‘ARTHROPOD FAUNA OF THE UAE. Volume 4.’

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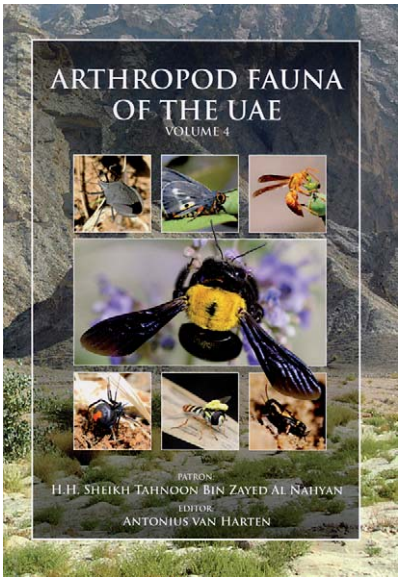
BOOK REVIEW

'ARTHROPOD FAUNA OF THE UAE. Volume 4.' Patron H. H. Sheikh Tahnoon Bin Zayed Al Nahyan. Editor Antonius van Harten. Sharjah, United Arab Emirates: UAE Insect Project, 2011. 832 pp., 24×17 cm. Hardcover. ISBN 978-9948-16-116-5. Available from: Dar Al Ummah Printing, P.O. Box 39975, Abu Dhabi, UAE; email: info@daralummah.ae.

Yet another outcome of this impressive series landed on my desk earlier this year. This time it is truly a behemoth if one considers its size, coverage and impact on biodiversity studies on the Arabian Peninsula and far beyond.

Thirty-seven chapters prepared by 57 world-class experts from 18 countries deal with 57 families of arachnids, crustaceans and insects, both terrestrial and aquatic. A good half of these families were not previously recorded from the United Arab Emirates. Three genera and 103 species are described as new to science, and several dozens of other nomenclatural novelties have been introduced. According to the the Introduction to the volume, 469 species are added to those already recorded in the country.



Taxonomic chapters still follow the standard developed earlier; a brief introduction is followed by a scrupulous systematic account for each family with relevant comments on biology and distribution of species, discussion, and the essential, often abundant, references. Twenty-nine identification keys boost up the value of 11 chapters. Particularly impressive are sections dealing with Braconidae, Formicidae, Crabronidae and Sphecidae, whose keys provide coverage beyond the UAE. In general, a broad involvement of material from outside the UAE (and often from outside Arabia) is a golden thread that runs through the entire volume and makes it a must-to-have publication for anyone who works on either Palaeartic or Afrotropical arthropods, or both. The book is generously illustrated with 442 full-colour plates and 125 sets of black-and-white line-art drawings and photographs. Authors of photographs, as well as graphics editors must be highly commended for the excellent job done.

The volume is finished off with a list of georeferenced localities mentioned in the book, and with indexes, separately compiled for newly published taxa and for other zoological names.

The editor of the series and the entire production team must be congratulated on the outstanding quality of the book. Given the huge size of the volume, a small number of factual and technical errors inevitably crept in. Thus, the family name Crabronidae

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is misspelt on p. 489; some Russian titles are erroneously transliterated; and the word 'African' has frustratingly disappeared from the title of African Invertebrates on p. 757. One is left only to wonder where the specimen has been collected if its label reads "PALESTINE: … 30 km S of Eilat …" (p. 610). The authors of the last chapter on the Cyclorrhaphous Diptera associated with vertebrates cite the book of Exodus when referring to the first recorded evidence of the fly [although this is also debatable] infestation in the region, but their statement on the explosive speciation of the Schizophora and their invasion into a new niche of animal corpses some 65 million years prior to the memorable event in the Nile Valley is far less convincing and has been left unsupported. In no case such errors spoil an overall most positive impression about the entire work, but the editor should probably consider services of a technical editor and a proof-reader in the future.

All in all, the current volume is a well-wrought piece of collaborative effort. As it has been reflected in the Preface to this volume by the Patron of the project H. H. Sheikh Tahnoon Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, "… generating an inventory of species and gathering detailed information on them makes … the soundest of foundations" for a great variety of disciplines, and this aim has undoubtedly been achieved.

M. B. Mostovski

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