

Reply of the author to the book review by V. V. Zolotuhin published in *Nota lepidopterologica* 33(1): 173–175

I always eagerly await the next, new issue of *Nota lepidopterologica*. With the arrival the 1st part of volume 33, much to my surprise I found on pages 173–175 an extensive review of my book devoted to the African Thyretini (Thyretini of Africa. An Illustrated catalogue of the Thyretini (Lepidoptera: Arctiidae: Syntominiæ) of the Afrotropical Region). My astonishment was caused by the fact that I had not expected an extrapalaeartic topic to be included in the scope of a journal focusing entirely on the Palaeartic Lepidoptera.

After publication of the book I was anticipating some constructive criticism and correction of mistakes from my fellow lepidopterists through a book review.

The review written by Vadim V. Zolotuhin may well confuse readers of *Nota lepidopterologica* since the leading critical argument is based on the fact that the reviewer wished to see an extensive monograph rather than an “illustrated catalogue”. In general however, the review leaves the reader with the impression that the book is poorly prepared, full of obscurities and, in what is probably the core conclusion, does not deliver the content suggested by its title. I absolutely do not agree with such an opinion and below I present some contra arguments to Zolotuhin’s statements.

First of all I must refute the suggestion that the book was ever intended to be “a revision-monograph”. This term, in the sense of taxonomy, is widely understood as a comprehensive treatment of a taxon. Extensive revisions (monographs) typically revise all known species within a group, add any newly discovered species, and assemble and synthesize all available information on the ecological associations, geographic distributions, and morphological variations within the group (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monograph>; <http://www.e-taxonomy.eu>). This term was neither used in the book nor in any advertisements preceding its publication. It was only treated as such by the reviewer: “Thus, this monograph, by Dr Łukasz Przybyłowicz from Cracow, is particularly welcome”. Instead of being a revisionary monograph the book was repeatedly defined by me as “an Illustrated Catalogue”, “a comprehensive, illustrated catalogue” or “present catalogue” as I was always aware it does not aspire to be any kind of revisionary monograph. This misunderstanding of the type of publication resulted in so numerous, critical “wishes” of the reviewer. Before starting the work on the catalogue, I evaluated the present state of knowledge of Thyretini and highlighted the most useful and feasible way to treat the topic. Such pre-evaluation of the problems allowed me to formulate the statements which were later elaborated in the book:

Preparation of the complete catalogue of the species-group taxa of the tribe Thyretini based on the examination of all available primary types. I should say that the former catalogue of Kiriakoff (1960) omitted several old taxa and naturally did not cover those described later. It also did not give any data on the type locality and the deposition of the types. In order to prepare such a catalogue I examined all of the 333 primary types except in a few cases (lost, destroyed or inaccessible) and these are marked in the text. The quality of many of them (including genital preparations) did not allow a detailed comparison to be made with similar taxa. The real problem arose in that a large number of very similar species were described on the basis of a single specimen (this is especially the case in the descriptions of Kiriakoff). The diagnostic characters presented in the original descriptions were very often so minor and obscure or compared to more morphologically distant species. The lack of drawings of genital details and photos of the habitus precluded any reliable taxonomic conclusions. The only solution to this problem is indeed an extensive revision based on morphological and molecular characters made on extensive material from a large area. As there is little chance of such an analysis in

the foreseeable future I decided to retain many the taxa in their present status, even though they might be changed after future comprehensive studies. I am convinced that the synonymizations should be done on a solid base of data and knowledge, since implementing many new synonyms would only make the systematics of the Thyretini even more complicated and cumbersome. Faced with such a situation, I compiled the full list of all known species-group taxa accompanied with taxonomic and nomenclatorial data as well as remarks. I hope I succeeded in preparing a publication which summarizes all the information which can be useful as a basis for a more detailed study of the Afrotropical Thyretini in the future.

Preparation of the iconography. I am very well aware that curators and collectors badly need the images of the habitus of every species. I was willing to make the book more useful for a broader audience of readers and therefore, I decided to illustrate each available species. This was my second target while preparing the book. Here again I met the same problems of similar species known only from unique specimens. As the book was always intended to be a scientific catalogue and not an album, atlas or an illustrated field guide I decided to use the type specimens rather than fresh specimens with higher quality. This approach ensured that the specimens represented the proper, described species. The short, explanatory information is given on the 8th page of the catalogue. The same procedure was followed while preparing images of male and female genitalic structures. Here again I was forced in numerous cases to show old, badly preserved preparations. The quality of the slides was not good but I intended to present to the reader how the particular taxon was described, based on slides of the type specimens. I am proud and happy that I managed to gather on just a few plates almost ALL representatives of Afrotropical Thyretini what in my opinion is really a great help for collectors and curators. I noticed that in most cases Thyretini are usually left as unsorted material in collections.

Preparation of short descriptions. Having the catalogue and illustrations I decided to add some short information on each species. Here again a large number of controversial taxa unfortunately resulted in a number of unclear statements. Such a situation was, however unavoidable, bearing in mind the poor taxonomic knowledge of the group and the lack of material from poorly studied genera or species groups. I would like to add that in many cases, however, short diagnoses accompanied by illustrations and the checklist of the group are helpful in identifying even superficially similar species. The Reviewer's comment on the lack of descriptions of larval morphology and the biology of species is strange and groundless. It is a widely known truth that the immature stages and biology of many groups of tropical moths are almost unknown. While preparing the book I did what I could to find all published information dealing with all aspects of Thyretini and ALL this information, even old and trifling, is presented under the relevant species. However, I never intended, as the reviewer wished, to undertake the additional study of chaetotaxy, morphology or developmental biology based on preserved material.

After assembling and analyzing all the original descriptions, and references dealing with any kind of topic related to Thyretini, I realized that nothing more could be added with present stage of knowledge without extensive and detailed studies. I also hoped and assumed that the presentation of the main clusters of information on Afrotropical Thyretini (the catalogue, illustrations, short taxonomic and nomenclatorial notes on each species) in one book would be welcomed by the lepidopterists and would encourage both professionals and amateurs to undertake more thorough and detailed studies on this fascinating group of tropical Arctiids.

I kindly ask the reader of *Nota lepidopterologica* to allow me to briefly respond to the critical remarks of V. V. Zolotuchin. I shall follow the numeration presented in his review.

As it was stressed above the book is a catalogue and not a revision and its aim is certainly not the in depth study of the entire range of all aspects of the species' variability. Let me leave the comments on the layout as the subjective opinion of the reviewer. The implementation of

distribution maps in the catalogue, given the scarcity of data on the species distribution at the moment, was never my intention.

Diagnostic characters are given as precisely as the accumulated material allowed. Furthermore, I intentionally abbreviated them as this chapter is rather an addition to the catalogue. I repeat again that the title of the book clearly indicates that it is a catalogue and not a comprehensive morphological revision.

Identification keys are generally NEVER provided in the catalogues.

A detailed discussion on the complicated and /or controversial taxa based on such a small amount of available material is not possible at the moment and this can be done only after accumulating new information. I hope and believe that lepidopterists, including the reviewer himself, will revise the genera or complexes of species of Arctiidae, and Afrotropical Thyretini in particular.

“The author’s point of view” is exceptionally clear. The genus *Pseudothyretes* shows a very strong sexual dimorphism and homogeneous habitus of each sex. The discovery of conspicuous differences in the male genitalia (depicted on plate 16) enables easy differentiation of species within this genus based on males. The females are still a “black hole” and further taxonomic speculations seem pointless. Again, I stress that my “short statements” are only remarks to the catalogue and illustrations and they are not a revisional elaboration of the group under consideration.

The final judgement on the usefulness and the helpfulness of the book will be made by its users. The book reflects the current stage of knowledge and it should be treated only as the starting point for further study. It summarised all published data and indicates how much should be still done to get a clearer picture on the diversity of Afrotropical Thyretini. So, it certainly is “the first comprehensive tool facilitating the identification”. It is true that a lepidopterist having this one book only is able now to identify the Afrotropical Thyretini specimens as far as it is possible with the present state of knowledge.

Regretfully I should conclude that it would have been better that the reviewer had read more attentively the title of the book he was reviewing. It is obvious that he confused two types of publications – catalogues and revisions. It is also very regretful that the editorial board of *Nota lepidopterologica*, consisting of outstanding European lepidopterists, allowed publication of such an unfounded critical review in a journal not specialising in the Afrotropical region.

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