

BOOK REVIEW

EISNER T., EISNER M. & SIEGLER M.: SECRET WEAPONS. DEFENSES IN INSECTS, SPIDERS, SCORPIONS, AND OTHER MANY-LEGGED CREATURES. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, London, UK, 2005, 384 pp. ISBN 0-674-01882-6 (hardback). Price GBP 18.95, EUR 25.50.

The great species diversity of arthropods is accompanied by a similar level of diversity in defence mechanisms against predators. Of the books dealing with defence mechanisms and interactions between potential prey and predators, *Secret Weapons* is exceptional in the way it presents information. Although the arrangement of the chapters is based on the taxonomy of arthropods, the book is far from being a systematic review of all the possible defence strategies of particular taxa. Instead, it is a series of independent stories.

Each of the 69 chapters describes the life history and behaviour of one arthropod species, and how its defence functions in a very readable manner. Most of the defence mechanisms described in this book involve chemical weapons, and the compounds used for defence along with their structural formulas are always depicted. Usually, the presence of formulas of organic compounds in textbooks deter biology students, but in this book,

the formulas are incorporated in interesting stories about animals and likely to be remembered.

The species chosen were determined mostly by the authors being located in North America, and on the availability of colour photographs and the personal experience of the authors with particular species. In many cases, the mechanism described is shared by many species in the same genus or family, making the examples more general. The taxonomic sampling is thus balanced, presents only one or few examples even from diverse families, which are widely known to possess a specific defence, and does not omit less famous groups.

Each chapter is accompanied by a list of references. Both common and scientific names are used in all examples, and a common index to species names, orders and families, compound names and other terms provides an easy tool for finding specific information in this book.

As indicated above, the book is a collection of fascinating stories, a useful field guide, a rich textbook and will be appreciated by scientists as well as naturalists. It provides an insight into a small part of the hidden and fascinating world of small creatures that few people know, but which is worthy of study.

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