

Bad Books – I

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INTRODUCTION

This article will disappoint those of you with salacious minds who are reading it due to the title. It is not really about “bad” books, but it is about books that are truly terrible and are misrepresented by book companies. This is the first in a planned series about various types of “books” now being offered by major book dealers such as Amazon.com and Barnes & Noble and by “used book” sites such as ABE.

While many older books have been digitally scanned and are available in reprint, some excellent and some unusable, reprints of actual books will be treated separately. The subject at hand is “non-books” created from web content and being sold in a deceptive manner.

THE BOOK

The catalyst for this article is a 67 page book entitled “Gerdiella Alvesi”, with the subtitle *Snail, Slug, Mollusca, Freshwater Snail, Gastropod Shell* [see Figure 1]. The name *Gerdiella alvesi* appears only in the three times it is mentioned as the title. Note that it is not in italics and Alvesi is capitalized. Authorship is shown as: Lambert M. Surhone, Mariam T. Tennoe, Susan F. Henssonow (Ed.). Printing date shown as 2011. The publisher is Betascript Publishing, which has a contact address in Mauritius with the statement: “Printed in U.S.A., U.K., Germany. This book was not produced in Mauritius.” It has the ISBN number: 978-613-6-23884-5.

The book is perfect bound with a heavy glossy paper cover.

In addition to the name of the book, the “Eds.” and the publisher, there is an attractive figure of a crawling land snail. An “Imprint” on the verso of the title page carries a great number of disclaimers. Among them are “All parts of this book are extracted from Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia (www.wikipedia.org)” and “You can get detailed informations about the authors of this collection of articles at the end of the book. The editors (Ed.) are no authors. They have not modified or extended the original texts.” [spelling and grammar in quotation is as published].

The title of this book is not shown in italics as it was not so shown by the publisher. The publisher utilizes this same format for other book titles that are scientific names.

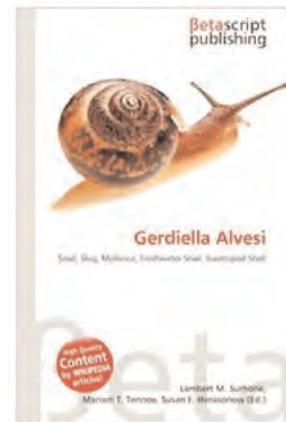


Figure 1

CONTENTS

There is a half-title page bearing only the names of the editors and the name of the book, Gerdiella Alvesi. The verso of that page is blank. The title page bears the same data in a larger font with the subtitle and publisher added. The verso of the title page is headed "Imprints" and contains a page of information about "permissions", etc. and the address of a "contact" in Mauritius. It is the name of a company and not Betascript.

The following page, printed only on the recto, is a list of Contents which is:

Articles

Bayerius peruvianus

Snail

Sea snail

Slug

Mollusca

Gastropoda

Rissooidea

Assimineidae

Animal

Heteropoma

Caenogastropoda

References

Article sources and Contributors

Image Sources, Licenses and Contributors

Article Licenses

License

A detailed description of the contents will not be attempted as it would probably end up being longer than the book. Each section has footnotes with references taken from Wikipedia together with the copied content. There is no reason given for the selection of what little is included, mostly general information about Mollusca (and other animals), presented in no discernible order.

One of the few species treated at all is on Page 1 where the heading is *Bayerius peruvianus*. There is a "Wikipedia box" with the "Scientific classification" showing it to be in "Kingdom: Animalia; Phylum: Mollusca; Class: Gastropoda; Unranked: clade Caenogastropoda, clade Hypogastropoda, clade Neogastropoda; Superfamily: Buccinoidea; Family: Buccinidae; Genus: *Bayerius*; Species: *B. peruvianus*;

Binomial [sic] name: *Bayerius peruvianus* Warén & Bouchet, 2001." We are then informed that "*Bayerius peruvianus* is a species of sea snail, a marine gastropod mollusk in the family Buccinidae, the true whelks." This is followed by two references to Warén & Bouchet, both taken from the data base WoRMS. That is all there is. There is no illustration of the shell, nor is there any mention of where the species occurs or any other data.

Most references are to recognizable works such as Bouchet & Rocroi (2005) and Ponder & Lindberg (2004) with a Berkeley web site for the latter. The Conchologists of America is cited for Rosenberg's article on the word "mollusk" with a valid web reference. Some parts are confused as in the part where conflicting sources are cited for the estimated number of mollusks.

Any one of most sections of this book would be suitable for a seventh grade show-and-tell, without the show. Illustrations are few and poor. However, any seventh-grader with Internet access can get more information from the web than is contained in this book.

As mentioned earlier, the title species, *Gerdiella alvesi*, appears only in the title. Neither it nor any congeners are listed by name within the book.

ARTICLE SOURCES AND CONTRIBUTORS

This is the title of two and a half pages of very small type, listing in serial format contributors to the Wikipedia articles that have been cannibalized. If every contributor listed had supplied a sentence, the book would have been a lot longer. Some are "real people" with recognizable names. However, the great majority are "web names" such as Buhnahnus; BuickCenturyDriver; Bongwarrior; Dances with Waves; Psychonut; WhisperToMe; Fungusdookie; etc. There are literally hundreds of these unidentifiable sources although it may be possible to determine their identity in some way through Wikipedia.

GOOGLE™

A Google™ search for *Gerdiella alvesi* brings up 359 sources, a highly unlikely number for a newly described deep-water species that has

never been on the commercial market. Many of these hits are for sites that copy data from WoRMS, the web-site data-base for marine organisms. Listings there are routinely picked up and copied by other data bases and by scavenging compilers such as Wikipedia. The first of these 359 sources listed is Google™ Books. On that web page a short description of the book is found but there were no reviews until I wrote one (see below). The book is shown to be available from Barnes & Noble.com for \$49.00. There are spaces for prices from other book companies, including Amazon.com, but without prices, indicating that they are not available from those sources.

Another American carrier of these books is BetterWorldBooks.com with 34,908 Surhone titles listed. A check reveals that it lists “Gerdiella Alvesi”, but at a higher price.

Many of these hundreds of Google™ listings are from foreign book dealers. There is a listing for Amazon.com [U.S.A.] but that link is non-responsive, and a search on Amazon.com fails to find it. This book is listed by Amazon in Great Britain and Japan among other countries.

BARNES & NOBLE

The major book seller Barnes & Noble is, in my opinion, acting irresponsibly in listing this sort of product. Given the quantity of titles they list for this editor, the quality must at least be suspect to anyone. Such quantity is possible only because these “books” exist only in computers and are printed with the desired title as they are ordered.

Although the disclaimer in the book, as mentioned in the description above, states that “all parts of this book are extracted from Wikipedia,” the Barnes & Noble’s ad states: “Please note that the content of this book primarily consists of articles available from Wikipedia or other free sources online,” which infers that non-Wikipedia sources are used.

Barnes & Noble, from whom the copy at hand was purchased, on 19 December 2011 listed 349,754 titles by Lambert M. Surhone. This is less than a German website with 356,765 titles. Amazon.com [Britain] lists 154,883 titles. These titles are on every imaginable subject. The num-

ber with molluscan titles is not known, but it is considerable. A search on the Barnes & Noble web site for the editor’s name and Mollusca returns 73 listings that are titles in the form “Coluzea, Mollusca”, “Aforia, Mollusca”, and “Aforia goniodes, Mollusca”, but that is a small fraction of the true total as that search returned only those titles in which “Mollusca” appears. Not all molluscan names appearing on Wikipedia have been checked, and a few that were checked do not seem to be present but this may be due to misspellings. In order to spread their net as wide as possible, in addition to the title under discussion there is one that is simply “Gerdiella.” A search for selected genera in Cancellariidae gives these returns: *Cancellaria* 45 titles; *Admete* 26 titles; *Aphera* 2 titles; *Brocchinia* 12 titles. For *Brocchinia* there is a title: “Brocchinia (Gastropod)” as well as individual titles in the name of each of the 11 named living species that appear on Wikipedia. The price of these “books” varies from \$49.00 to \$51.16.

The cover of each is shown on the Barnes & Noble web site with the name prominent on one of several different cover designs, most being living land snails. A few other covers have a group of sinistral *Strombus gigas*, the top of a *Melongena*, the dorsal view of a *Cypraea*, or a non-molluscan abstract design.

The description of each book is identical to that given for “Gerdiella Alvesi” and there is no reason to think that their content is not also identical

REVIEW

This review was posted on Google™ Book Review on 19 December 2011:

“This ‘book’ has nothing to do with the species *Gerdiella alvesi*. That name appears only on the cover, on the half-title page, and the title page. It does not appear anywhere within the text which is, as the ad states, comprised of notes taken from on-line sources. This ‘book’ appears to exist with hundreds of other titles. The ‘book’, if sold with the title ‘Mollusca’ would be bad enough, but to list it as appearing to be about a particular species is disingenuous at best.”

BETASCRIP T PUBLISHING

Readers are encouraged to check Google™ for any of these titles and for the publisher, Betascript Publishing. There is at least one blog on which people have expressed their dissatisfaction with these “books” and implies that some legal action was contemplated but that blog appears to have become inactive. It is stated there that Amazon.com had expressed their intent to cease carrying Betascripts titles. It appears that they have tapered off, if not quit entirely. From this blog it can be inferred that Betascript’s offerings in other fields is as abominable as in Mollusca. A search for “Wikipedia Betascript” will afford you more information than can be offered here.

SUMMARY

The book discussed, and others of its kind, are not what they are made to appear to be. The disclaimer that all content is taken from Wikipedia “or other free sources online” could lead one to think that there is material on-line sufficient to compile an entire book about a species. It is only when the book is received is it possible to know that the title species is not even mentioned in the text.

Even if these Betascript books had any use, they would be grossly overpriced. The cheapest price noted is \$49.00, which is outrageous for a 67 page octavo perfect bound booklet. Dozens of dealers list them at various prices.

We suggest that, regardless of title, money not be wasted on a book that is published by Betascript and/or edited by Lambert M. Surhone and his coeditors as listed above.

A Google™ search for “Wikipedia Betascript” will introduce you to many articles about this publisher and these books. Such a search is recommended as it will be both educational and cautionary. Malacology is not the only field infested by these “books.”

Other types of misleading books and reprints will be the subject of future articles.

REFERENCES

The references listed in the book are often confusing and misleading although they are ostensibly taken from the web. As an example, the lengthy listing for Bouchet & Rocroi 2005 on page 40 (also listed differently on pages 7 and 61) contains superfluous data and a website address for the “Vlaams Instituut Voor de Zee” which is simply a listing of the work and a short abstract. References are listed below in their normal form. The book’s listing for Warén & Bouchet 2001 does not include the title of their paper.

- Bouchet, P.& Rocroi, J.-P. (Ed.) (2005). Classification and nomenclator of gastropod families. *Malacologia*, 47(1-2): 1–397.
- Lima, S.F.B. de, Barros, J.C.N. de & Petit, R.E. (2007) A new species of *Gerdiella* (Gastropoda: Cancellariidae) from the South Atlantic Ocean off Brazil with discussion of an undescribed species. *The Nautilus*, 121(2): 99–103.
- Ponder, W. F. & Lindberg, D. R. (1997) Towards a phylogeny of gastropod molluscs: an analysis using morphological characters. *Zoological Journal of the Linnean Society*, 119: 83–265.
- Warén, A. & Bouchet, P. (2001) Gastropoda and Monoplacophora from hydrothermal vents and seeps; new taxa and records. *The Veliger*, 44(2): 116–231.
- WoRMS [World Register of Marine Species] is a data base web site that can be accessed by searching for that acronym or at <http://www.marinespecies.org/index.php>. Last accessed 25 March 2012.

NOTE

Although no nomenclatural action is taken in this paper, this note is to declare that it is being published for the permanent scientific record and copies are being sent to numerous systematists and institutions. It is being reproduced in ink on paper in over fifty simultaneously produced identical copies. It is also being made available as an electronic file.

Conchologia Ingrata is available without charge.

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- No. 1. Petit, R. E. 2008. ICZN Article 9.1 – Why? 4 pp.
- No. 2. Petit, R. E. & Callomon, P. 2009. The distressing case of *Polyhomoa itoi* Azuma, 1949 and *Kyidris mutica* Brown, 1949. 4 pp.
- No. 3. Petit, R. E. 2011. Reprint of Lamarck's 1816 "Liste des objets". 19 pp.
- No. 4. Petit, R. E. 2011. A review of *Rare and Unusual Shells of the Florida Keys and Adjacent Areas* by Edward J. Petuch and Dennis M. Sargent, 2011. 5 pp.
- No. 5. Petit, R. E. & Tucker, J. K. 2011. A name too far. (Review of "Taxonomic review of the *Conus spectrum*, *Conus stramineus* and *Conus collisus* complexes (Gastropoda – Conidae) – Part I" by R. M. Filmer, 2011). 6 pp.
- No. 6. Matsukuma, A. 2012. Index to mollusks in *Tableau Encyclopédique et Méthodique*, part 23, pls. 391-488 by J. B. P. A. Lamarck. 10 pp.
- No. 7. Petit, R. E. & Van der Bijl, A. N. 2012. P. P. Carpenter's 1857 "Mazatlan Catalogue". 7 pp.
- No. 8. Petit, R. E. 2012. A review of *Rare and Unusual Shells of Southern Florida (Mainland, Florida Keys, Dry Tortugas)* by Edward J. Petuch and Dennis M. Sargent. 9 pp.
- No. 9. Petit, R. E. 2012. A critique of, and errata for, *Recent Cancellariidae* by Jens Hemmen, 2007. 9 pp.