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Buchbesprechung / Book Review

Kůrka A, Řezáč M, Macek R & Dolanský J 2015 Pavouci České republiky [Spiders of the Czech Republic]. Academia, Praha. 623 pp., ISBN: 978-80-200-2384-1

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Spiders are a very popular group in the Czech Republic. This fact is confirmed by public interest in arachnological books like “V říši pavouků” [In the realm of spiders] (Baum 1938, Baum & Buchar 1973) or “Naši pavouci” [Our spiders] (Buchar & Kůrka 1998, 2001) which are completely sold out today. Now, we have a further book contributing to this series – the atlas “Pavouci České republiky” [Spiders of the Czech Republic]. The author team consists of two excellent Czech arachnologists, a well-known scientist and a professional photographer. Such an author constellation promises a high-quality result. During four years of preparation, this ambitious project arose aiming to bring a complex book covering the biology – and specifically an atlas – of all spider species living in the Czech Republic, including photographs of most of them.

The book is divided into general and systematic parts. In the former, readers are provided with information over 64 pages about spider morphology and biology. The morphology part comprises descriptions of the spider body and each organ system. Further chapters deal with spider venom and the most characteristic organs for spiders – the spinning apparatus. All are accompanied by original illustrations and as yet unpublished photographs. The next chapter describe ethology, from mating and moving to prey tactics. The authors also remembered to describe how spiders avoid their predators. The following chapter summarizes the ecology of spiders and their importance for bioindication – a topic that was established in the Czech Republic by Jan Buchar. The atlas thus contains a list of threatened biotopes and the spi-

der species inhabiting them. Furthermore, each spider species is characterised by the degree of vulnerability based on the current Czech Red List (Řezáč et al. 2015). The last chapter focuses on collecting and identifying spiders and contains an identification key for the families. It is worth mentioning that the key uses different morphological characters as compared to other keys commonly used today. It is thus not surprising that the effectiveness of the new key was almost immediately tested by students (Křištofová 2015, Křištofová et al. 2015).

The information mentioned in the general part of the atlas is precise and up to date. In addition, the text is easily readable and the chapter headings are often unusual, drawing the reader's attention, e.g. “Pavoucí kámasútra” [Spider Kama Sutra]. Only relevant data are provided so the reader is not overwhelmed by unnecessary facts. I can recommend the entire general part of the atlas not only as suitable reading material for amateurs, but also as a textbook for university students studying invertebrate zoology and/or arachnology.

The systematic part of the atlas is the bedrock of the book. At the beginning, the position of spiders in zoological systematics is introduced, followed by a chart with typical representatives of all 39 Czech families. Descriptions of families, genera and species occurring in the Czech Republic are then provided. The arrangement of the families more or less reflects the traditional system. Each family (except the Phrurolithidae that was established shortly before the book was printed) is characterised morphologically and basic biological data are provided. The number of species and their

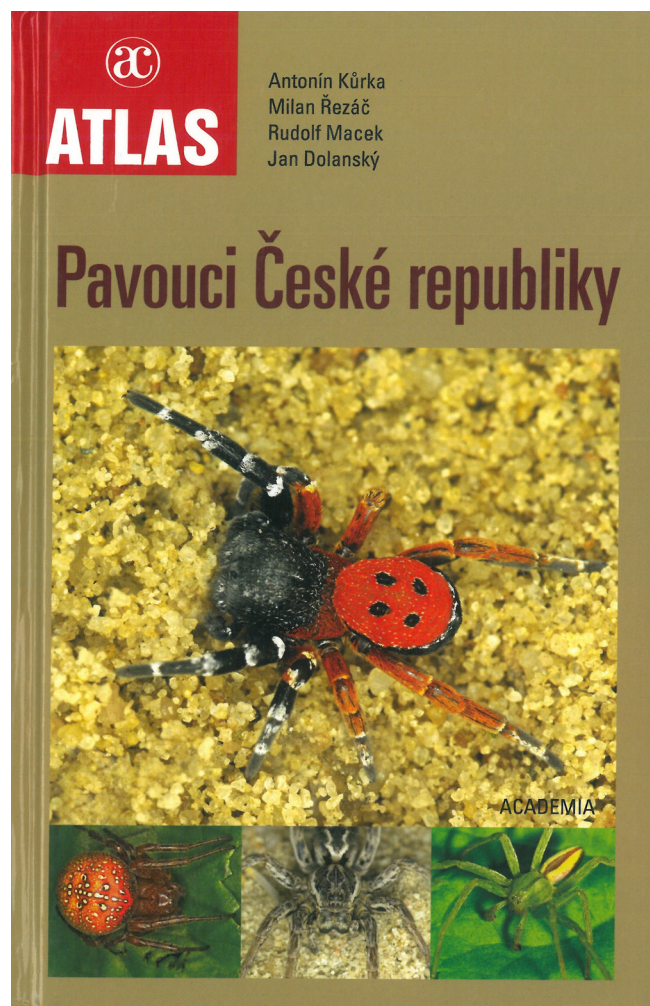
distribution are also provided. The species are sorted alphabetically according to their Latin names; the Czech name, as well as a brief morphological characterisation, is also included. I remember how the authors were checking the true state of morphological characters on museum specimens, in those cases when other literature had provided contradictory data. Similarly, they were checking the body lengths of spiders (some publications give the body length whereas other only the length of prosoma). Furthermore, the biology and ecology of each species is described as well as the period of adult activity. This information was also being checked and consolidated, because some publications provide the entire period of adult occurrence (including resting or hibernating adults), whereas other sources give only the period of reproduction when the adults reach the highest activity and it is thus likely to encounter them in nature. The distribution of the species both in the Czech Republic and in the rest of the world is summarized.

The atlas was prepared to be as up to date as possible. We can find all species occurring in the territory of the Czech Republic. Those species that were found after the editorial deadline are mentioned in an addendum. In some cases, the atlas even foresaw changes – the authors also included those species whose description was “in press” at that time. However, as arachnology is a very dynamic branch, several changes occurred while the atlas was being printed, e.g. several *Habnia* species (p. 358) were transferred into other genera and the resid mentioned on p. 112 as *E. cf. illustris* was described shortly after as a new species: *E. hermani* Kovács et al., 2015.

Nice photographs of living Czech spiders (despite their smaller size) are very valuable. In comparison with other similar monographs published all over the world, the Czech atlas is unique as it is the only national atlas showing photographs of almost all species living in a given area. Only after having a look at the Czech atlas, can the reader imagine the species proportion and richness of central European spider families. Only a few people know that more than two thirds of the species are represented by tiny, 1–2 mm long, money spiders (Linyphiidae). When comparing the photos in the atlas, we also see that it is almost impossible to identify spider species based only on the image. An experienced arachnologist can identify more than 60 species from photographs – in the case of Czech araneofauna this still corresponds to only 7% of the spider species.

A subjective disadvantage of the atlas is that it is written in Czech and thus only easily understandable for Czech and Slovak people, with more difficulties also for those people speaking other Slavic languages. On objective disadvantage is a lack of literature sources. The references include, at most, only books and it is a pity that original scientific papers (that surely served as sources of information for the general part of the book) were omitted. The list of references is printed on one page and on four lines of the other page, so there would have been enough room to include more literature. The indexes of Czech and Latin names follow. Unfortunately, they are sorted according to the generic names – this may complicate searching for a species after it was transferred to another genus. A terminological index is not included.

Attractive photos, reliable information, excellent graphics (I would only have chosen a different colour for the cover) and a high quality print on glossy paper surpassed my expect-



tations. It is thus not surprising that the atlas “Spiders of the Czech Republic” became a bestseller shortly after being published. Also thanks to its suitable format it is a practical and highly recommendable field book for all naturalists, students and professional arachnologists.

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