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Book Reviews

Grasshoppers and allied insects of Great Britain and Ireland by J. Marshall and C. Haes. Harley Books, Colchester, 1988. Price £25. ISBN 0 946589 13 5.

A sound guide to the grasshoppers and allied insects of Great Britain and Ireland by J. Burton. Harley Books, Colchester, 1988. Price £5.75. ISBN 0 946589 22 4.

It is twenty-four years since David Ragge's classic work *Grasshoppers, crickets and cockroaches* appeared in Warne's Wayside and Woodland series. Now long out of print, that volume has become very sought after by entomologists seeking the most comprehensive and up-to-date authority on the orthoptera, dictyoptera and phasmida found in the British Isles. Natural history book collectors have also helped to reduce the number of copies of 'Ragge' on the second-hand market and considerably to inflate its value. Even rarer than the book itself is the record that was issued with it, of the songs and calls of the grasshoppers and crickets.

In this new work Judith Marshall, of the British Museum (Natural History) and Chris Haes, national recorder for the orthoptera, have combined to fill the vacuum created by the scarcity of 'Ragge' and have produced a worthy successor. Although obviously owing a great deal to the previous volume this is by no means just a re-working of it. Following the general format established by Harley Books for their insect publications, there are substantial preliminary chapters covering biology, collection and study, before the detailed descriptions of the species, their life histories and distribution. A large section is given over to habitats and conservation and the fine illustrations (painted by Denys Ovenden) are grouped together at the rear.

The introductory chapters include two sections which immediately catch the eye. These concern the application of scientific names and the pronunciation of them. The principles behind the International Code of Zoological Nomenclature are laid out clearly and precisely, however the advice on pronunciation may be somewhat controversial, at least to those reared on 'anglicised' latin. What is clear is that both sections could (and perhaps should) be placed in the front of any taxonomic text as an excellent guide to those daunted or confused by scientific names.

Chapters on morphology, life-history, development, song, courtship, predators, parasites and disease are good summaries as are those on collecting and rearing. Understandably the orthoptera are concentrated upon, but direction is given for those interested in more exotic groups, for instance the address of the Blattodea Culture Group - a rival 'BCG'!

British orthopteroid insects are, as a general rule, large, relatively easily identified and few in number. Despite this they have never been a popular group to study as they do not make good cabinet specimens. Unfortunately, the section on preservation does not really offer any new ideas on methods of maintaining a life-like appearance. Rapid drying is advocated, but no mention is given as to whether the use of freeze-drying or vacuum desiccation may be of use. 'Pinning' is the only mounting technique discussed, although 'carding' may help prevent physical damage to legs and antennae and spirit preservation may be useful for nymphs and for later examination of soft-parts. My major criticism of this chapter though concerns the advice on killing of the insect. The use of a prepared 'cyanide jar' is mentioned although this technique has long fallen into disrepute for obvious reasons. Regulations on the use of such poisons are very strict, but even if it is still possible to obtain such a jar, I would never advocate its use to a collector. Similarly

more attention could have been paid to other killing agents listed, for example, carbon tetrachloride is a known carcinogen, and not to be recommended lightly.

As an alternative to the preservation of the insects themselves the contributions to the book on photographing and tape-recording of songs are very valuable. Such a shame then that the only photographic studies of the living insects are the few adorning the dust-jacket.

The checklist, keys to species and species descriptions are excellent. In the latter, bold type is used to pick out the most salient descriptive features which is useful. Distribution maps are plotted by vice-county.

A fairly common enquiry to many museums are insects discovered on imported fruit and other goods. These are often grasshoppers, crickets and cockroaches and this source of foreign species is dealt with. Some of the commonest species introduced by this means are illustrated, but it would be far outside the scope of this book to go into this subject in great detail.

The history of the establishment of the British fauna after the ice-age is reproduced virtually word for word from 'Ragge'. Although initially disappointing, it is a testament to the quality of research that went into that previous book. The types of habitat available today, the use of orthoptera as habitat indicators and the problems of their conservation are all discussed in detail.

A second set of distribution maps precede the appendices. In this case they represent the results of the Orthoptera Recording Scheme operated by the Biological Records Centre, Monkswood and are plotted by 10km square. The appendices are exhaustive and include a gazeteer, notes on twenty superlative sites for orthoptera and even Welsh, Scottish and Irish names for certain species.

Despite the appearance of a number of cheaper books in recent years covering some of these groups, e.g. Shires Books, Cambridge Naturalist's Series, Collin's Field Guides, this is without doubt the finest and most comprehensive book on the market concerning British orthopteroids. It will no doubt become a 'classic' and hopefully will stimulate much more interest in the insects, particularly as regards understanding their complex behaviour and biology.

Issued as a companion to the above book is a cassette of grasshopper and cricket songs compiled by John Burton. Each species is introduced by David Ragge who takes pains to follow the guidelines over pronunciation of scientific names suggested by Marshall and Haes. Once learnt they provide a much easier means of preliminary identification in the field. It is very welcome to have these recordings available to a wide audience again, given the scarcity of the record issued with 'Ragge'.

Ray Barnett