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Review of *Tiger Beetles of Alberta: Killers on the Clay, Stalkers on the Sand* by John Acorn

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Tiger Beetles of Alberta: Killers on the Clay, Stalkers on the Sand. John Acorn. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2001. xix+120 pp. Illustrations, photographs, map, appendices, glossary, references. \$19.95 paper.

John Acorn has taken a nontraditional, perhaps even a little eccentric, approach to this first volume in a series on Alberta insects. Well known for his television series *Acorn: The Nature Nut*, the author draws on his expertise to give us a colorful and informative examination of tiger beetles, masterfully expelling scientific jargon along the way and replacing it with more user-friendly terminology.

Acorn opens with a personal account of how he got involved in “tiger beetling,” adding folklore—including colorful terms such as “chicken choker” (apparently a Southeastern US term for tiger beetles)—to his account as well as warnings of the dangers of tiger beetle searches, which may involve rattlesnakes, grizzly bears, and irate ranchers.

Chapter 1 begins with a dramatic, anthropomorphic representation of the tiger beetle’s life. With phrases like “tip toes” and “lousy personality,” Acorn attempts to communicate with amateur hobbyists, though pertinent biological, physiological, and ecological information is also given here. The second chapter, describing the different habitats where tiger beetles can be found, is accompanied by good photographs of selected instances.

A map to the best viewing and collecting sites in the province launches chapter 3. Each of the nineteen Alberta species is introduced with a photo, common name, scientific name (with a pronunciation guide), and, yes, a descriptive haiku! Identification characteristics are given for field (sight) and lab (specimen in hand) use, followed by the etymology of the scientific

name. Classification below species includes geographic races and color morphs. An Alberta range map of the species comes next, succeeded by material on species ecology, including habitat, life history, range, and specific information on where to find the beetle in Alberta. The species account ends with "Cicindelobilia," an entertaining section filled with anecdotal information involving the species and obscure facts related to tiger beetling.

Chapter 4 addresses classification issues surrounding tiger beetles and discusses previous systematic work, while chapter 5 describes ways to collect, watch (encouraged), photograph, and rear tiger beetles. Although references to Tai Chi tactics for aerial netting lighten the text, a photo of Acorn supposedly ready to pounce on a tiger beetle with his net poised a few inches off the ground does not portray proper capture form.

The challenges of conservation are the focus of the more serious chapter 6. Here Acorn discusses the impact of human activities on tiger beetle populations and correctly identifies the key issue of habitat destruction. He defends collecting as a non-issue in the insect conservation debate and argues against the "overlisting" of tiger beetles vs. other insects on endangered species lists, while acknowledging that we protect tiger beetles because of their beauty and because we like them.

Appendices include a checklist, a key to the adult tiger beetles of Alberta (geared more towards amateurs and possibly more confusing than helpful), and resources for tiger beetlers (equipment suppliers, journals, societies, and the like). A Gallery of Tiger Beetles, composed of clear color plates of all of the color morphs and races of Alberta tiger beetles, concludes the volume.

Mistakes in the book are almost non-existent: the pronunciation guide to one subgenus (*Cylindera*) is wrong, and one common name used (Salt Creek tiger beetle) is inappropriate for the race occurring in Alberta. Photographs are usually sharp and show diagnostic characteristics sufficiently.

Overall, *Tiger Beetles of Alberta* is an engaging, reasonably-priced book aimed at non-professionals. Anyone, amateur or professional, with an interest in tiger beetles of Alberta or North America will find it useful, since many of Alberta's species also occur in other regions. If you are interested in a colorful introduction to tiger beetles, this book is a must. **Stephen M. Spomer** and **William J. Allgeier**, *Department of Entomology, University of Nebraska-Lincoln*.