

REVIEW: AMERICAN SPIDERS BY W. J. GERTSCH. David Edwin Hill

GERTSCH, W.J. 1979. American Spiders, 2nd edition. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company. 274 pages. (\$24.95)

To preface the account which follows, I should note that this volume is basically a reissue of the first (1949) edition, and that as such it will continue to provide a worthy introduction for the general reader with an interest in the American fauna. The book is well-written, and it is rich in information pertaining to the natural history of the diverse array of spiders. Contrary to the account on the end papers, however, this book does not "reflect the large body of current information concerning spiders." The lack of current knowledge in many areas clearly makes the use of anecdotal information a risky business; this of course does not detract from the ability of the book to arouse interest in a variety of subjects pertaining to the spiders. In the following consideration of the treatment of salticid biology, page references are provided in parentheses.

Dr. Gertsch writes (201) of the "superiority" of salticids as hunters, and claims that the "line of two-clawed vagrants culminates in the jumping spiders (200)." This perspective scarcely does justice to the concept of adaptive radiation, and the notable success of the Clubionidae and Thomisidae, among others. Treatment of the sensory faculties of spiders is limited. The claim (13) that spider eyes are "feebly developed" when compared with those of insects is unwarranted. Despite the recent work of Michael Land (actually about 10 years old), which established the

ability of salticids to focus on objects at infinity (like ourselves), once again we find the notion that salticids receive a "sharp image at a distance of ten or twelve inches (201)." The suggestion (13) that smell may be lacking in spiders does not agree with the possibility that "airborne pheromones reinforce vision as active courtship agents (80)." An earlier discussion (72-74) of salticid mating seems to favor the role of "ordinary natural selection" as professed by Bristowe; nonetheless this is followed (76-84) by the anthropomorphic (but colorful!) accounts of the Peckhams and the assertion that "there is an active female selection." One can only wonder what is meant by "sexual selection" here; indeed the whole matter leaves me confused. I disagree strongly with the assertion (204) that "salticids live such stereotyped lives that the habitus of the few covers the many."

For the most part the text is not interrupted by drawings; the quality of descriptive writing does not require such supplementation anyway. Reproduction of black and white photographs is very poor, and the color plates which must contribute greatly to the expense of this book contribute little to its substance. In Plate XXXII (facing 147), a dead *Phidippus* is termed "a giant crab spider, *Olios fasciculatus*." Plate 27d shows a *P. audax*; Plate 28c,d show two female *P. regius*. Since this review has been essentially an exercise in "nit-picking," I should once again note that the text of this book provides a highly readable, and a highly enjoyable, account of the American spiders.