

PREFACE

During the last decades, the living systems of our planet had experienced a sharp decline in biological diversity. The consequences of this process are not completely understood, but may have fundamental implications for the future of the biosphere and the wellbeing of the next generations.

To deal with this crisis of planetary proportions we need instruments that allow us to understand the magnitude of the problem and predict its consequences. These tools draw from a comprehensive knowledge of biological diversity, including the evolutionary history and ecology of living organisms. The foundation of this knowledge are the taxonomic inventories of biological diversity and particularly the inventories of species, the basic units of biodiversity.

Precisely at the time in which we are confronting a biodiversity crisis, is when taxonomy is also confronting its own survival crisis. The international scientific community has witnessed a decline in the number of taxonomists at the same time that other biological disciplines are flourishing. Some countries have reacted to the problem by creating scientific programs to promote the training of new taxonomists and the development of taxonomy through the investment of economic resource; PEET (Partnership for Enhancing Expertise in Taxonomy) in the USA is probably the best known. Some political leaders have realized that taxonomy is just too important to let it disappear as a scientific discipline. Unfortunately for some fields of taxonomy these programs come too late and in some cases there are no living experts who can identify organisms of several taxonomic groups.

The field of Malacology in Spain and Portugal, and particularly the study of opisthobranchs in both countries, is one of the most noticeable exceptions to the rule. Thanks to the efforts of a small group of scientific pioneers in the 70s and 80s (Ros, Ortea, García-Gómez, Ballesteros, Talavera, Luque, Cervera, Templado, Urgorri, and others) the Iberian Peninsula has created the most prolific school of opisthobranch specialists in the world. At the present time, there are probably more active opisthobranch researchers in Spain and Portugal than in the rest of the countries together. This effort has also been reflected in a impressive number of publications, doctoral dissertations, and in the description of more than a hundred new species during the last 25 years.

The present monograph constitutes an excellent example of a comprehensive study of the marine diversity in a region with a great biological importance, and it constitutes the culmination of several decades of biological research. This publication has been possible thanks to the work of many and I hope it will become a model to follow in other regions in need of biological inventories.

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