

Book Review

Dragonflies and Damselflies of Texas and the South-Central United States. By John C. Abbott. 2005. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey. 344 p. US\$79.50 cloth, US\$35.00 paper. ISBN 0-691-11363-7 cloth, 0-691-11364-5 paper.

In my early years as an enthusiastic seeker of the *Lepidoptera* (butterflies and moths), the *Odonata* (dragonflies and damselflies) frequently aroused at least as much disappointment as they did interest. Over the years, many a dream butterfly mysteriously metamorphosed into a less enchanting dragonfly on close approach. Of course, dragonflies and damselflies are, in their own way, just as interesting as butterflies, but not to this butterfly collector in those days. Then, I saw all odonates as just dragonflies and damselflies, in the same generic way that those unfamiliar with agrostology or range management science often see the world's more than 10,000 grass species as simply *grass*. G. K. Chesterton was right when he said that there are no uninteresting things; there are only uninterested people.

In John Abbott's *Dragonflies and Damselflies of Texas and the South-Central United States*, the glory and diversity of the *Odonata* are conspicuous even to the uninterested. The book covers 263 individual species, including 178 dragonflies and 85 of the more delicate damselflies. Sporting 328 color plates, 32 drawings, 6 tables, and 263 distribution maps, the book claims complete coverage of the order in the states of Texas, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Louisiana. It is the first such comprehensive, published work on the subject for that region.

The book is an excellent field guide but is clearly more than a field guide. Its detailed, lengthy descriptions of the species include discussions of firsthand encounters, and these discussions often include descriptions of species' habits and habitats. The book includes most of what specialized professionals would want to know about these species and more than most amateur enthusiasts would need. The color photographs, with a few exceptions, show excellent resolution and effectively showcase the diversity of color in wing and body of the odonates.

The photographs of the dragonflies and damselflies are almost impressive enough to convert an often-disappointed *Lepidoptera* devotee into an *Odonata* enthusiast. Almost.

The distribution maps of individual species are of the checkered, county-by-county kind that reflect reported species sightings by county. The species descriptions, which constitute most of the book, are supported by an introduction, species checklist, glossary, extensive bibliography, and detailed index.

Dragonflies and Damselflies of Texas and the South-Central United States, as an impressive, authoritative reference on the *Odonata*, should be of great interest to entomologists and general naturalists of that region. Because the species described in the book represent, by the author's account, over half the species of *Odonata* in North America north of Mexico, those with interest in the insect order anywhere should find the regionally comprehensive book a valuable reference, and a great field guide.—David L. Scarnecchia, Washington State University, Pullman, WA.