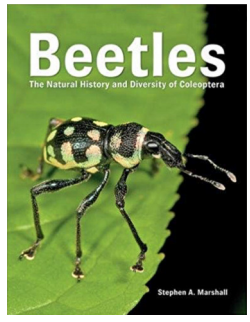
Beetles: The Natural History and Diversity of Coleoptera

By Stephen A. Marshall. 2018. Firefly Books. 784 pages, 95.00 CAD, Cloth.



A massive work like this book is rarely expected even after a lifetime of study. However, (a) this book has not come out at the end of Marshall's career and (b) this tome is not even his second one, it's his third!

One can open this book anywhere in the almost 800 pages and be met with beautiful photographs of beetles, many of them taken in the field; alone, these would make the book a centrepiece on any naturalist's coffee table. However, the huge volume of information in the text will make this a go-to reference book for even the most ardent coleopterist.

The writing is casual, occasionally humorous (with a mandatory reference to The Beatles!), with scientific jargon kept to a minimum. Having said that, the 'minimum' often includes complex names and processes, simply because no easier words exist. Some zoological background would certainly make the text more digestible to the reader. I would not, however, let this prevent me from gifting this book to an amateur entomologist, nor even a novice.

Part 1 introduces beetle biology (excluding taxonomy), including size diversity, beetle look-a-likes, life histories, and much more. This section is richly illustrated with large, excellent photographs. It is here that we find out why beetles are so successful, both in sheer numbers and diversity. Habitat and food specialists are each given a subsection, as have been defences, pests, and anatomy. There are more; suffice it to say that I can't imagine a topic which has not been addressed.

Part 2 of this book is a taxonomic look at essentially all of the 180 beetle families. As in his book *Flies* (Marshall 2012), Marshall writes about each family, richly illustrating them with a diversity of species from around the globe; there are over 250 photographs for scarab beetles (superfamily Scarabaeoidea) alone! Again, most of the thousands of shots are of live beetles *in situ*, but some are clearly taken under studio-like settings and a minority are taken of museum specimens (pinned or pointed). There are even photographs of stamps which feature beetles.

The final part of this book is "Studying Beetles". Here, Marshall describes catching, preserving, and photographing beetles. Collecting methods are described, often in detail other authors may have left out. Notes on some legal issues, with an example of those who got into trouble for not following the laws, are described. Finally, the book finishes with a key, richly illustrated, which is very nice. However, and this is literally the only downfall of the book, many of the labelled structures are not magnified enough to be useful.

A book of this quality and magnitude is rare; there should be no second thoughts about getting this for yourself or other insect enthusiast.

Literature Cited

Marshall, S.A. 2012. Flies: The Natural History and Diversity of Diptera. Firefly Books, Richmond Hill, Ontario, Canada.

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