

Insects of Kazakhstan: a photographic atlas.

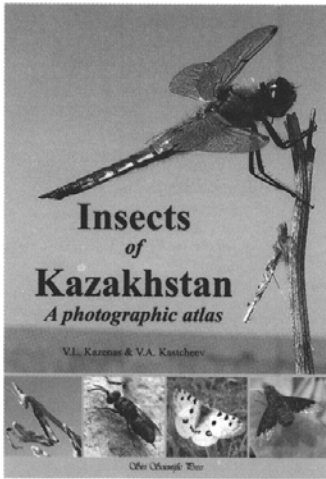
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Kazakhstan is one of the more remote regions of Eurasia, Central Asia which has remained insufficiently studied with regards to insects and other invertebrates. This is partly due to the lack of accessible, popular literature that could be used as a visual guide by amateur or early-stage naturalists, biology teachers, school children, wildlife photographers or general entomologists. It is my pleasure to introduce a new popular book on insects of Kazakhstan to the readers of *Antenna*.

Kazakhstan, or officially the Republic of Kazakhstan, is the ninth largest country in the world in terms of area occupied, covering a territory equal in size to Western Europe. Kazakhstan lies in between the Caspian Sea in the west and NW China in the east, and encompasses a great variety of landscapes and habitats, from deserts and steppes to taiga-forests, rock-canyons and even snow-capped mountains. The 'Introduction' of the new book (p. 5–9) contains twenty-two colour photos of some of these habitats, giving a real impression of the natural diversity of landscapes in Kazakhstan.

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This book has been written by two professional entomologists from the Institute of Zoology in Almaty: Vladimir L. Kazenas, an expert on the aculeate Hymenoptera (Sphecidae in particular), and Vitaly A. Kastcheev, a coleopterist specializing in the rove-beetles. This is a unique edition, containing some 1100 colour photographs documenting more than 1000 insect species. Although about 27 expert entomologists were involved in the identification of the photographed insects (their names are mentioned in the 'Acknowledgements'), some 25% of the featured insects (in such groups as the parasitoid wasps, cuckoo wasps, solitary bees or certain Diptera groups) remain understandably unidentified or identified to genus only. As mentioned in the 'Introduction' (p. 6), the insect fauna of Kazakhstan consists of about 20,000 recorded species of approximately 50,000 that appear to occur there. Although only a small percentage of the Kazakhstani insects is covered by this book, which is hardly surprising, the featured species are indeed those that are most likely to be encountered by a naturalist visiting the country, as evidenced by a selection of the blister beetles (p. 88–93), the darkling beetles (p. 94–97) or of the macro-Lepidoptera (p. 168–203). Everyone who has collected insects in Kazakhstan, as did the author of this review, would agree with the latter statement. Moreover, it is safe to assume that the audience of this richly illustrated book is potentially very broad and will include not only entomologists, but also wildlife photographers and interested eco-tourists.

The book consists of an 'Introduction', 18 chapters according to the insect orders considered (of the 30 orders known from Kazakhstan), 'Bibliography' and 'Index to Families' (with common names). One of the chapters (p. 10) is devoted to two orders: Zygentoma (silverfish) and Archaeognatha (bristletails). Homoptera (p. 50–58) and Hemiptera (p. 59–70) are treated as separate orders. Each chapter starts with a concise characteristic of the order: viz. the information on its world and regional diversity, brief morphological description and some biological data, followed by the photographic account of better known or spectacular species. Each photo is provided with species and family names. The majority of photos were taken in the wild from live specimens, with a few exceptions (e.g., *Carabus granulatus* on p. 73; Staphylinidae on p. 111; *Myrmica atra* on p. 151, etc.) when museum specimens were set up in 'live postures' and photographed. The 'Bibliography' given on pages 227–228 contains a short reference list of 39 selected Russian titles (but translated into English), most of which are books written by recognized experts and devoted to the regional fauna of or identification keys (called by mistake 'determinants') to various insect groups. Although it is indeed a good selection of main sources of information available for the Kazakhstani insect fauna, some important recent works are missing: e.g., the latest treatise of Orthoptera of Kazakhstan and neighbouring territories by Latchinsky et al. (2002).

The reader of this book will have a chance to see live photos of some endemic Central Asian insects: such as, the wingless grasshoppers *Conophyma almasyi*, *C. nanum* and *C. semenovi* (p. 31) restricted to the south-east regions of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan only, the interesting central Asian mantid *Empusa pennicornis* (p. 25), or the Middle Asian blister beetle *Mylabris elegantissima* (p. 90) known to be closely associated with the so-called sand acacias (*Ammodendron* spp., Fabaceae) feeding on their buds and flowers. Such examples can be extended. A chapter devoted to the aculeate Hymenoptera (p. 116–164) looks quite impressive, containing 305 photos of 251 species. The reader will enjoy the live photographs of named solitary and social wasps (p. 129–151), as I did. To my knowledge, some of these species (e.g., *Chalybion turanicum* – p. 133, *Crabro altaicus* – p. 141, *Prionyx haberhaueri* – p. 135, *Sphecius uljanini* – p. 147, and some others) have never been photographed previously. It is a bit unfortunate that the authors did not provide any comments or at least extended captions to the aforementioned and other 'exotic to Europeans' insects presented in this book.

Overall, the book makes a very good impression with regard to its carefully selected content and quality, being printed on high grade glossy paper, and I wish to congratulate the authors and publisher for such fine work. The book constitutes a reliable visual guide on selected groups of Kazakhstani insects and will be useful both for the beginners making their first steps in entomology and for general entomologists (amateur and professional alike). It is a must-have for all entomologists or naturalists with an interest in the fauna of this region, or for those wishing to visit Kazakhstan, a rather exotic region where lots of entomological discoveries await those who challenge to come over and search for them. The book will also be useful for entomological curators who deal with museum insect collections from this part of the world.

References

Latchinsky, A.V., Sergeev, M.G., Chidelbaev, M.K., Chenyakhovski, M.E., Lockvud J.A., Kambulin V.E. & Gapparov, F.A. (2002). [Orthoptera of Kazakhstan, Middle Asia and neighbouring territories]. Larami: Int. Ass. Appl. Acridology & Univ. Wyoming, 387 p. [in Russian]

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