

Book review

PASSERA, L. 2008: Le monde extraordinaire des fourmis

Librairie Arthème, Fayard, Paris, 235 pp., ISBN: 978-2-213-63429-6, Price: €30.00

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There are books you are ready to read but you never get around to it, and then there are books you constantly keep on your desk within reach for rereading. The latest book by Luc Passera belongs to this second category. The author retired from the University of Toulouse some years ago, but did not stop working. Among other works you might have read "Les fourmis, comportement, organisation sociale et évolution" published together with his Belgian colleague Serge Aron (PASSERA & ARON 2005) or "La véritable histoire des fourmis" (PASSERA 2006). But this time, Passera decided to write a book for a general audience, and for two reasons; first, to inform people with interest in ants, and second, to thank the public who, through their state taxes, allowed Luc Passera to work on ants for so many years.

The book is organized in 17 chapters, with some similarity to Wilson's book on insect societies published in the seventies (WILSON 1971). You will discover chapters on predatory ants, wood ants, army ants, harvester ants, weaver ants, desert ants, slave ants ... All this may sound rather classical, but it is not. Passera selects a couple of recent research results about the biology, behaviour, evolution and phylogeny of ants. In each chapter you will find very recent citations of important discoveries. For example, he presents some unpublished results about reproductive strategies of the wood ants *Formica lugubris* and *F. paralugubris* studied by Arnaud Maeder in the Swiss Jura. Another example is work of Hölldobler's team on *Odontomachus* behaviour in closing its mandibles. But there is also a very good summary of the work about ant phylogeny by MOREAU & al. (2006). This is more than just another "easy reading" book on ants.

Today you may try to be an ant specialist, but we are more or less all group specialized (at genus level or even lower than the species level!). This book will bring you the answer to what should be known on these specialized groups, such as parasitic ants or leaf cutter ants. It is not a reference book like the previous one he published, but a series of neat and up to date stories on ants. The last four chapters present some key aspects about societies without a conventional queen, myrmecophiles, tramp and invasive ants and finally some discussion of ants and men. It is also a good place to discuss cultural transmission among ants (i.e., the work of Nigel FRANKS and Tom RICHARDSON 2006).

Each chapter is illustrated with excellent images (about 80) that will entertain you during this reading, most of them made by well known colleagues like C. Baroni Urbani, X. Cerdà, N.R. Franks, J.-P. Lachaud, A. Maeder, B. Schlick-Steiner and F. Steiner, W. Tschinkel, R. Wehner, A. Wild ...). The only sad point is that this book is only available in French, but I can warmly recommend you to buy it and read one page each evening; in less than a year (235 pages) you might be able to understand a bit of myrmecology in French!

References

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