

BOOK REVIEW

Dragonfly Genera of the New World: an illustrated and annotated key to the Anisoptera. Rosser WG, N Von Ellenrieder & JA Louton. The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, Maryland, USA, 2006. 384 pp., ISBN-10: 0801884462, USD 99.00 (hardcover)

The Neotropical region, with more than 1,600 described species, hosts the largest biodiversity of Odonata in the world (Garrison 1991, Tsuda 2000), reaching its maximum expression in central and northern South America. While North American Odonata has been well surveyed (if not completely) and several compilations and field guides exist (Westfall & May 1996, Dunkle 2000, Biggs 2004), the opposite rules in Central and South America. Even when a wide number of species have been described in the last years, many more are still waiting to be discovered and no general keys or compilations for this region exist (with the exceptions of Borror 1945 and Munz 1919). In addition, Neotropical Odonata bibliography is widely scattered.

In this sense, "Dragonfly Genera..." represents a huge step forward, besides offering us a key to all Neotropical genera known, it is also a magnificent framework and a great compilation.

The book is divided into 12 chapters. The first one is an introduction dealing with some morphological aspects, methodology, collection and preservation. The morphology section ("what is a dragonfly?"), even though it is adequate, it is also brief, and I would have expected a deeper treatment on the subject. The second chapter includes a key to the families, and the remaining chapters deal with Neotropical Anisoptera families and Libellulidae subfamilies.

Every family chapter starts with the geographical distribution, number of genera and species, and the family characterization followed by both male and female genera keys. The genera are extensively treated, including a complete species synonymy list (larval description references also included). All this followed by the main bibliography references, distribution, characterization, classification status, habitat and new species potential. A distribution map is also presented for each genus.

A remarkable high percentage of species were directly examined as indicated on the species list.

The keys, built with DELTA key-generating software (Dallwitz et al. 2000), are clear and extensively supported with illustrations and scanning pictures. Keys were tested by biology students and not specialized entomologists on specimens from the Argentinean Patagonia, proving to be highly effective and user friendly.

Even when genera identification is the main purpose of the book, the intrageneric variation is also described by including several species drawings, therefore allowing many species to be identified.

Over 1,600 extremely explicative and artistic quality illustrations together with the keys constitute the core of the book, which is also accompanied with 24 color pictures. In my opinion such an effort and such beautiful insects deserve much more pictures.

This book also provides through its synonymic lists an invaluable access to all main bibliography references. A remarkable aspect is the characterization and diagnosis of every family and genus; this information, mainly regarding to genera, is dispersed or absent in general bibliography.

In conclusion, this book becomes the fundamental study for every biologist and advanced naturalist who deals with or is interested in Neotropical dragonflies.

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