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BOOK REVIEW

GERSTMEIER R.: CHECKERED BEETLES: ILLUSTRATED KEY TO THE CLERIDAE AND THANEROCLERIDAE OF THE WESTERN PALAEARCTIC (bilingual – English + German). Margraf, Weikersheim, 1998, viii + 241 pp. Hb: ISBN 3-8236-1175-5. Price DM 99.50.

The book is treated chiefly as a tool serving the identification of the Western Palaearctic representatives of Cleridae and Thanerocleridae. Therefore, it has been long awaited by all persons interested in these fairly interesting and attractive insect groups, including (or perhaps chiefly) amateur beetle collectors. So far, the two families have been keyed collectively only in the territory of Spain, central Europe and the former USSR, and a need has been felt for a thorough treatment of the Mediterranean and the Middle East. These regions are inhabited by a majority of species of the genus *Trichodes*, the determination of which has been the entomologists' nightmare.

The book begins with several introductory chapters, which briefly describe the history of

investigations on Cleridae and Thanerocleridae and the bionomics of their representatives. Then follow keys to the differentiation of the two families, the world's subfamilies of Cleridae, and the genera of the different subfamilies. Unfortunately, the author did not have time to arrange the system of subfamilies according to the most recent revision of the higher systematics of Cleridae (Kolibáč, 1997) in which the subfamilies Epiphloeinae, Enopliinae and Tarsosteninae are included within the subfamily Korynetinae. This would not matter much provided that the key to the subfamilies was to serve the determination of the Western Palaearctic species only. Unfortunately, however, the key has been conceived on a world-wide scale; therefore, I have to point out that it is hardly possible to use the key to determine the subfamilies of the clerid fauna of the world. Another drawback of the key is that no mention has been made of the clerid larvae. The larvae of the representatives of European clerid genera are sufficiently known, so that at least their basic characteristics could be used to compile a key to the Western Palaearctic representatives.

The keys to the genera of the different subfamilies have been maximally simplified, sometimes up to the tolerability limit. This is particularly true of such cases in which the author employs, for the differentiation of genera, such rather vague character statuses as “eyes finely faceted” vs. “eyes coarsely faceted”, or “head noticeably long” vs. “head not noticeably long”. On the other hand, none of the subfamilies includes more than 10 genera, many of which are monotypic, so that the readers can get their bearings even from the high-quality colour photographs that are appended at the end of the book. (Compared to other Cleroidea, the determination of species of the family Cleridae is greatly facilitated by the fact that often the various genera and species show very characteristic shapes and colour patterns, so that many of them can be readily determined with the sole use of colour photographs.) Moreover, the key is accompanied by many good line drawings, so that the reader really should be able to identify all of the genera.

The most important parts of the book are the keys and characteristics of species. All species are keyed and, moreover, for each of them there brief description, data on bionomics (as far as it is known) and distribution; the latter is schematically shown in a map of the Western Palaearctic (in the text, unfortunately, only the countries are stated without any more precision). Furthermore, known synonyms are listed for each species. The author has also established seven new species synonyms. I consider this fact rather unfortunate as the book is primarily a tool serving the identification of clerid species and does not comply with criteria required of a taxonomic revision. That is why the new synonyms mentioned above unfortunately suffer from a number of formal shortcomings and will require additional clarification. The author does not mention the material studied in the case of the synonymized species and, in some cases, it is even uncertain whether he did study type specimens (this pertains to *Tillus rufopiceus* Schenkling, 1899, *Trichodes frater* Kraatz, 1893, and *Trichodes fraterculus* Zaitzev, 1915, the synonymization of which is hardly possible on the sole basis of their descriptions). In other cases again it is not quite clear how many specimens the type series contains and which concrete specimen the author examined. At any rate, lectotypes should have been designated in *Phloiocopus rufus* Pic, 1935 and *Trichodes reitleri* Champenois, 1900, since there is a real danger

that the type series may contain several species (which is a common case, e.g., in taxa described by Maurice Pic) and, hence, it is uncertain which of them has in fact been synonymized by the author. The requirement of lectotype designation also pertains to the three species mentioned above. Another two synonyms (*Opilo hladilorum* Winkler, 1984, and *Trichodes sbordonii* Audisio, 1975) are also based solely on descriptions. However, these are fairly modern descriptions and the holotypes of these species have been designated; thus, their synonymization on the basis of their descriptions is basically possible. In general, it is my opinion that it is improper to do formal taxonomical changes in books of this kind.

All the drawbacks mentioned above do not concern the basic purpose of the book, i.e. providing an easily understandable tool for the determination of Western Palaearctic Thanerocleridae and Cleridae. The keys to species are very comprehensible and mostly do not require any closer morphological examination of the beetles to be determined. Both the keys and the descriptions are accompanied by a large number of good line drawings which show the morphological characters or even the whole habitus of the beetles (in all, 304 drawings), and there are high-quality colour photographs of almost all species in 8 tables of 16 photographs each. A reader interested in the two beetle families will get a good overview of the species of the Western Palaearctic, and that is why I can recommend the book to all amateur beetle collectors as well as to all serious students of these families among both amateur and professional entomologists. Last but not least, the book is of great importance to the systematics of the complicated genus *Trichodes*, the distribution of which is centred especially in the Mediterranean, the Near and Middle East. Naturally, the author's treatment of the genus *Trichodes* is not the ultimate revision of that genus. It is, however, the first really modern synopsis of the hitherto knowledge, and his classification into species may be understood as a working hypothesis upon which subsequent taxonomical work can be based.

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