

Literature

Spencer, K. A. 1992: *Flycatcher. Memoirs of an amateur entomologist.* — SPB Academic Publishing bv, The Hague. 414 pp. ISBN 90-5103-072-X. Price DFL 190.

Science is a collective pursuit, yet scientists are, in general highly individualistic. A happy synthesis of these reconcilables has proven to be a way to scientific progress. Because of that, biographies of eminent scientists can offer a means to understand the scientific method.

Science is also an international concern, yet especially in the biological sciences work is largely done in a regional frame. The reason for such a limitation is naturally the overwhelming multitude of animals and plants — no one can handle more than a small part of the whole. The choice is then whether to draw the borders regionally, or to concentrate on a restricted group of organisms and treat it on a wider basis.

Kenneth A. Spencer (born in 1916) has been studying the family Agromyzidae for more than thirty years, concentrating his efforts on one family, but with no geographic limitations. He is recognized as a world expert on these flies, and in his book *Flycatcher* he tells of his activities in various countries of the world. Spencer calls himself an amateur entomologist, referring to the fact that he has no academic schooling in entomology, yet having served on numerous occasions as a consultant on these insects, especially in connection with pest research, he might be said rather to stretch the definition. His knowledge of Agromyzidae began through contacts with E. M. Hering, then the main specialist of the family, and has later on been perfected through practice.

Spencer tells of his studies, pursued all over the world. This part of the book is arranged so that each country is discussed separately. The result is a fragmentation of the tale, all the more since the countries are listed alphabetically within the continents. Of course that arrangement makes it easier to find his connections to one particular country; for Finland we thus discover his contacts with Richard Frey, Walter Hackman, Bernhard Lindeberg and Harry Krogerus, as well as his correspondent membership of the Entomological Society of Helsingfors. Yet in many cases one and the same project has touched several countries, and must be dug out from various places in the book. Such is for instance Spencer's work on Agromyzidae for "Fauna Entomologica Scandinavica".

Agromyzidae includes several economically important pest species, such as *Liriomyza trifolii*, *Liriomyza huidobrensis* and *Chromatomyia syngenesiae*. In attempt to prevent their spread, severe quarantine regulations have been adopted in many parts of the world. Spencer relates his experience as an expert on such problems in connection with the importation of flowers from Colombia to the U.S.A. He also gives examples of poorly planned control measures, in which poison has been spread without any regard for the current stage in the fly's life.

Agromyzidae is a fairly large family, and Spencer mentions a considerable number of species. The book has an index, which makes it possible to find references to particular species. Another index helps the reader to find other topics and especially the many localities discussed, and the third lists persons. There is also an appendix, describing how to study the male genitalia. Those starting work on Agromyzidae will, however, hardly look for this kind of information in a book described as memoirs.

Although the study of Agromyzidae forms the main part of the book, we can also find a few chapters dealing with other parts of Spencer's life, before the flies entered it. They include a few snippets from his career in the publishing business, including cases when he had to bribe his way. A few pages deal with Balkan politics, for instance with the Greek civil war, and the Cold War propaganda campaign connected with it; unless you had known most of it before, these fragments would hardly make clear what the issues were.

The book is sub-titled "Memoirs of an amateur entomologist". It does not really fulfil the expectations raised by such a name. Its highly fragmentary form does not give us the chance to follow its author's life and development, as the word "Memoirs" would imply, and therefore "Reminiscences" might better suit its contents. A determined editor might have convinced the author to alter the general structure, and thus made the book more accessible to readers. As it stands, there is a vast amount of interesting information, recoverable through the indexes, but no actual synthesis.

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