Book Review

KAWAI, S., HORI, S. KAWAHARA, M. & INAGAKI, M. 2005: Atlas of Japanese Scarabaeoidea. Vol. I. Coprophagous group. – Tokyo: Roppon-Ashi Entomological Books, 190 pp. [in Japanese]. This book can be ordered at about 133 Euro (plus postage) from Roppon Ashi Entomological Books (roppon-ashi@kawamo.co.jp; http://kawamo.co.jp/roppon-ashi/sub290e.htm).

Entomology is a science where images should play a fundamental role, in the sense that it deals with objects which are relevant to us mainly because of their shape and colours. At the same time the introduction of the concept of "biodiversity" and its importance in the realm of environmental conservation has urged us all to uncover the hidden treasures of the insects enormous diversity and beauty in order to make people understand and fully appreciate the true meaning of this word. Once again images would be of primary importance in communicating this. Up to few years ago the expensiveness of printing images, the poor quality of macrophotographs and the costs and time required for drawings have been a major handicap hindering the fulfilment of this goal, therefore we all were accustomed to entomological publications with long descriptions, but often with the iconography completely absent or reduced to a few drawings of morphological details only, allowing readers to appreciate only a very small slice of the diversity of the involved organisms. The advances of digital photography together with new cheaper printing techniques are changing these habits very fast. Possibly at the top end of this evolution is a recently published book about Japanese Scarabs.

This book is the first in a series of three volumes covering all Japanese Scarabaeoidea (including Lucanidae and Passalidae). The first volume deals with Trogidae, Bolboceratidae, Geotrupidae, Ochodaeidae, Hybosoridae, Ceratocanthidae and Scarabaeidae (Scarabaeinae, Aegialiinae and Aphodiinae).

This new series is the result of the research efforts on Japanese Scarabaeoidea lead by the Japanese Society of Scarabaeoideans. The society recently published a complete catalogue of Japanese Scarabaeoidea (Fujioka 2001: A list of Japanese lamellicornia. – Kogane, Supplement 1: 1–294), and this series of three books aims to be the iconography of that catalogue. The completion of the first volume required three years of work by four authors. They were coordinated by Shinya Kawai. The book mainly aims to provide an iconography, thus the text is reduced to the minimum and (unfortunately) it is only in Japanese, although some text conventions make essential information (geographical distribution, rarity, habitat, phenology) easy to understand, even to non Japanese readers.

In the first volume a short introduction and a simple illustrated key to the genera dealt with in this first part precede a series of 161 full page sheets covering all the 152 species and nine subspecies listed in the catalogue by Fujioka (Trogidae to Scarabaeidae: Aegialiinae). Each sheet includes Latin name, size, some other information in Japanese, and four charts illustrating the geographical distribution through the twelve major regions of Japan (first chart), the phenology of adults (second chart), their habitat (third chart) and their altitudinal range (fourth chart). All these four charts can be easily understood by referring to pp. 6–7 of the introduction. At the right bottom of each sheet there is a true size photograph of the species concerned and a series of stars indicating its rarity, from one star (common) to five stars (very rare); the number next to the stars indicates the page number in Fujioka's catalogue.

What is more important is the iconographic part of each sheet, which comprises at least 12 high quality large size colour digital photographs for each species, including full habitus of adult males (and females, when there is a pronounced sexual dimorphism) in dorsal, lateral, dorsolateral, and ventral views, some morphological details useful for identification, and male genitalia in dorsal and lateral views. For a few chromatically very variable species (*Phelotrupes auratus*, *P. laevistriatus* and *Bolbocerosoma nigroplagiatum*) one further plate is added depicting all the major variations. The quality of the photographs is striking and all specimens illustrated are perfectly prepared, clean and well illuminated. For many of these species it is the first time that they are illustrated and I suppose that for almost all of them it is the first time that we can see such a wealth of images, including the ventral side.

Sooner or later in our life all of us have dreamed of a book depicting all species of the beetles we are studying, and this dream has come true for those who are interested in Japanese Scarabaeoidea. I foresee that such a book will remain unsurpassed for a long time to come, although at the same time I would hope that this way of conceiving the importance of iconography in entomological publishing will become an example to follow for new faunas and revisions on beetles and other insects.

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