

STRATFORD-UPON-AVON: A FLORA AND FAUNA**By John M. Price**

210 pages, with one sketch map. 15 x 23 cm. Paper covers. Gem Publishing Company, Wallingford, Oxon. £13.00. ISBN 0 906802 09 1.

Urban areas have proved relatively unattractive to naturalists and have provided very few publications attempting to cover the total flora and fauna. The author of this unusual book opens his introduction with this contention.

This is a book exclusively devoted to the flora and fauna of a small country town, busy with tourists because of its Shakespearian associations. The entire area under consideration is contained within a circumference of about a mile around its railway station. It is almost entirely built up, apart from small areas of parks and gardens, and short stretches of the River Avon, Shottery Brook and the Stratford-upon-Avon Canal. It does not include any areas of notable natural history. Its drift geology is mainly heavy calcareous clays and gravel with a few limestone outcrops.

The author and his team of about 36 specialist naturalists have collected about 80,000 records, comprising a total of 3,426 species representing 28 Orders of animals and plants. Of the species, 1,008 are vascular plants, algae, fungi, lichens, liverworts and mosses; 95 are vertebrate animals; and 2,334 invertebrates. Within this last group are 618 species of Lepidoptera, 475 Coleoptera, 326 Hemiptera, 459 Diptera and 91 Arachnida. Eighty-four of the arachnid records are for spiders; these include some of my records when I lived at the White Swan Hotel and when in 1961 the beer cellar provided no less than 14 species (Parker, 1962), including the rare *Psilochorus simoni* (Berland) and the very rare *Urozelotes rusticus* (L. Koch), which I found on the wall of the boilerhouse at midnight on 26.vi.63. *Theridion mystaceum* (L. Koch) overwintered as sub-adults along the wall cornices of my sitting room where *Euophrys lanigera* (Simon) often appeared in summer and was frequently to be found on the tiled roof of the hotel. An earlier discovery by the author of this book was the rare *Nigma walckenaeri* (Roewer) in Avonbank Gardens in 1955.

Several species of harvestmen are also listed. The book brought to mind one very memorable event on a sunny October morning in 1963 when I observed, from the balcony of the hotel, a mass dispersal of spiders when thousands of tiny linyphiids, each suspended by a silken gossamer line were airborne in a gentle breeze and drifted across Rother Street Market Place in front of the hotel.

One always associates Stratford-upon-Avon with William Shakespeare, who had a greater knowledge of natural history than any other English poet or playwright. He refers to about 160 plant species by name in his works which has warranted the publication of a volume of reference to them (Ellercombe, 1878). He knew the fauna equally well but did not always give a proper name. He mentions at least 130 kinds of creatures and knew the difference between ravens, rooks and choughs; vultures, eagles, ospreys, buzzards, hawks and falcons; also lapwings and woodcock; swallows and martins; apes and baboons; crabs and prawns; porpoises and whales; spiders, scorpions and snails—all listed in a book on the fauna (Dent, 1972). There is a quite horrendous figure of a spider in a drinking glass in *The Winter's Tale* (II.i) and, in *Richard III*, Queen Margaret (I.iii) and Queen Elizabeth (IV.iv) each refer to the King as 'that bottled spider' and that 'bunch-backed toad'!

References

- Dent, A. (1971) *World of Shakespeare : Plants*. Osprey Books, Reading.
 Dent, A. (1971) *World of Shakespeare : Animals and Monsters*. Osprey Books, Reading.
 Ellercombe, H. (1878) *Plant Lore of Shakespeare*. Pollard, Exeter.
 Parker, J. R. (1962) Spiders in cellars. *Bull. Flatford Mill Spider Group*, **13**: 5.

John Rowland Parker

THE SPIDER FAMILY THERIDIIDAE (ARACHNIDA: ARANEAE) FROM JAPAN**By Hajime Yoshida**

222 pages, 538 line drawings, 68 colour photographs. 21 x 28 cm. Paperback. Arachnological Society of Japan, Otemon Gakuin University, Ibaraki, Osaka. 2003. US \$40 plus p. + p. (US \$8 by surface mail and US \$15 by air mail). Orders should be sent to the author, Dr H. Yoshida: araneae@mb.infoweb.ne.jp; 7-16, Kagota 2 Chome, Yamagata-shi, Yamagata, 990-2484 Japan. ISBN 4-9901449-8-8 C3645.

Although the study area covered by this taxonomic synopsis is Japan, this book will undoubtedly be a useful tool in treating the theridiid faunas of the Russian Far East, NW China and Korea. A total of 122 valid species belonging to 35 genera are considered, including identification keys to the subfamilies, genera, species-groups and all species.

The book is organised traditionally: a few introductory chapters about the higher taxonomy of Theridiidae, followed by a brief history of the study of this family in Japan, a glossary of the terminology used, and an analysis of the position of the theridiids in the order Araneae. The following chapters, forming the bulk of the book (pp. 21–188), present a detailed taxonomic account of all Japanese genera and species, with most of the genera being treated *sensu stricto* (e.g. *Rhhomphaea* and *Argyrodes* are separated; *Trigonobothrys* is removed from synonymy with *Dipoena*, etc.). The taxonomic part of the monograph thus provides a lot of opportunities for further analysis and discussion of the taxonomic issues of the family. The main text is followed by 68 beautiful colour photos giving further impressions on most of the described species. Relevant comments on invalid species names are given on pages 196–197. The reference list (pp. 210–217) is impressive and contains 290 sources. An index to genera and species is given in both Japanese and Latin. I am surprised that most of the theridiid species have common Japanese names (not the case in Russian, my native language, nor in many other languages).

It is a pity that, apart from a very brief English summary, this substantial volume is entirely written in Japanese, which is unknown to many European arachnologists, including myself. Therefore, I was unable to get a real impression of some, I am sure, interesting discussions, like those on distributional patterns of the theridiids (pp. 198–204), or on the position and relationships of the Synotaxidae (pp. 19–21). However, the book contains 538 excellent line drawings, making it a really useful tool for identification of the Theridiidae.

The author and the Arachnological Society of Japan should be congratulated for producing a further landmark publication for the study of Japanese spiders. For all who are interested in the comb-footed spiders of Far East Asia, this comprehensive volume is good value—a real must-buy.

Dmitri V. Logunov