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Review of *The Carrion Beetles (Coleoptera: Silphidae) of Nebraska* by Brett C. Ratcliffe

Stephen Trumbo

University of Connecticut at Waterbury

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The Carrion Beetles (Coleoptera: Silphidae) of Nebraska. Brett C. Ratcliffe. Lincoln: University of Nebraska State Museum, 1996. 100 pp. Photos, maps, illustrations, and citations. \$18.00 paper (ISSN 0093-6812).

Until the 1970s the carrion beetles were appreciated by only a handful of entomologists who knew where to locate the scattered pertinent information buried within the scientific literature. Summaries of the natural history of the only social genus (*Nicrophorus*) within the family Silphidae by E. O. Wilson (1971) and Milne and Milne (1976) seem to have attracted biologists of diverse interests to investigate these odoriferous beetles. At present, nearly a dozen papers are published yearly on the ecology, behavior, evolution, physiology, conservation, and molecular biology of the silphids. *The*

Carrion Beetles of Nebraska, a handsome and well-written volume, provides the first coverage of the silphids for an individual state. The introductory natural history of Nebraska includes information on vegetation, soils, and climate. The bulk of the text is devoted to silphid taxonomy, species' descriptions and species' natural histories. Unusual for such a volume, Ratcliffe provides sufficient background on methods and current research to allow the intrigued novice to begin collecting animals and undertaking scientific work. Although details on rearing are not included, one can locate them by using the up-to-date and substantial bibliography. Ratcliffe supplies information on how to sex silphids, though the most reliable method I have found for *Nicrophorus* (close examination of the dorsal aspect of the posterior abdomen) is not mentioned.

The taxonomic portion of the text is divided into the subfamily Silphinae, which contains carrion and detritus feeders, as well as predators of insects associated with carrion (six Nebraska genera), and the subfamily Nicrophorinae, which in North America is represented by the single genus, *Nicrophorus*. The taxonomic keys are straightforward; most experienced silphid biologists, however, will be able to identify even unfamiliar species using geography, habitat, and the highly commendable color-enhanced drawings. In all, nineteen species for which there are Nebraska records are described. It is unfortunate Ratcliffe did not take on the slightly larger task of a text on the carrion beetles of North America, with an emphasis on Nebraska; the inclusion of three additional species of *Nicrophorus* would have covered the continent. As it is, *The Carrion Beetles of Nebraska* will be a valuable resource for anyone interested in silphid biology and a fine starting point for students contemplating research in this area. Enticing publications such as this will ensure that the secretive world of carrion beetles will be enjoyed by a widening group of entomophiles. **Stephen Trumbo**, *Department of Math and Science, University of Connecticut at Waterbury*.