

SMETANA, A. 1995. Rove beetles of the subtribe Philonthina of America north of Mexico (Coleoptera: Staphylinidae): Classification, phylogeny and taxonomic revision. *Memoirs on Entomology, International* 3: i-x, 1-946. Available from Associated Publishers, P.O. Box 140103, Gainesville, FL 32614-0103 at \$125.

Almost everyone who has worked on insect communities of natural or agricultural lands in America north of Mexico has encountered members of the genus *Philonthus* or its allies (subtribe Philonthina). All too often identification to species level was unavailable, in part because the existing keys were mainly from the 19th century and were grossly inadequate, and in part because for over three decades neither the USDA nor the Smithsonian Institution has employed a systematist to work on Staphylinidae. I know this because, although I am not employed as a systematist (I merely profess a side-interest in systematics of Staphylinidae as a means of identifying the species with which I have worked as an ecologist), I have been asked to identify in my spare time very many specimens of this group. Aleš Smetana, in this masterly book, the culmination of many years of research, has come to the aid of the entomological community and made identification of adults of *Philonthus* and allies possible. Now I can say to inquirers: "buy a copy of the book and make your own identifications."

Aleš Smetana is an immigrant to Canada employed as a systematist by Canada Agriculture. Having written taxonomic works in Czech, German and French, he now writes remarkably well in English. Over 40 years ago, employed as a forestry entomologist in what was then Czechoslovakia, he began to publish systematic works on the subfamily Staphylininae of Staphylinidae. Since arrival in Canada, his major works were funded by his employers, and published in *Memoirs of the Entomological Society of Canada*. It is a sad reflection on the reduced status of insect systematics in Canada that Canada Agriculture found itself unable to support the cost of this publication, his most important work. Therefore, this masterpiece was published in Florida.

After the introductory taxonomic history, begin 13 pages on natural history of Philonthina. The importance of Philonthina suggests there should be many more pages on natural history, but I suspect that lack of a huge number of citable studies reflects one thing: taxonomy is the underpinning for all other entomological endeavors, and that if entomologists (basic and applied) who have encountered Philonthina

in the field in America north of Mexico had been able to identify specimens, there would have been many more publications.

The systematic section [descriptions, distribution (with maps) and keys to identification] occupies over 700 pages, and then there are almost 150 pages of high-quality illustrations, mainly of diagnostic characters but including some habitus illustrations. Remaining parts are a systematic index and a cladistic analysis.

Smetana states that his cladistic analysis is hindered by lack of understanding of groups belonging to and allied to *Philonthus* worldwide. His next endeavor will be a worldwide analysis. This new analysis may cause changes in generic assignment of the species of America north of Mexico. Beware, reader, that the generic assignment of species names in this book is not set in stone! Yes, it would have been "nice" if the worldwide cladistic analysis had been done before this book appeared in print so that the generic assignments would have been less subject to future change. But I for one am extremely pleased to see the appearance of this book now, and I will gladly live with the need for future changes.

Doubtless some people will be deterred by the price of the book. But it has 946 pages, so consider the average price of a technical book of half that number of pages produced by a "big name" publisher (I won't name them - you know them), and you will realize that this book is a bargain. It is simply that *Philonthus* and allies are a large subtribe within a very large family. Knowledge of systematics of very many of the other subtribes of the family is extremely poor in America north of Mexico, and much worse in all other regions except Europe. If only Smetana were to live 946 years, he might present us with many other much-needed volumes!

I have extremely few criticisms and will air only one. Smetana states that many species of *Philonthina* were introduced to America north of Mexico. In fact, very few species were introduced, and these recently, by USDA entomologists, as natural enemies of pest flies whose larvae inhabit cattle-dung. Most of the species that Smetana regards as "introduced" arrived by unknown means (not by purposeful introduction) and should be classed as immigrants [see Frank & McCoy Florida Entomol. 73: 1-9 (1990), 76: 1-53 (1993), 78: 21-35 (1995)]. But, then, most humans in America north of Mexico also are immigrants, or at least of immigrant stock.

J. H. Frank
Entomology & Nematology Dept.
University of Florida
Gainesville, FL 32611-0630