

Preface

British arachnology really began with the work of John Blackwall (1788–1881). Before this, although about fifty British species were recognized by the Latin names given by continental workers, none had been adequately described. Blackwall's book, *A History of the Spiders of Great Britain and Ireland* was published in two volumes by the Ray Society in the 1860s and was the first comprehensive work dealing with the identification of the British species. Blackwall continued to publish papers on spiders until 1875, by which time the number of recognized British species had risen to over three hundred. The published works of O. Pickard-Cambridge, W. Falconer, J. E. Hull, A. R. Jackson and others, further increased this number resulting in the need for a revisionary work on British spiders even as early as 1900. Naturalists had to wait another fifty years before this need was fulfilled, the British list by then exceeding five hundred and sixty species.

G. H. Locket and A. F. Millidge's masterly work *British Spiders*, volumes I and II, was published by the Ray Society in 1951 and 1953, providing students with a new, illustrated identification guide to the British species. In 1958, the appearance of W. S. Bristowe's classic volume *The World of Spiders*, in Collins New Naturalist Series, further stimulated general interest in the group. These two works were complementary and undoubtedly led to an upsurge in the numbers of arachnologists, both amateur and professional.

Closely following this literary milestone in British arachnology was the formation, in 1958, of a small working group to study British spiders – the Flatford Mill Spider Group. This original group, of eleven individuals, grew steadily, became the British Spider Study Group in 1964 (with fifty members), and finally the British Arachnological Society (B.A.S.) in 1969 (with one hundred and twenty members). Membership of the B.A.S. is now over six hundred.

Volumes I and II of *British Spiders* were reprinted in 1968, much to the relief of a growing number of students, and in 1974 volume III of *British Spiders*, by G. H. Locket, A. F. Millidge and P. Merrett, was published, revising the earlier volumes, and adding descriptions of new species and county distribution maps.

The present work is an attempt to make the identification of British spiders a little easier – for established arachnologists, for beginners, and also for those 'occasional arachnologists' who may need to identify these animals during the course of other zoological or ecological studies. A further volume, in preparation, will describe, and illustrate the genitalia of, the Linyphiidae and will contain a check list of the British species. It will also include corrections or changes in nomenclature and subsequent new species (there are already four as this work goes to press).

There are still relatively few active arachnologists in this country and our knowledge of spider distribution remains rather poor. Knowledge of spider biology and ecology is also relatively poor and there are many exciting advances to be made by applying modern technology to the study of spider taxonomy, physiology, behaviour, communication, etc. This book can make no attempt to deal with these issues but hopefully will help and encourage others to do so.

Discussions with Mr G. H. Locket, Dr A. F. Millidge, Dr P. Merrett and Mr F. Wanless have been of great help with questions of nomenclature, but they are not necessarily responsible for the views expressed in this work. A number of individuals have been of great assistance in providing fresh and preserved specimens of some of the rarer species and also comparative material for the assessment of variability in the commoner species. Dr P. Merrett (Institute of Terrestrial Ecology) provided live specimens of a considerable number of the rarer southern species illustrated in the colour plates as well as loaning many other preserved specimens and

giving valuable advice over the years. Mr G. H. Locket has given much encouragement and sound advice as well as loaning specimens from his collection and that of the late Mr A. A. D. La Touche which is in his care. Mr J. Crocker has been very helpful in discussions on spider taxonomy and biology over the years as well as giving practical advice on publishing, providing numerous specimens from his collection and generally acting as a sounding board for ideas. The following, amongst others, have also given considerable assistance with specimens: Mr E. L. Bee, Mr R. B. Coleman, Dr E. Duffey, Mr P. Hillyard (British Museum, Natural History), Mr C. A. Howes (Doncaster Museum), Monsieur M. Hubert (Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle, Paris), Mr R. Jones, the late Mr R. Leighton, the late Mr D. W. Mackie, Dr A. F. Millidge, Mrs F. M. Murphy, Mr J. Murphy, Mr D. R. Nellist, Mr J. R. Parker, Dr M. J. Scoble (Hope Dept., University Museum, Oxford), Mr C. J. Smith, Mr R. Snazell, Mr E. Taylor, the late Mr A. A. D. La Touche, Mr F. Wanless (British Museum, Natural History) and Herr J. Wunderlich.

To all of these, and to the trustees and authorities of the various museums mentioned, I wish to convey my grateful thanks. Dr P. M. Merrett, Mr A. Rodger Waterston and Mr L. G. Swash all gave valuable editorial help with the book during the production stage, the latter also preparing the index. I am also indebted to Mr Basil Harley for the great care and interest he has shown over the publication of this work, and to my wife, Deborah, for her support and encouragement.

Sheffield

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November, 1984