

REVIEWS

New Zealand Spiders. An Introduction, by R. R. & L. M. Forster. Pp. 1-254, 164 drawings and black-and-white photographs, 132 coloured plates. Auckland and London: Collins, 1973, \$10.60.

At last we have a natural history book written by someone indubitably qualified to do so. Dr R. R. Forster, Director of the Otago Museum, is not only one of the foremost authorities on several groups of the Arachnida but with his considerable background of museum experience, is particularly well suited to know how best to present what the public needs in the realms of natural history writing. Following the success of their book *Small Land Animals of New Zealand* in 1970, Dr Forster and his wife have again teamed up to produce a fine addition to New Zealand literature and something that will be appreciated far beyond New Zealand itself.

Spiders may not be regarded by the majority of people as beautiful creatures. W. S. Bristowe, in his New Naturalist volume *The World of Spiders* (1958), has given a most enlightening account of spiders in superstition and imagination and his delightful, scholarly approach would, I am sure, convert many who have hitherto regarded these animals as loathsome, frightening, or merely unpleasant. The Forsters' book will do more than this. It is a beautiful book, copiously illustrated by colour and black-and-white photographs and with line-drawings of unusual style and exceptional quality, done by Mr Barry Weston, which will convince many a reader that spiders are, like this book which depicts them, not only beautiful in themselves but have a peculiar fascination all their own which is not based on dread or superstition but on the revelation of their structure and habits so well given by the authors of this fine work. Bristowe's book should, none the less, be read in conjunction with the New Zealand book since the subject matter of each is complementary to a useful extent. We are blessed, in fact, with quite an array of spider books — Gertsch's *American Spiders* (1949), Comstock's *The Spider Book* (1967), Savory's *The Biology of Spiders* (1928), *The Arachnida* (1935), *Spiders and other Arachnids* (1964), and McKeown's *Australian Spiders* (1951), to name but a few which can be recommended for further reading. The Forsters' book is superior to most of these, certainly in its wealth of illustration and local relevance.

The first part of *New Zealand Spiders* discusses the structure, behaviour and life history of spiders with special reference to local examples and also introduces the reader to some close relatives of spiders, the mites, false-scorpions, and harvestmen, the latter group having been particularly well monographed for New Zealand by Dr Forster himself. The second part of the book considers the details of various natural groups or families of spiders found in this country through the range of trapdoor spiders, wolf, lynx, jumping, crab, orbweb, cobweb, and a host of others, to the "midget" spiders on which Dr Forster has done notable taxonomic research. Especially welcome is a section on poisonous spiders, dealing particularly with the Katipo spider and dispelling some of the myths that surround this quiet and retiring denizen of our shores.

The historical introduction reveals something of importance also to us, the significant role that amateur workers have played in helping to unravel the threads of the natural history of New Zealand spiders. Beginning with Llewellyn Powell, originally a Christchurch medical practitioner, in 1871, we find ourselves indebted to, amongst others, R. Gillies, farmer and businessman of Oamaru and Dunedin, P. Goyen, inspector of schools in Otago, George Chamberlain, industrial chemist of Wellington, C. L. Wilton, sheepfarmer of the Wairarapa, as well as to the Comte Raymond de Dalmas, a wealthy Parisian naturalist who visited New Zealand in 1912 for salmon fishing and also to Professor B. J. Marples, a founder-member of the Ornithological Society of N.Z., who became intrigued with spiders during his student days in England, later making notable studies here. It is of interest also to recall that T. H. Savory, that distinguished chronicler of the Arachnida, stated in his history of arachnology, *Spiders, Men, and Scorpions* (1961) — "The true founder of Arachnology in New Zealand was A. T. Urquhart" who published 19 papers on spiders between 1882 and 1897 while farming near Auckland. Both his stamping ground and his descendants at Karaka are well known to many New Zealand ornithologists.

Although this is not the place for a detailed criticism of the Forsters' contribution, it is tempting to make a comparison with the most recent similar book produced in the Australasian region, that by Densey Clyne (1969), *A Guide to Australian Spiders. Their Collection and Identification*, which is also notable for its wealth of colour illustrations (236), less detailed, however, and not so gloriously presented as in the Forsters' book. One serious deficiency in *New Zealand Spiders* is at once revealed, highlighted by a study of Miss Clyne's book. Despite the fact that it is still too early to list the spider fauna of New Zealand at the species level, "barely one quarter of the two thousand or more species" having been described so far, there is still too little help for those who wish to identify the spiders they find. For these the reader must work from the keys to families given on pages 46 to 51 of the first part of Dr Forster's technical work *The Spiders of New Zealand*, of which three volumes have so far appeared as Bulletins of the Otago Museum (I, 1967; II, 1968; III, 1970), each priced at about half the cost of the popular account. One must otherwise rely heavily on the illustrations for identification, and it will be found, in fact, that many genera, families or groups of spiders do have a natural posture or overall stance which helps to place them taxonomically.

The Forsters share their expertise in photography with their readers and those who wish to emulate their success in this field will find some sound advice, of application to other groups of small land animals, in the section on photography in the concluding chapter "How to find and study spiders." Following the instructions in this chapter, readers will quickly begin to wonder if spider-watching (to use Bristowe's expression) is not as enjoyable a pastime as bird-watching. It may be a long time before we have an Arachnological Society of N.Z. or even a Royal N.Z. Forest and Spider Protection Society but I prophesy that New Zealand spiders will have their champions and they will have the Forsters to thank for it!

E. W. D.