

BOOK REVIEW

‘ARTHROPOD FAUNA OF THE UAE. Volume 1.’ Editor Antonius van Harten. Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates: Dar Al Ummah Printing, 2008. 754 pp., 24×17 cm. Hardcover. ISBN 978-9948-03-642-5. Price: Europe – 35 Euro (incl. p&p), North America – 65 USD (incl. p&p), other countries – 100 Dirhams + p&p. Available from: Dar Al Ummah Printing, P.O. Box 39975, Abu Dhabi, UAE; Fax: +971-2-6734766.

This volume presents the first results of an ambitious project intended to cover the arthropod fauna of the United Arab Emirates. This country is situated on the border between the Palaearctic and Afrotropical regions, but it has been left almost unnoticed by professional entomologists so far. As has been correctly pointed out by H. H. Sheikh Tahnoon Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the Patron and initiator of the project, in the Preface to the volume, “...whereas many large-scale projects are focusing on so-called biodiversity

hotspots, like Madagascar, New Caledonia, New Guinea, or Costa Rica, far too little attention is given to those arid tropical regions with an apparent low biodiversity, like the United Arab Emirates”.



The volume opens with brief descriptions of localities where arthropods have been intensively collected over the last three years. This chapter is comprehensively complemented with colour photographs of collecting sites. A wide range of collecting methods was employed by over 30 specialists from the UAE and elsewhere, and about 160 taxonomists from 27 countries are collaborating on the project. About 50 authors contributed directly to this volume. Such a mass breakthrough approach has produced coverage of about 720 species and sub-species in 79 families of 12 orders, with 87 species and subspecies described as new to science and some 570 species being new to the

country. This brings the total number of arthro-pod species now known from the UAE to about 1400. When the series is complete (at least another three volumes are planned), these numbers will increase again – after all, this volume covers only about 30% of the families for which specimens were collected.

Each taxonomic chapter starts with a concise introduction, followed by a detailed systematic account with relevant comments on biology and distribution of species, and the necessary references. Most of the chapters contain colour images of whole insects, which will undoubtedly facilitate their recognition by non-specialists (although the editor wisely warns in his introduction against relying on illustrations). The most valuable parts of publications of this kind are the identification keys, and the present book is no exception. In total, 20 keys are provided, although this number could have been higher.

The book is exceptionally well illustrated, with some 600 full-colour plates and an attractive and eye-catching cover (although somewhat misleading since only one of the nine arthropods shown is dealt with in the book). Wherever required, species descriptions are generously supplemented with line drawings. The volume is finished off with two easy-to-use indexes, separately compiled for “taxonomic novelties”, and for the generic and specific names.

The editor has expended considerable effort on making the volume look consistent and professionally done, although there are always ways to improve (a few of the colour photographs, for example, are of poor quality, and typographical errors have crept into a few of the running heads). The “actual date of publication: 20.01.2008” is stated at the very beginning of the volume, but individual chapters carry another date (30.11.2007), which could be confusing if they are distributed separately. (PDFs obtained from the editor of some chapters have the 2008 date, however, so that must be considered the effective one throughout.)

The present volume clearly shows that the arthropod fauna of the UAE is much richer than anyone could have anticipated. This book is highly recommended to entomologists, as well as ecologists, conservation specialists, naturalists, *etc.* There is no doubt that it will stimulate further studies of arthropods in the United Arab Emirates, on the Arabian Peninsula, and in the neighbouring countries.

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