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BOOK NEWS
AND REVIEWS



The Spiders of Great Britain and Ireland
by Michael J. Roberts. Published by Harley Books.
3 volumes. Size A4 (290 x 212 mm)

This is the book on spiders we have been waiting for! Published in 3 volumes; the first two are text volumes dealing with all the British species. Vol. 1 includes an introduction, sections on morphology, behaviour, collection, preservation, literature, classification and keys to families, and genera of large families. Each genus and species is described, paying special attention to distinguishing closely related species. Vol. 1 covers Atypidae - Theridiosomatidae. Vol. 2 continues with this treatment, covering the large family of 'money spiders' Linyphiidae. The text is condensed and written principally to assist the identification of the species. Each volume also has over 100 pages of text figures providing comparative line-drawings of critical features e.g. genitalia - palps and epigynes.

The author's aim is to make the identification of British spiders easier for established arachnologists, for beginners and also for those 'occasional arachnologists' who may need to identify these animals during the course of other zoological or ecological studies. It supplements and complements the previous main work of reference 'British Spiders' by Locket and Millidge.

As one of those "occasional arachnologists" at whom the book is aimed, I put it to the test! Using a combination of colour plates, and general keys it was possible to run down the names of a few preserved specimens without too much difficulty. Species descriptions provide a ready check on important characters, and those of closely related species. Text also gives additional information on the status, distribution and habitat preferences. It really does work!

The colour plates, all 237 of them in Volume 3 are superb! They cover a total of 307 species, each one greatly enlarged with legs outstretched; they are accurate down to the last hair. In all cases the actual size of each species is indicated by a life-size line drawing. It all makes identification easier; but the colour plates themselves are a pleasure to browse and enjoy. Michael Roberts has been painting them in his spare time, since 1968.

The price, Vol. 1 £45, Vol. 3 £55 (Vols. 1+3 together £85; Volume 2 will appear in 1986), is going to bite hard into the book budget of the average provincial biology curator, but do not let this be offputting. This book combines high quality scientific artwork with an up-to-date text and keys. In no previous work in the arachnid literature have illustrations of this standard been published.

Despite the fact that Mike Roberts lives and works in Sheffield, this is no biased review. I sincerely believe that this book would be an indispensable asset to the library of all museum natural history departments. It should revolutionise the study of British spiders, and help to put them on the map!

D.W.