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BOOK REVIEW: Arachnida and Myriapoda of the Seychelles Islands. Edited by Justin Gerlach & Yuri Marusik

434 pages, 1,500+ line drawings, 17 photos, 24 x 16 cm. Soft-cover. Siri Scientific Press, 2010; in English. Available from the publisher, Dr David Penney; e-mail: siri.press@live.co.uk; cost £60 plus postage. Further details online at: <http://siriscientificpress.co.uk>. ISBN 978-0-9558636-8-4

International arachnological and myriapodological communities can welcome a new substantial book of the monographic series devoted to the Seychelles fauna. This book is a comprehensive synopsis of all groups of Arachnida, including Acari, and Myriapoda recorded from the Seychelles. It contains detailed information on 433 species (362 arachnids and 71 myriapods) and combines the high standards of classical arachnological publications with most of the recent nomenclatorial corrections. Taxonomic novelties are few in this volume: viz., a synonymy of two *Pritha* species (Filistatidae) is suggested, two new genera of Holothyridae mites are described and three new combinations of the same mite group are established. Fourteen authors from eleven countries contributed to this volume. The book is organised as a collection of papers, with each individual chapter starting from a new page, with slightly different presentation styles, dedicated figure numbers and reference lists.

Pages 4–7 include an abstract, a list of contributors, a brief introduction and notes on the history of arachnid/myriapod research in the Seychelles. This section also contains a brief discussion of the comparative diversity on the various islands. The Seychelles are characterised by a high level of endemism (56% in arachnids and 48% in myriapods). Some 4% of species in both groups were non-native introductions. Unfortunately, the book does not contain a proper zoogeographic analysis of the studied

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fauna or its comparison with those of other island archipelagos of the Indian Ocean, e.g., of the Comoros.

The largest section of this book is devoted to spiders (pp. 8–306). It was compiled by the late Finnish arachnologist Michael I. Saaristo and published posthumously. However, all figure plates in the spider section were compiled by the editors, with some of them being made by the second editor. The section starts with an account on general spider morphology (pp. 8–11) and a glossary of the terms used (pp. 12–19), followed by a key to the Seychelles spider families (pp. 20–22). Page 22 also contains a list of museum collections used. According to the information given, only seven museums in the world possess the Seychelles material of arachnids and myriapods. Some spider families are treated in more detail than others. For instance, the section devoted to the Araneidae (pp. 32–53) contains not only its brief taxonomic characteristics (as with all other families), but also keys to subfamilies, genera and even to species for one genus (*Neoscona*, p. 40). No keys are provided for other spider families, except for the Sparassidae. Every spider species is treated according to the following plan: reference list; material examined; diagnosis; very brief description (or a reference to it); and distribution (general and within the Seychelles). All reported species are well illustrated by grey-scale figures of the copulatory organs and, in the majority of cases, of their general appearance. However, not all the illustrations are original, some were borrowed from various sources, for instance, those for *Argiope* and *Neoscona* species (pp. 44, 48), *Hersilia aldabrensis* (p. 76), the majority of Salticidae illustrations (pp. 174–201), and others.

Other invertebrate groups considered in the reviewed volume are treated in a similar way as the spiders, with more or less detailed elaboration, partly depending on the current level of knowledge of each group. For instance, the chapter devoted to Opiliones (pp. 312–320) contains a key to all species, but no diagnoses in the species accounts and no illustrations of genitalia, which is a noticeable disadvantage of this section; even the material examined is not mentioned for the harvestmen. The section devoted to the Acariformes mites (pp. 354–357) contains only a list of recorded species. The sections devoted to centipedes (pp. 360–386) include rather detailed species descriptions compared to the other groups treated in the volume, including the spiders.

Pages 409–421 contain a table of red-listed indigenous and endemic species according to the IUCN Red list criteria. Unfortunately, there is no cumulative account of how many red-listed species of various categories occur on the Seychelles and/or individual islands, and what is to be done in order to protect them or their habitats. The volume ends with an index of the taxa covered in the book (pp. 422–434).

Overall, this volume has made a very good impression on me, and I wish to congratulate the authors and editors for such fine work. This impressive book is a real tribute to our late friend, Dr Michael I. Saaristo, whose lifelong interest in the Seychelles spiders made possible the publication of this volume. This book, beyond doubt, constitutes a reliable source of taxonomic and faunistic information on the Seychelles arachnids and myriapods, being a must-have for anyone studying the African fauna and for all arachnological taxonomic libraries. I recommend this book to both amateur and professional arachnologists alike.

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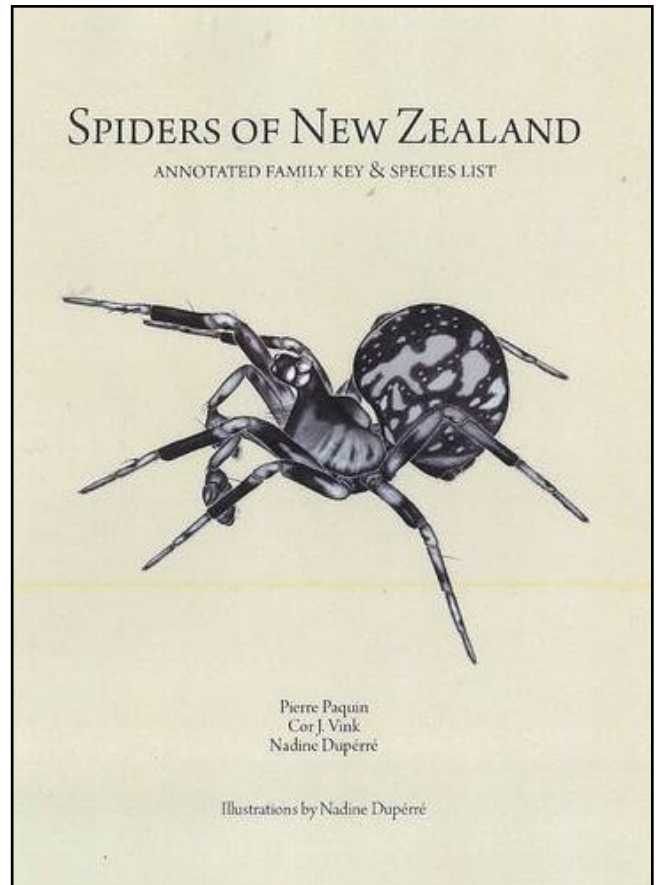
BOOK REVIEWS:

Spiders of New Zealand. Annotated family key and species list. By Pierre Paquin, Cor J. Vink & Nadine Dupérré. 2010. Manaaki Whenua Press, Lincoln, New Zealand (www.mwpress.co.nz). Pp.118. Price 50NZ\$

Fauna of New Zealand, Pisauridae (Arachnida: Araneae). By C.J. Vink & N. Dupérré. 2010. Manaaki Whenua Press, Lincoln, New Zealand (www.mwpress.co.nz). Pp.60. No. 64 in the *Fauna of New Zealand* series. Price not known.

The first volume opens with an outline of spider anatomy. This is followed by a dichotomous key to families and discussions on the diversity of genera and species, morphological attributes which distinguish similar families, taxonomic notes, endemism, habitat and distribution. The accompanying illustrations are of very high quality.

This publication is an excellent example of the very detailed and advanced studies on the New Zealand spider fauna which has evolved in isolation from other land masses for 80 million years. To the taxonomist it is of



great interest because 93% of the fauna consists of endemic species so is very different from the fauna we know in Europe. To the ecological arachnologist it is equally fascinating because we get some insight into how evolution works in a long-isolated country where substantial natural habitats still remain compared with the UK where the spider fauna has no endemics because of our close association with the rest of Europe. The environmental history of the two countries is equally important because our landscape has been changed by settlement for several thousands of years while New Zealand has not been extensively modified by man for more than 250 years.

Britain and New Zealand are comparable in area but the former has 658 species while the latter has 1126 described and another 536 awaiting description, making a present total of about 1662 species in 236 genera and 57 families. As new species are still being found the authors think the true total could be about 2000. One can't help feeling this is a conservative estimate because even the well-worked fauna in Britain, which recorded a total of 584 in 1958, has since added another 74 species. The best known New Zealand arachnologist, R. R. Forster, thought the New Zealand total could be as much as 2500 species. Whether 2000 or 2500, the fascinating question is why New Zealand has such a rich fauna when no country in Europe reaches even the lower figure. France, one of the largest, is two and a half times the area but has a total of 1569 species (Le Peru 2007). The family Linyphiidae is the largest in New Zealand but only 12% of the total and they are all in the subfamily Linyphiinae. Endemic Erigoninae apparently do not exist as all known species are introduced. In Britain about 40% of the spider fauna are Linyphiidae, of which over 70% are Erigoninae.