

BOOK REVIEW

Viéitez, J.M., Alós, C., Parapar, J., Besteiro, C., Moreira, J., Núñez, J., Laborda A.J. and G. San Martín. – 2004. *Annelida Polychaeta I*. In Fauna Iberica, Vol. 25. Ramos, M.A. *et al.* (Eds.). Museo Nacional de Ciencias Naturales. CSIC, Madrid. 530 pp. (ISBN84-00-08294-X)

In 1968 Ramón Margalef wrote: “The battle against taxonomy has obtained a victory; nowadays the classification of an organism has become a difficulty”. Faced with the dramatic decrease in the number of taxonomists and monographs on flora and fauna, Enrique Macpherson recently wrote: “Can you imagine a language that does not update its dictionaries? It will soon be considered a dead language. It seems that ecology is moving in this direction. Our dictionaries are becoming obsolete and this will ultimately bring us to an ecology with deficits, founded on a taxonomic basis obtained decades ago”. The decline of taxonomy has been particularly prevalent in Europe and in the USA. Nations once considered as leaders in this field have lost most of their traditional taxonomic skills. From a scientific point of view the recent enthusiasm for studying biodiversity seems to have in part slowed this decline. Unfortunately, most government institutions seem to be almost deaf when faced with this cultural impoverishment, thus progressively reducing research funds. A common European policy aimed at reviving taxonomy is needed; this policy has been enforced in the USA with a National Foundation initiative to train new taxonomists (the PEET initiative). There is nothing like this in Europe. The initiatives providing databases with lists of species (ERMS) are useful, but the concrete risk is to have a list of the words in the “dictionary” (lists of species) but not many “definitions” (species descriptions).

Spain is one of the most outstanding European exceptions. The Spanish taxonomic laboratory is capable of improving the research around the world and particularly in the Mediterranean area. Some Spanish researchers are considered to be worldwide leaders in taxonomy. For instance Guillermo San Martín’s monographs on syllid polychaetes are the identification tools used by most taxonomists and para-taxonomists (identifiers) in their research into

the marine benthic environment. Since 1968 (with the publication of *Crustáceos Decápodos Ibéricos* by R. Zariquiey-Alvarez) up to the present (with the publication of *Fauna of the Mediterranean Hydrozoa* by J. Bouillon, M.D. Medel, F. Pagés, J.M. Gili, F. Boero and C. Gravili) *Scientia Marina* has been demonstrating that a taxonomy-friendly editorial policy increases the prestige of a journal. The “Museo Nacional de Ciencias Naturales” of Madrid is a faithful ally of taxonomists (some nations do not have a national museum of natural history). Spanish far-sighted government policy is absolutely enviable.

The book reviewed here has been produced in this scientifically challenging environment. It is one of the volumes (the 25th) of the “Fauna Iberica” editorial project published by the “Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científica” and the “Museo Nacional de Ciencias Naturales” of Madrid, financially supported by the Spanish “Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia”. It is the second step (after San Martín’s *Annelida Polychaeta II, Syllidae*) towards describing the Iberian-Balearic polychaetes and another step towards describing Iberian-Balearic fauna in its entirety.

The monograph analyses Phyllodocidae, Hesionidae, Pilargidae, Nereididae, Nephthyidae, Paralacydoniidae, Chrysopetalidae and Pisionidae, which are 8 of the polychaete families currently recorded on the Iberian-Balearic coast. The authors consider the family level as the most important taxonomic unit within Polychaeta, thus avoiding introducing and describing higher categories (definitely not monophyletic) apart from the class itself.

The book is intended both as a general introduction to polychaetology and as a guide text for identification with dichotomous keys. It provides biogeographic, ecological and biological information about the taxa therein described.

The first part is a synthetic overview of the entire class with a taxonomic and natural history, modern systematic (somewhat of a compromise between alternative phylogenetic hypotheses), geographic distribution, ecology, biology, adult and larval morphology and anatomy, ending with a brief paragraph on collection and conservation techniques. The illustrations and tables are very explicative, mostly

borrowed from classical iconography, but some are original. In our opinion, these 90 pages are a *vademecum* for young polychaetologists, easily approachable for beginners and can be considered a glossary for subsequent descriptions of taxa.

The coupling of diagnostic figures with dichotomous keys for all polychaete families (not only the ones therein described), ensures an easier understanding of the specific terms, leads toward comfortable determination and introduces the taxa that make up the book's core.

The second part of the book is subdivided into 8 sections dedicated to the above-mentioned families that are a conspicuous part of Aciculata Phyllococida. Every section contains an introduction to the family, which follows to a certain degree the same scheme used previously in the introduction to the class (including dichotomous keys to genera), and genera themselves are presented exactly in the same way up to the species descriptions. The 129 species diagnoses are brief and light for the reader and follow a common scheme: a first part regarding morphology and taxonomic accounts widely supported by tables and stylistically impressive drawings (even if they lack measurement bars, which would have been desirable). Some S.E.M. photographs help in focusing species' diagnostic features. A second part deals with geographic distribution: as far as possible the cosmopolitan status of some species and some unusual distributions are accurately referenced. A third part concerns biology and ecology and can be useful additional information for both identifiers and taxonomists.

Two indexes ensure comfortable reading, in particular the alphabetic index of taxonomic names (the last pages) which lists the updated taxon name even if the reader tries to trace it using one of its syn-

onyms (reported in parentheses). In fact, Appendix 1 (Apéndice 1) is intended to be a translator of synonymies and solves most of the nomenclatural intricacies. The book's entire contents are strongly supported by an appropriate and complete reference section.

Since Spanish is one of the most spoken languages in the world, the book can be easily understood by a large readership, even if in our opinion it deserves to reach a wider range of potential users through an English translation.

The book's scientific value is unquestionable considering that, with regard to the Atlantic-Mediterranean area, it is the sole available identification guide to the taxonomic entities therein described (apart from Fauvel's "Faune des France des Polychétes Errantes" published in 1923).

Finally, this book is not only a useful tool for expert polychaetologists but also for identifiers that are not accustomed to the "tricky ways" of taxonomy. However, considering this monograph as a final goal, a definitive unchangeable picture of the Atlantic-Mediterranean fauna is a capital mistake. New species are continuously being described, the local faunal compositions can naturally or unnaturally change and the cosmopolitan status of some species is a current issue of debate. This monograph is a starting point, a firm base to be periodically updated and, in the same way as other similar work, it shouldn't be used superficially.

We sincerely hope that something similar will be achieved in other countries.

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