

## BOOK REVIEW

NASKRECKI P.: THE SMALLER MAJORITY. The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, and London, UK, 2005, 278 pp., ISBN 0-674-01915-6 (hard cover). Price USD 35.00, GBP 21.95.

The author is Director of the Invertebrate Diversity Initiative of Conservation International and Research Associate with the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard University. In the prologue of this volume, entitled *How I Discovered the Smaller Majority*, he proposes an excellent idea, which brings us eye to eye with the smaller majority – the 99 percent of animal life that are smaller than a human finger. Naturally, he deals with the “majority of the smaller majority”, the insects and confirms the statement that “To a rough approximation and setting aside vertebrate chauvinism it can be said that essentially all organisms are insects” by R.M. May (*Science* **241**: 1141, 1988).

In an excellent way, the author, instead of concentrating on well-known and often cited groups, like beetles, butterflies or large hymenoptera, photographed and tried to document mainly the intricate forms and fascinating behaviour of invertebrates such as preying mantids, grasshoppers, katydids, spiders, crabs and other, usually largely neglected groups of animals. The author accompanies the photographs with insights into the biology and diversity of lower vertebrates, such as frogs, geckos and chameleons and dispels a few myths along the way. His notes on understanding animals in general, define our relationships with animals and their role in “human” philosophy, and the need to protect them, are particularly stimulating.

Besides the prologue and epilogue, the book consists of 3 chapters entitled *Tropical Humid Forests, Savannas and Deserts*. In contrast to the first chapter, which consists, in addition to the introduction, of sub-chapters entitled: *A Conquest of Land, Terrestrial Crustaceans, Amphibians, Katydids, Arachnids, Ants, Lizards, and Mantids*, the chapters on savannas and deserts are not subdivided. This is better and more comprehensive for non-specialists since, in the former case, e.g. the sub-chapter on “Spiders” suddenly refers to millipedes or centipedes, which belong to quite different taxonomic groups and that on “Ants” to grasshoppers killed by parasitic fungi, and butterflies and their caterpillars. From the ecological point of view the extremely

interesting order Diptera is treated in the sub-chapter “Lizards”. The book ends with an appendix containing a concise species index (pp. 273–278), general recommendations for amateur photographers or rain forest tourists, a rather disappointing section on “Resources” and evidently arbitrarily chosen literature and addresses of some of the organizations dealing with the protection of the biosphere.

More than 400 spectacular, colour photographs of an excellent quality accompany the text. They include photographs of characteristic species and details of structures related to their ecological adaptations. All photographs published in this book were apparently taken in the animals’ natural habitat, often in remote, rarely visited locations. Some show both invertebrate and lower vertebrate organisms never before photographed. For instance, the serial photographs of metamorphosis in *Xestoptera cornea* on pp. 82–83 are unique, those on pp. 86–87 showing a cockroach and tortricid/noctuid moths sucking the excrement of a small lantern bug are photographic masterpieces.

On the other hand, some pictures lack an explanatory text (e.g. on pp. 258–269) and just fill gaps. Other pictures, showing “unidentified species of the family...” are rather confusing. In my opinion, e.g. the Muscidae in the Diptera or Cerambycidae in the Coleoptera, can relatively easily be identified. If not, then presenting such pictures is unnecessary. The photographs (e.g. those on pp. 248 and 252–257) representing “in some cases animals completely new to science” (p. 3 of Prologue) do not belong, in my opinion, in a publication of this type and should be published elsewhere. Unfortunately, it is very easy to misname them and thus complicate the standard taxonomic procedure.

The quality of hundreds or possibly even thousands of books on insects and other animals, targeted at the public, nature lovers, beginners in entomology and environmentalists vary from mere compilations, detailed, but rather time-consuming descriptions of insect morphological adaptations to fascinating collections of photographs. In my opinion, Naskrecki's book represents an exception in many respects and can be undoubtedly included in the latter category.

*T. Soldán*