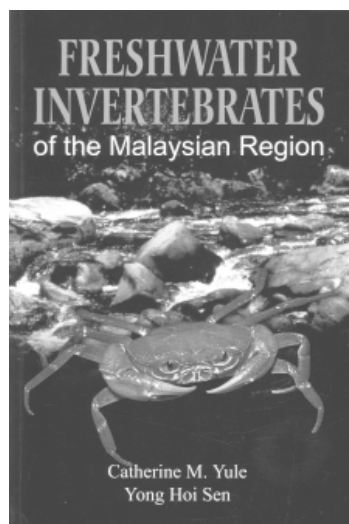


BOOK REVIEW



**F r e s h w a t e r
Invertebrates of the
Malaysian Region.**
Yule, C. M. & H. S.
Yong (eds.), 2004.
Academy of Sciences,
Malaysia. vii + 861 pp.
RM 180.00. ISBN 983-
41936-0-2.

This is the first
c o m p r e h e n s i v e
publication dealing with
freshwater invertebrates
of the Malaysian Region,
loosely defined by the
editors as comprising
Malaysia, Singapore, and
parts of Indonesia and

southern Thailand. It is an international effort that has drawn on the expertise of up to 80 specialists from 20 countries worldwide.

The publication of this book is important, as much of the freshwater invertebrate fauna of the Malaysian region remains “poorly known” or “poorly understood”. This is emphasised by several chapters of the book covering faunal groups that have yet to be recorded from the Malaysian region, but are nevertheless anticipated from its diverse freshwater habitats through further exploration and discovery.

The book is divided into 68 chapters, with the first two touching on freshwater habitats. The opening chapter introduces readers to the many freshwater environments found in the Malaysian region such as lakes and freshwater swamps; peat swamps; rivers and streams; and underground drainages. The second chapter is on phytotelm, ecologically unique but often overlooked stagnant water bodies contained in parts of plants.

The rest of the book is dedicated to the major freshwater invertebrates, starting with a chapter containing a concise introduction and identification key to various groups from the Malaysian region. Groups covered include protozoans, sponges, helminthes, bryozoans, annelids, molluscs and arthropods (with insects—especially dipterans—comprising the vast majority); with the taxonomic coverage of each chapter ranging from Phylum to Family level, depending on the group.

The well-organised and relatively standardised format of the chapters not only makes it easier to navigate and make

comparisons between faunal groups in the book, but also allows each chapter to be used as a stand-alone reference. The chapters typically include the following sections: a brief introduction to the group; general biology and life cycles; representative taxa in the Malaysian region; one or more identification keys; taxonomic, ecological or life history notes on specific taxa; and diagnoses or short descriptions of the main taxa. Some chapters also have useful methodology write-ups on collection, preservation, preparation and examination of specimens. The comprehensive listings of relevant references that accompany each chapter further reinforce the book’s value as a starting or focal point for studies on freshwater invertebrates.

The large number of keys in this volume, certainly one of its most useful features (and probably reason enough for workers to obtain a copy of the book), facilitate identification of taxa at different levels based on the current state of knowledge of the group. In addition, some chapters include keys for identification of separate developmental stages and sexes. Due to gaps in current knowledge of regional fauna, some of the keys are necessarily inclusive. In the Preface, the editors have acknowledged these taxonomic gaps, and hope that the book will encourage efforts to improve the keys, and ultimately increase our knowledge, enabling us to fill in the “blanks”. A few chapters do not provide keys, but instead direct the reader to published ones in the appropriate reference(s). However, it might have made this volume that much more comprehensive as a “one-stop” reference if these published keys had been reproduced in modified forms at least (as was done in some other chapters).

Complementing the text and keys are numerous excellent line drawings. However, the print quality does not always do justice to the illustrations. In some cases, the reproduction is poor, with drawings and labels appearing faint or in low resolution. In any case, these are only minor problems, which are likely to be easily rectified in the next edition. On the whole, this volume remains an important contribution to freshwater studies and biodiversity research in Southeast Asia; and would make an excellent reference and tool for students, workers and managers in the various fields of freshwater biology and natural resource management.

Darren C. J. Yeo

Department of Biological Sciences
National University of Singapore
14 Science Drive 4
Singapore 117543, Republic of Singapore