

BOOK REVIEW

Insects: Their Natural History and Diversity. by S.A. Marshall. Firefly Books Ltd. Richmond Hill, Canada. 720 pp. ISBN-13: 978-1-55297-900-6; ISBN-10: 1-55297-900-8 (Hard cover: 2006). \$ 95.00 CAN.

Over the course of the last two years this ‘big green book’ has become my favourite (and most often used) entomological reference. With its interestingly written text and outstanding photographs, this comprehensive and user friendly book is a must have for professionals and amateurs alike.

Although large, *Insects: Their Natural History and Diversity* is far from intimidating. The introduction opens with a basic explanation of insect anatomy and biology, and the reader is instructed to “get your hands on a grasshopper” and follow along as the text explains the different body segments. The chapters that follow are organized either by insect order or in logical groups such as “The Wingless Insects (Springtails, Diplurans and Bristletails).” Also included is a valuable chapter on methods of collecting, keeping and photographing insects, as well as a fantastic picture key to the insect families.

Chapters in the main body of the book are organized into two sections. The first comprises brief biological overviews of the insect families or superfamilies found in each chapter. This introduces the reader to the fascinating biology and behaviour of a particular group of insects. In these introductions Marshall gives the reader insight into the most interesting and unusual aspects of that family. It reminded me of early mornings as an undergraduate at the University of Guelph, when an 8:30AM class seemed more like story time than a lecture (please note that Steve has not commissioned me to say nice things about his lectures!) The second portion of each chapter provides spectacular photographs of many of the species representing each family discussed. Almost all of the photographs are of the insect in nature, quite often engaging in one of the interesting behaviours discussed in the introductory section of the chapter. Captions for each photo contain at least the genus (most often species), as well as an explanation of the photograph.

The last section of *Insects* contains the picture keys. Again designed with the amateur entomologist in mind, the illustrations eliminate the need for specific taxonomic knowledge; and most of the characters used can be seen without a microscope. The first two keys take the reader down to order, while further, more specific keys help the reader identify their insect to family. Picture keys of common immature insects can also be found in this section. Once a family is reached a page number is given; the reader can then refer to that section of the book to look at photographs of individuals from that family. I have found that this is often a great way of affirming my original decision about a specimens identity.

I have completely lost count of how many times and in how many ways *Insects* has been useful. Aside from being a fantastic way to get your friends interested in entomology (by showing them stunning photographs of bizarre and beautiful insects), I can honestly say that I have picked up this book at least twice a week for the last year or so, either to identify an insect that I have found in the field, or to look at as I would a coffee table book. At \$95.00 it is well worth the investment and is an absolutely essential component of any entomological library!

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