

Foreword

This volume, which completes Roberts' work 'The Spiders of Great Britain and Ireland', deals solely with the Linyphiidae, which is numerically the largest family of spiders in the British Isles, and indeed in northern Europe generally. It is a matter of history that the development of spider taxonomy took place, until comparatively recently, almost exclusively in the northern hemisphere, where linyphiid species are much more numerous than in the southern hemisphere. The large number of species, often small in size, which were encountered by the earlier arachnologists earned for the Linyphiidae the unfortunate reputation of being a 'difficult' family. In my opinion there is no longer any sound justification for this view; consideration of the global araneid fauna makes it abundantly clear that the Linyphiidae should not be regarded as in any way more 'difficult' than other families which contain numerous species, e.g. the Theridiidae, the Araneidae or the Salticidae.

As is normally the case in the Araneae, diagnosis of the numerous species of the Linyphiidae is based ultimately on the genitalia. Intelligent use of the keys and of the fine figures provided in this volume for the male palps and the female epigynes should enable all arachnologists, even the merest tyros, to identify the British members of the family without undue difficulty.

The present time is a period of active development of taxonomic theory and practice, and it must be emphasised that the taxonomic situation in the Linyphiidae is still somewhat fluid in some areas. It is not surprising, therefore, that I find myself in mild disagreement with a small number of the names used by Roberts. It can be taken as certain that more name changes will become necessary in the future.

These volumes, the high quality of which reflects considerable credit on both author and publisher, are a valuable addition to the literature on British spiders; the arachnologist in Britain is now better equipped than in any other country to study and identify his native spider fauna. It is clear that no further books directed towards the identification of British spiders will be required for many years to come; but how wonderful it would be for arachnology if illustrated manuals of similar quality could be produced for other parts of Europe (particularly for the southern, central and eastern areas), and perhaps in the more distant future for other parts of the world!

Ottery St. Mary, Devon,
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A. F. MILLIDGE

To my wife, Deborah