

Book review

MARUYAMA, M., KOMATSU, T., KUDO, S., SHIMADA, T. & KINOMURA, K. 2013: The guests of Japanese ants

Tokai University Press, Minamiyana, Japan, xii + 208 pp.; ISBN: 978-4-486-01970-1, Price: ¥ 4725; available from Roppon-Ashi, at <<http://kawamo.co.jp/roppon-ashi/sub619.html>>

David R. Nash, Centre for Social Evolution, University of Copenhagen, Universitetsparken 15, DK-2100 Copenhagen, Denmark. E-mail: drnash@bio.ku.dk

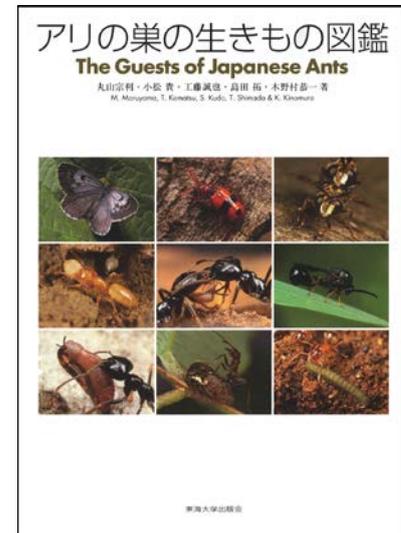
Myrmecol. News 20: 6 (online 17 February 2014)
ISSN 1994-4136 (print), ISSN 1997-3500 (online)
Received 7 January 2014; accepted 17 January 2014

The English title of this book harks back to H.S.K. DONISTHORPE's 1927 classic work "The guests of British ants – their habits and life-histories" (George Routledge and Sons, London, xxiii + 244 pp.), which is no accident as the authors, as they mention in the preface, have taken their inspiration for this book from the earlier work. The Japanese title translates as "A pictorial book of creatures in ant nests", which is perhaps more pedestrian, but also accurately captures the essence of the book.

The main part of the book consists of photographs of Japanese myrmecophiles, arranged systematically, and with explanatory notes in both Japanese and English. The photographs are superb, and generally depict each species in magnificent close-up, in its natural environment (often the ant nest), and in most cases there are multiple photographs per species showing different behaviours or life stages. In some cases, pin-sharp images of museum specimens are included, either because photographs of field specimens could not be obtained, or to illustrate features not clear otherwise. The English text associated with each entry is brief, but at a minimum gives a summary of the species' distribution, the ant species with which it associates, notes on its appearance and ecology (where known), a note of which author wrote the description, and any references. The size range of each species is also clearly indicated in the Japanese text, which is slightly more comprehensive. Brief descriptive captions are also included under each image. As well as the main section on myrmecophiles, there is the added bonus of a similar section on termitophiles, and following each of these, images of the ant and termite hosts with details of their distribution in Japan.

The final sections of the book are a systematic list of known Japanese myrmecophiles and their host ants, and a comprehensive reference list. The former is a major work in its own right, and also serves to remind the reader just how many of the recorded myrmecophiles have been successfully photographed and described in the main section of the book, while the latter is likely to prove invaluable in the coming years, as it provides English transliterations and translations of the authors, titles and sources for most of the Japanese references.

The book is clearly a labour of love for the authors, who are enthusiastic macro photographers as well as experts on Japanese myrmecophiles. This is emphasized by a series of "columns" spread throughout the book with titles



such as "Photographing myrmecophiles", "Greatness of tiny creatures" and "Myrmecophiles and me", where each author gives a personal take on some aspect of the book. At least, that is what I assume they do, as these sections, despite having English titles, are written only in Japanese. This is a pity, as the book comes across as rather clinical to the English reader, which somewhat obscures the authors' enthusiasm for the subject.

The book is not without its faults. One thing that I missed in particular was a map showing the distribution of the Japanese islands and archipelagos mentioned in the text, as the distribution data in the book is given only as city or island names. While these can easily be located in an atlas or on-line, it would be more convenient for those of us not so familiar with Japanese geography to have a map included in the book. The choice of myrmecophiles to include in the book is also a little eclectic – for the most part, the authors have chosen to include species found within ant nests, and exclude those that associate with ants outside the nest, but there are a few exceptions to this, and some species that depend on myrmecophiles are included as "myrmecophiles sensu lato".

As the authors point out themselves, the study of myrmecophiles (and termitophiles) in Japan is still in its infancy, but this book fulfils several valuable rôles. It effectively summarises the state of the art of what is known about Japanese myrmecophiles, including providing an impressive list of new observations and host records. It also provides accurate host information for each species, often pointing out earlier misidentifications of hosts that have persisted in the literature. It provides a highly accessible account to non-Japanese readers of a fascinating fauna and set of diverse interactions, which will undoubtedly allow many interesting comparisons with myrmecophiles elsewhere. Last, but by no means least, it showcases some excellent photographs of beguiling creatures and their interactions with ants, that are both stunningly composed and beautifully reproduced.