Buchbesprechung/Book Review

Gajdoš P, Černecká Ľ, Franc V & Šestáková A 2018 Pavúky Slovenska – Slovenské názvoslovie, prehľad čeľadí a súčasné poznatky [Spiders of Slovakia – Slovak nomenclature, overview of families and present knowledge]. Veda, Bratislava. 172 pp., ISBN: 978-80-224-1618-4.

170 × 240 mm, hardback, 14.40 EUR & postage; Order: VEDA, vydavateľstvo Slovenskej akadémie vied, Dúbravská cesta 9, 845 02 Bratislava, Slovakia; E-mail: vedasav@savba.sk;
https://veda.sav.sk/en/book/gajdos-peter-cernecka-ludmila-franc-valerian-sestakova-anna-pavuky-slovenska

A new book written by Slovak arachnologists was published last year. Its name is "Pavúky Slovenska" [Spiders of Slovakia] and its subtitle "Slovenské názvoslovie, prehľad čeľadí a súčasné poznatky" [Slovak nomenclature, overview of families and present knowledge] promises that the book is about more than Slovak spiders only. The authors nicely combined an updated national checklist (969 species), newly established Slovak nomenclature and up-to-date characteristics of the spider families present in Slovakia accompanied by illustrative photographs of selected species.

The author team consists of well-known Slovak experts in the field of spider faunistics, ecology, taxonomy and nomenclature. These authors pose a substantial question at the beginning of the book: "Is Slovak zoological nomenclature really needed"? Establishing national names is usually a questionable topic, often resulting in excited debates. In the first part of the book, the authors answer surely "yes" and support their claim naturally and logically – they took the words right out of my mouth. On eleven pages of the following chapters, the authors justify Slovak nomenclature (useful at schools, for popularization, films and exhibitions, nature conservation, easy to remember in contrary to Latin names etc.) and explain the rules they used for creating it. In general, this part of the book can surely be applied to the majority of national nomenclatures and is highly recommended for all who plan creating a national nomenclature in their own language.

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The second part of the book is devoted to spiders themselves and is introduced by an extensive excursion into Slovak historical literature. While this eight-paged excursion might be useful and fascinating for Slovak (as well as Czech) readers, linguists and historians, it does not bring any relevant information for readers from other countries. By contrast, the three following chapters describe on ten pages exactly the information that the public is most interested in: why are spiders important for us, what do spiders look like and how spiders are divided further. These three chapters introduce the spiders in a readable, understandable way, giving many examples and attractive notes, like "records/extremes" and other peculiarities. The reader obtains there the most essential and up-to-date information about spiders, e.g. where spiders live, how much do they eat, what is their web and venom used for by humans, etc.

The check-list including the Slovak nomenclature is the third, largest part of the book. The spiders are divided into Mygalomorphae, Haplogynae and Entelegynae, and within these groups, the 39 Slovak families are arranged in more or less traditional order, reflecting current phylogenetic views. Each spider family is briefly characterised (from a quarter up to nearly one page of text) and the sources of Slovak names are given. The Czech, English and German names of the family are also provided. The check-list, both in Latin and Slovak (including also Slovak synonyms) follows in a light-orange table, thus it is easy to navigate. All texts are accompanied by original colour photographs of selected species (or their webs and egg-sacs). Dubious and misidentified species are dealt in a separate chapter, correcting several mistakes in the Catalogue of Slovakian Spiders (Gajdoš et al. 1999).

A rich list of references (142 sources) mentioning all Slovak relevant literature as well as recent scientific papers is a welcome advantage of the book. Two name indexes (Slovak and Latin) are also provided. Their disadvantage is they are sorted according to the generic names – this may complicate searching for a species after it was transferred to another genus. Neither a terminological index nor any notes about threaten species are included.

The book is manufactured as a hardback, high-quality print on glossy paper, with yet unpublished photos and nice, uncluttered graphics. I enjoyed the style in which the whole book is written: It is both scientifically correct and close to popularisation, thus even amateurs will not get bored when reading it. The only subjective disadvantage of the book is that it is written in Slovak and thus easily understandable only for Slovak and Czech readers, with more difficulties also for those people speaking other Slavic languages. Thanks to the well-balanced content, readable style and attractive graphics, I can recommend the book to the widest spectrum of readers – from amateurs, students and teachers, to naturalists and professional scientists.

Reference

Gajdoš P, Svatoň J & Sloboda K 1999 Katalóg pavúkov Slovenska [Catalogue of Slovakian spiders]. Ústav krajinnej ekológie Slovenskej akadémie vied, Bratislava. 339 pp. [in Slovak and English]

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