

Book Review: *Spiders of Australia: An introduction to their biology, taxonomy and distribution* (2003). Pensoft Publishers, Sofia: Bulgaria.

by Maurice Pledger, United Kingdom, naturalist, author and wildlife artist.

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Dear all, my name is Maurice Pledger, and by way of profession I am a wildlife artist and author, living in Hertfordshire, in the UK. I have been asked to 'write a review' of a new book just published, *SPIDERS OF AUSTRALIA* by Trevor J Hawkeswood in Sydney, Australia. I feel very humbled and privileged at being asked to do this, as I feel very out of my depth. Although at 48, I have been a naturalist all my life, interesting myself mainly in birds, fish and insects, spiders have very much passed me by. Having said that, I am amazed at the many varied species and diversity they show, when I have seen them while looking for other things. Funnily enough, it was Trevor who really 'started me off' in the entomological part of my life, about ten years ago. It was then that I bought the fabulous book he wrote, *BEETLES OF AUSTRALIA* first published in 1987. This small but very significant book was to set the scene for the rest of my life. In the following years, I hesitatingly contacted this giant of Entomology, thinking him to be an aged learned old gentleman, so great was his knowledge. I was absolutely floored by the fact he is my own age. I still cannot believe it. So began a deep and lasting friendship by email and phone, and he has been sending me many of the hundreds of scientific papers he has written on Australian insect life. In my eyes, Trevor must rank as one of the greatest Entomologists of all time, if not THE greatest. His knowledge of all insect and plant life is unsurpassed. His other publication in book form, *HOST-PLANTS OF CHRYSOMELIDAE OF THE WORLD* which he co-authored with Pierre Jolivet, quite frankly, just beggars belief. Now here I must say that Trevor has a unique ability to walk along all the varied paths in his writings. By this I mean that specialist entomological books in the main, are by necessity very scientific, and to the layman very heavy going. To the point where unless you have several degrees in Biology and Physics, you will in all probability, not understand one word. Correspondingly, books which are written for the more general public very often just gloss over the more important facts and deal mainly with physical appearances. Trevor, in his writings, crosses all these borders and his texts are refreshingly easy to read, while at the same time going into the minutest of detail about species life histories. All too often, entomological publications rely heavily on previous author's works and items and facts are merely regurgitated as gospel, without too much thought it seems. All Trevor's writings come from his own observations in the field. This alone sets him aside from 95% of the world's scientists.

So, this all neatly brings me to his new publication, *SPIDERS OF AUSTRALIA*. I received my copy for review just a few days ago from his wonderful publishers Pensoft, based in Sofia and Moscow. The moment I opened the parcel, I knew that this was yet another Hawkeswood Classic. As I've said, my knowledge of spiders is to be honest, less than meagre, but reading the text, it is becoming obvious that although the species he describes are Australian, many familiarities are showing in the habits of those I've seen over here. He describes over 150 species in quite some detail, the photographs which have been taken by himself and a few friends are breathtaking, the paintings of others by his friend, author and artist J.R Turner are fabulous. Being an artist myself, I can appreciate the difficulty of showing necessary detail in a very difficult subject, and Turner's work is spot on. The text, as usual, is very easy to read, and will not deter the younger readers. Even the most diehard scientist/entomologist will find every page crammed to bursting with Trevor's own observations in the field. The index system is as clear as a bell, which these days in entomological publications, seems to be severely wanting. The paper used, the printing, everything about the book is pure quality.

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An unbelievable book, and especially for the young enthusiast in the UK, believe it or not. Many people worldwide have an inborn love and fascination for spiders, and as I mentioned before, although the species concerned are Australian, the reader will be totally absorbed by the clarity of the text and photos, and the wealth of information which relates directly to species in their own native country. For the spider enthusiast this book is manna from heaven. From the layman with only passing interest to experts in the field, this book will be a source of inspiration and information. Fabulous. Maurice J. Pledger.

Hawkeswood, TJ (2003). *SPIDERS OF AUSTRALIA. An introduction to their classification, Biology and Distribution*. ISBN 9546421928, PENSOFT PUBLISHERS, Sofia-Moscow. 165 mm x 140 mm, 166 colour plates, photos, figures, index, references. In English. Available as paperback and hardback, 264 pp. Price EURO 19.95 (paperback), 34.95 (hardback).

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