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BOOK REVIEW

ROBINSON W.H.: URBAN ENTOMOLOGY. INSECT AND MITE PESTS IN THE HUMAN ENVIRONMENT. Chapman and Hall, London, UK, 1996, 430 pp., ISBN 0-412-60750-6. Price GBP 24.99.

This book deals with life history and control of arthropods that interact with people, their pets and property in the human environment. The term urban entomology was established by Walter Ebeling to separate the study of household and structural pests from such disciplines like agricultural and medical entomology. However, the term seems to imply that the discipline (and the book) focus only on insects in cities; in fact, it covers much more. William Robinson inserted in his book many subchapters that describe the transition of human environment from primitive dwellings through modern cities and overpopulated fringe slums might have stayed with the description of biology of household and stored products pests. The cat fleas and flour moths are not specific problems of Los Angeles or Calcutta (and the author is aware of that).

Another problematic issue in the scope of the book is the inclusion of many medical pests. In some cases I welcome such chapters, especially those describing the role of house-inhabiting cockroaches and house dust mites in the development of allergic diseases. But I hesitate to accept stinging Hymenoptera, mosquitoes, and spiders as specific problems in the urban environment.

An interesting and maybe non-traditional item is the definition of the pest status, that differs much in the context of housekeeping from that we use traditionally in agriculture or forestry. The author emphasizes that for a man sitting in his room, the occurrence of even one small insect is unacceptable and provokes a control action. The manufacturing and application of large amounts of insecticides for controlling cockroaches and other hated creatures provides a great source of income for the chemical industry and specialized companies. Consequently, he includes wildlife-friendly education and psychological treatment of entomophobia among pest control strategies and techniques.

The structure of chapters in the main part of the book includes an introduction to the particular group of pests, description of the adaptations (the author uses the term "adaption") of the animals to the household environment, pest status, specific biology of the group and selected species, and control strategies. Every chapter is conluded by a list of suggested reading. The treated groups are characterized either by taxonomic status: cockroaches, ants, flies, stinging Hymenoptera, and termites, or as a group of taxa sharing similar food resources or pest status: fleas, lice and mites; spiders and bugs; flour and fabric pests; and wood-infesting beetles.

An appreciable advantage of the book (or the discipline in whole, unlike e.g. plant protection management) is the worldwide validity of both the general information and the information of particular species. Many of the pests became cosmopolitan due to human activity (in a wider scale than some agricultural pests), and the author gives information on the geographical and ecological origin of those species.

Illustrated with a number of line drawings and black-and-white pictures, the book is easy to read and appropriate for a wide audience. There are pieces of information for students in entomology, parasitology, medicine, for managers of sanitary organisations and even house builders. It presents the evolutionary plasticity of insects and their importance to man through examples of the groups occurring most closely to us.

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