review: *The beetles of the world* (Moron, M.A. 1990)

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BOOK REVIEW

MORÓN, M. A. 1990. **The beetles of the world.** Vol. 10. Rutelini premier partie. Sciences Nat, Venette. 145 pp. Price: $190 (US).

Depending on the audience, the Sciences Nat series on beetles of the world is either warmly embraced for its beautiful photography "enabling" picture identifications or rejected because of its simplistic approach to complex taxonomic issues. Morón, operating under a narrow set of editorial guidelines (*e.g.*, no keys), has done a remarkably good job at bridging this gap with his treatment of Pelidnotina. The result is not only a beautiful book (as most in this series are), but one that is also scientifically credible. Given that any revision of *Plusiotis* deserved a color rendition, and that the Sciences Nat series is the only outlet for extensive color work dealing with beetles, it becomes evident why the two came together to produce this volume.

Morón's intent is to treat the subtribe Pelidnotina in three parts. In this first volume are treated the genera *Plusiotis, Chrysina, Chrysophora, Pelidnotopsis,* and *Ectinoplectron.* One new species of *Chrysina* is described as well as 15 new species of *Plusiotis.* Only two species were synonymized.

Each species is characterized by reference to the original description, synonyms, brief description, a statement on rarity, size range, general distribution, biological notes, and morphological variation observed. Nearly all species are illustrated by a color habitus photograph that constitute 18 full page color plates. There are an additional three color plates showing habitats, ten plates of line drawings illustrating genitalia primarily, and ten maps with distributions plotted. The text is in English, Spanish, and French.

Morón's taxonomy is, in my view, sound, and he does provide a brief overview of the characters used in his study. He examined more than 4,500 specimens, which is a considerable accomplishment considering that many of the species are rare or otherwise poorly represented in collections. I wish that the editor(s) would permit inclusion of keys in these works because it would greatly facilitate identification. Details of structure cannot be shown in a *gestalt* photograph. Moreover, the illusion is further promulgated that one can reliably identify taxa by "picture keying," and this is simply not the case. The photographs are of good quality although plate 12 is an exception. Both Dr. Morón and Mr. Rigout are aware of this, however, and hope to improve it in a later edition.

Creation of new names formally introduced into nomenclature for every known color form or morphological variety has been an unfortunate hallmark of many of the authors of this series. This kind of typological approach does not constitute good descriptive science and does, in fact, do harm to our study of these creatures by cluttering the literature with names that have no proper standing in nomenclature. Happily, Dr. Morón utilizes a modern biological species concept that allows for variation within a taxon, a trademark of a good systematist.

It is also apparent that he is a sensitive, and sensible, scientist as can be seen from his deletion of precise collecting information for most species (excluding new taxa). Unlike most other insect groups, these beetles are under intense collecting pressure because of their monetary value in some circles. Under these unusual circumstances, I approve of the lack of precise locality data. "We can only hope that the study of these beautiful and interesting species will help us to protect them, since the massive and irrational destruction of their natural habitat and the overcollecting of small and localized populations places many of the species considered in this work under the threat of imminent extinction" (Morón, p. 65). As Aristotle once said, "We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit." Miguel Morón is developing some nice habits.

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