

Łukasz Przybyłowicz 2009. Thyretini of Africa. An Illustrated Catalogue of the Thyretini (Lepidoptera: Arctiidae: Syntominiæ) of the Afrotropical Region. – Entomological Volume 16. A series facing global biodiversity in insects. – Apollo Books, Stenstrup. 170 pp., 6 (colour) + 37 pls. Hard cover, format 175 × 255 mm.

I first became acquainted with African Thyretini in 1989 when Vladimir Dubatolov brought a couple of these moths to St Petersburg for identification. Externally, the moths look like unusual Syntomidae or Lasiocampidae / Limacodidae. However, despite spending some time on them and consulting a number of standard references, unambiguous identification proved impossible. This was not a surprise, as most African moths have been poorly studied. Moreover, the Thyretini were not well defined until very recently and the group has been variously treated as a family or as a subgroup of the Arctiidae or Syntomidae. Thus, this monograph, by Dr Łukasz Przybyłowicz from Cracow, is particularly welcome.

The book states that it is the first comprehensive tool for the identification of thyretines, a unique group of large arctiids (Arctiidae: Syntominiæ) restricted almost exclusively to the Afrotropical Region. The 194 currently recognized species are catalogued and illustrated. Information on the original descriptions, type locality and type depositions for each of 333 species-group names is given. Five genus-group names and 62 species-group names are synonymized. Three genus-group names and seven species-group names are excluded from the Thyretini and transferred to other groups of arctiids. The diagnostic features of each species are presented, as well as brief details on early stages, biology and known distribution. The male and female genitalia are illustrated by half-tone photographs and the whole moths by colour photographs. Where possible the types are illustrated rather than other specimens. Finally, a complete bibliography treating various aspects of the nomenclature, taxonomy, faunistics, biology and other information concerning Thyretini is included.

The book is divided into 14 (but really into 15) chapters; their status and rank is different, the numeration is lost in the text of the book and numerated headlines are also often lost from the text. The chapters are as following: 1. Acknowledgements, 2. Summary (only 6 lines), 3. Introduction – half a page, briefly considering the placement of the Thyretini among arctioid moths, without discussing taxonomy, and a history of their study. A short note explains that "in the present catalogue the traditional classification is still applied" (p. 7), but it remains unclear what "the traditional classification" is. 4. Arrangement of the book – an explanation of the structure of the systematic account of species. 5. List of abbreviations of institutions. 6. Catalogue (nomenclatorial list of names, catalogued alphabetically). 7. Unavailable names. 8. Taxa excluded from the Thyretini. 9. Taxonomic changes and comments to the generic level (with some remarks on taxonomy for five genera). 10. Descriptions of species (which is more an annotated list of species). 11. References. 12. Colour plates with adult habits. 13. Plates with male genitalia. 14. Plates with female genitalia. 15. Index of scientific names. The numeration of the chapters is wrong from the 7. (given "6." erroneously twice) that results in the book in 14 but not 15 chapters.

It is not necessary to consider each of the chapters, but three are worthy of discussion. These are the Catalogue, the annotated list of species and figures.

Nomenclatorial Catalogue (pp. 10–29, although not headlined in the text of the book), without doubts is a corner-stone of the monograph. It consists of complete nomenclatorial data (such as original descriptions, type localities, deposition of the types, synonymy and designation of a lectotype) for all 194 currently recognized species-group names. Unfortunately, the number of species associated with each genus differs from that given earlier in the catalogue (see below). A large number of infrasubspecific names (mostly described originally as aberrations) are considered in a separate section “Unavailable names”. Otherwise, there is little to criticize in the catalogue, which is certainly comprehensive. This part will be especially helpful for curators arranging collections although genera and their species are arranged alphabetically, rather than in any systematic order.

For identification of thyretines, the annotated list of species and figures is the most important part of the book. I read carefully the numerous specific accounts, but in the end it left me with more questions than answers.

1. Unfortunately, by separating the catalogue from the systematic account of species and listing of colour variations and aberrations given under “Unavailable names”, the individual variability of particular species is not clearly shown and there are many duplications and large, blank gaps in the text. This together with rather poor layout, such as extra lines for plate numbers only, occupies at least 15 pages of wasted space and make the information provided confusing to follow. The space lost here could have been used for other information, such as maps of distribution.

2. Diagnostic characters are provided for only a few of the similar species. For a number of species, only very short descriptions are given and for others the only diagnostic characters used are for the male genitalia. For most other species, comments such as “lacking contrast”, “females are indistinguishable”, and “smaller than previous species”, provide little diagnostic help and really should have been augmented by figures of genitalia and adults.

3. Similarly, identification keys are not provided.

4. In some complex cases where there is an uncertain or controversial status of a taxon, the author fails to discuss these matters and simply refers to his own works (only three are listed in the references).

5. The author’s point of view is not always clear. For example, seven species are listed in *Pseudothyretes* Dufrane, 1945 (p. 93–94), and are also numbered in the catalogue, but, for example, the text for some species reads: “160. *Pseudothyretes carnea* (Hampson, 1898) ... One of the two species in the genus described from a female. It certainly is conspecific with one of the other species but it is impossible now to match females with males” or “163. *Pseudothyretes mariae* Dufrane, 1945 ... The holotype is in fact a female ... For taxonomic interpretation see remarks for *P. carnea*”.

Such ambiguous notes can also be found in other parts of the book, and suggest that the number of “currently recognized species” is undoubtedly an underestimate. Also, the absence of new descriptions is surprising as it is hard to believe that the Thyretini of the

African continent are so well studied. In other groups of moths, more than 50% of the species are often still undescribed.

The illustrations should be a key feature of a book such as this, as thyretini moths are often brightly colored and many have wings with transparent windows. However, the colour quality of the plates is very poor with the plates being dark and colours poorly represented e.g. red colour is almost absent, being replaced by brownish or dark crimson. Even very bright moths with characteristic wing pattern elements can only be recognized with difficulty or in some cases are indistinguishable from others. Additionally, some of the specimens displayed are poorly preserved or badly set. Finely prepared moths of different sexes, from different locations and various patterning and colouration are absent!

In contrast, the half-tone plates are highly professional, made to the best quality, with easily recognizable illustrations. Here, it would have been advantageous to see some additional marks like arrows pointing to characteristic features of similar species.

The publication has been needed for a long time and I hoped it would be a perfect example, a jewel in any library. However, there is insufficient coverage of the subject. It can not be described as a tool “facilitating the identification of thyretines”. It is valuable as a nomenclatorial Catalogue, although it is not comprehensive in the remaining parts, completely lacking morphological descriptions for moths and larvae, their biology and additional data. Nevertheless, I wish Dr Przybyłowicz well in his studies and hope for improvements in futures publications on Thyretini and really would like to see a comprehensive revision of this group in the future.

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