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SHORT NOTE

Taxonomy and nomenclature threatened by D. Makhan

For many years Mr. Dewanand Makhan has been a growing threat to taxonomy and zoological nomenclature, by publishing a large number of new genera and species in groups as wide ranging as beetles (Staphylinidae, Scydmaenidae, Tenebrionidae, Hydrochidae, Hydrophilidae, Hydraenidae, Elmidae, Haliplidae, Dytiscidae and Dryopidae), spiders and gastropods.

These publications are uniformly very poor in quality and scholarship. New genera and species are never properly diagnosed or compared to existing nominal species. The descriptions and illustrations are often inconsequential or grossly inaccurate. Many descriptions do not conform to the International Code of Zoological Nomenclature (ICZN). Furthermore, Mr. Makhan engages in intellectual theft by describing species from already-labeled (but not yet published) paratypes of other authors before they are able to do so (compare Makhan 2000¹ with Steiner et al. 2003²), demands money (120,000 Euros) from persons requesting to see his specimens, and generally acts in a maniacal and personally highly insulting manner towards any other worker who criticises or questions his work.

While the “Makhan problem” is recognized by many major museums and journals, he continues to seek out collections from which to solicit loans under the name of Utrecht University and publishes manuscripts either privately and/or obscure exotic journals with weak peer-review safeguards. Makhan uses the Herbarium as his return address, and therefore many curators are initially unaware that he is not actually employed as a member of the academic staff until it is too late.

In the family Hydrochidae, Makhan described more than 100 species, most of which are synonyms (Oliva 1996³ synonymized 16 (!) of the 27 species of Hydrochidae described by Makhan from South America). The world catalogue of Hydrophiloidea by Hansen (1999: Stenstrup, Apollo Books, 416 pp.) was a milestone in the modern systematics of this large superfamily, and any author who neglects its content by either pretending to be not aware of this work or really never reading it, shows a degree of ignorance far beyond our imagination. Makhan goes even further – he described four genera, which were based on similarly dubious characters as those already discussed and found irrelevant by Hansen (1999): the characters used to erect these new genera are weak or incorrectly interpreted (e.g. 3-segmented maxillary palps). Moreover, most of these “genera”, and some of the species they contain, are unrecognizable due to the very minimal descriptions provided (some of which are 30 words long and include ambiguous or family-level characters, e.g. “legs simple, tarsi 5-segmented”!).

Exacerbating this taxonomic disarray, Makhan published one of his poor manuscripts twice: **1**) as a journal article (Makhan 2004⁴) and **2**) as a privately published “Book”⁵, which he offered for sale at Euro 300 (!) in an advertisement sent out world-wide. Makhan pretended that the book had been already published in 2002, and he gave no details about the page numbers. In fact, the book was inaccessible until 2004 when a copy could finally be purchased (see *Latissimus* 17: 12, and *Latissimus* 19: 6). To our great surprise, it turned out that this “book” contained only 24 pages and that the same text (almost absolutely identical) had already been published in the Australian journal “*Calodema*”! Although the same new taxa are described in both works, the texts are slightly different, with the journal article appearing to be an edited version of the “book” (e.g. scientific names are italicized in the article but not the book); the “book” contains a few additional photographs. The type locality for *Hydrochus hellenae* is given as Australia in the “book” while it is given as ‘Zaire’ in the journal article! Apart from the fact, that selling 24 pages of an already published article at Euro 300 can be regarded as fraudulent, the taxonomy and nomenclature of Hydrochidae have been heavily corrupted. What is the actual date of publication of the new species? Which of the descriptions are to be regarded as the original ones?

In early 2006, a disabusing letter, compiled by A.E.Z. Short, P. Jałoszyński & M.A. Jäch and signed by more than 120 scientists from all over the world, was sent to the authorities of the University of Utrecht asking them to stop Makhan’s devastating activities. Eventually, in May 2006 Makhan was suspended from his duties, pending investigation...

M.A. JÄCH

¹ Hydrochidae (Coleoptera) from North America with description of *Hydrochus pajnii* sp. nov. and *Hydrochus yadavi* sp. nov., pp. 51–53. – In: Sobti, R.C. & Yadav, J.S. (eds.) [1999]: Some aspects on the insight of insect biology. – Delhi: Narendra Publishing House, 313 pp.

² The Seth Forest Scavenger Beetle, a new species of *Hydrochus* (Coleoptera: Hydrophiloidea: Hydrochidae) from the Chesapeake-Delmarva Range. – *The Coleopterists Bulletin* 57 (4): 433–443.

³ The genus *Hydrochus* Leach (Coleoptera; Hydrophiloidea; Hydrochidae) in South America, with special reference to Argentina. – *Bulletin et Annales de la Société royale belge d’Entomologie* 132: 301–341.

⁴ Hydrochidae of the World, Dryopidae and Hydrophilidae (Coleoptera). – *Calodema* 2: 11–26.

⁵ Hydrochidae of the World. Dryopidae and Hydrophilidae. – Nieuwegein: Makhan, 24 pp. [ISBN 90-807419-1-4; publication status uncertain, between 2002 and 2004]

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