

## LITERATURE REVIEWS

### TARANTULAS OF BELIZE

By **Steven B. Reichling**

xii + 127 pages, 8 pages of colour plates. 16 x 23.5 cm. Krieger Publishing Company, Malabar, Florida, USA ([www.krieger-publishing.com](http://www.krieger-publishing.com)). 2003. Hardback, US \$29.50. ISBN 1 57524 206 0. Softback, US \$21.95. ISBN 1 57524 228 1.

This rather slim volume is very much a personal account of the author's studies of tarantulas in the small Central American country of Belize and, as such, most of it can be read straight through with enjoyment, rather than being used primarily as a volume for reference. The study grew out of a dissertation project to discover the role of the female tarantula in rearing young.

Before the author's studies only one species of tarantula, the Mexican Redrump *Brachypelma vagans*, was known to occur in the country. His research means that at least nine species are now known, no fewer than six of these having been described as new to science since 1996, while the specific identity of one spider, a pygmy tarantula, is as yet unknown and may represent another new species! If the spiders of such a large, popular group can produce so many new discoveries in a small country whose fauna and flora have been fairly well studied, one can only wonder what else remains to be discovered in the Neotropics.

Chapter 1, 'A Tarantula Hunter's Diary', sets the background to the study and leaves the reader wanting more, while Chapters 2 to 5 put tarantulas into their wider context, including threats and conservation concerns.

Chapters 6 and 7 deal with 'Habitats' and 'Ecology', and then Chapters 8 and 9 cover how to find tarantulas, including 'fishing' techniques, and 'Collecting and the Law'. The book differs from most on tarantulas in that it is very much concerned with their ecology and behaviour in the wild, rather than in captivity. Investigation of the spiders in their burrows has shown that their environment is remarkably constant: at a depth of 48 cm the daily temperature fluctuates by only 2° each side of 25°C, while outside it ranges from 14 to 40°C.

The author's obvious excitement at the discovery that Mexican Redrump spiderlings disperse in single file columns in groups of 20 to 100 is well conveyed to the reader: 'I was scanning the road carefully as I walked, hoping to find snakes since this was a particularly hot and sticky night, when about 2 meters in front of me I saw what I took to be a small slender snake. I pulled my flashlight out of my pocket and shone it on the thin dark line that was undulating slowly across the track. The image caught in the light had me rubbing my eyes, exclaiming words of surprise to no living thing that could understand me. It was a procession of baby Mexican redrumps that had just left the maternal burrow. They were heading out into the unknown, together, to begin their new lives. Up until that moment this behavior was unknown for any spider, yet they'd been doing this for thousands of years, under cover of night.'

The sections that most readers will refer back to are the 40 pages covered by Chapters 10 to 12, which deal with identification, including a dichotomous key and the individual species accounts, plus notes on four extralimital species, recorded from areas of Guatemala and the Yucatan of Mexico adjacent to Belize, and which might perhaps turn up in that country.

The book is avowedly written for the popular market and uses English names for all species, including the key

to species, though the scientific names are included in the species' accounts. These all follow the same format: Description, Similar Species, Distribution and Habitat, Abundance, Reproductive Biology (data from wild individuals where possible), and Remarks (ecology and natural history, taxonomy), and there is also a distribution map for each of the nine species known from Belize showing the known distribution within Belize. The male of one species and the female of another are still unknown.

My only real criticism is of the very poor reproduction of black-and-white photographs of spiders and their habitats scattered within the text. Many are so poor it would have been better to have dispensed with them altogether. However, the eight colour plates with 15 photographs covering all nine species are mostly attractive, although I am unsure of the value of including uninspiring colour photographs of the dried holotypes of two species for which there are no images of living spiders—indeed one of these is known only from a single specimen.

Ian Dawson

### SPIDERS IN OKINAWA

By **Akio Tanikawa**

96 pages, 384 colour and 12 grey-scale photographs. 15 x 21 cm. Paperback, with a colour dust-jacket. Orders should be sent to the Bunyou-sya Publisher, 1-14-14-402, Okura, Setagaya-ku, Tokyo, 157-0074, Japan < [HYPERLINK "mailto:araneae@mb.infoweb.ne.jp" info@bunyo.co.jp](mailto:araneae@mb.infoweb.ne.jp)>. 2003. 2,600¥ (About £14.00). ISBN 4-9980907-9-8 C0645.

A new photographic field guide to the spiders of Okinawa (the Ryukyu Archipelago, southern Japan) seems to represent an improved version of the INTERNET photo album (version 1.7d, November 2002) by the same author ([HYPERLINK "http://www.asahi-net.or.jp/%7edp7a-tknw/okinawa/index2.htm"](http://www.asahi-net.or.jp/%7edp7a-tknw/okinawa/index2.htm)).

An introductory chapter (pages 3–16) provides a list of, and brief comments in Japanese on, all the illustrated species (215 altogether). The following pages (17–82) contain a set of 384 beautiful colour and 12 grey-scale photographs grouped by six photos on each page. All spiders were photographed alive and are easily recognisable, as far as I can judge from examining the groups (e.g. Thomisidae, Theridiidae, Salticidae) better known to me. For only a few families (Tetragnathidae, Pisauridae) are all the species recorded from Okinawa illustrated. Unfortunately, no Latin names are given in the captions to photographs: this could make it difficult for people unfamiliar with Japanese to gain full benefit from this book. An up-dated check-list of the spiders of Okinawa is given on pages 83–91 and numbers 314 species of 35 families. This list is by no means complete: for example, the linyphiids and salticids are only represented by 8 and 15 species respectively. Brief concluding remarks (pages 92–93) and a species index (pages 94–95), both in Japanese, complete the volume.

The author must be congratulated on producing this very useful introduction to the Okinawa spiders, a must for both amateur and professional arachnophiles studying or willing to study the spiders of SE Asia. It represents good value for money.

Dmitri V. Logunov