



# PCT Field Guides; Spiders & Ants

Book Reviews of Two Classic Field Guides

Stephen L. Doggett

**P**est Control Technology (PCT) is one of the leading pest management magazines in the US. Beyond the periodical (which is free to subscribe too), PCT holds seminars and sells a range of educational materials including books, a number which they self-publish. In this Book Review, I will critique two of their field guides; *Field Guide for the Management of Urban Spiders* (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition) by Stoy A. Hedges, and *Field Guide of the Management of Structure-Infesting Ants* (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition) by Stoy A. Hedges.

Firstly, we must ask what constitutes a 'field guide'? Compact size? Cheap? Few pages? Easy to read? Both of these books certainly are compact as they only measure 11x18cm and could easily be thrown into your bag. They also quite cheap, **plus there is a special discount offer for FAOPMA readers only detailed at the end of this article!**

Both books however do contain a lot of pages for a field guide. The spider book has over 250 pages, while the ant guide has over 320. In order for the book to be portable, both utilise quite small fonts to pack in the extensive information; in fact the ant guide does induce some eye strain (and I have never worn glasses). With so many pages and such small fonts being used, these aspects do make both guides more challenging to use in the field. As such, I feel both would have been better as full sized text books and then left in the office as a

reference source. To date, there does not seem to be an electronic version available that you could place onto your tablet or phone, which would make the guides more useful in the field. Hopefully the next edition will have an e-book option.

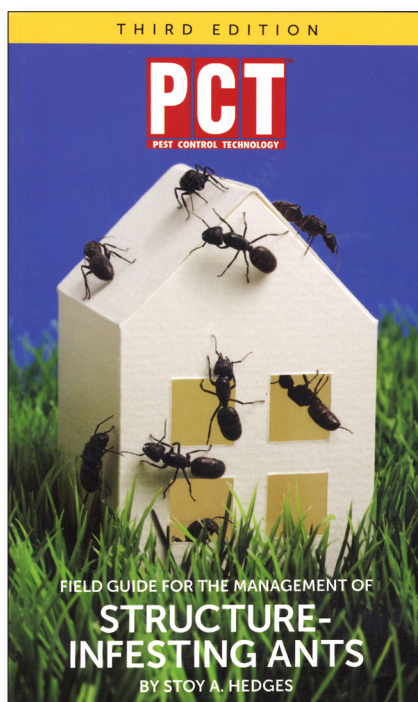
Let's start by reviewing *Field Guide for the Management of Urban Spiders*. I have to say that I have never been a fan of spider management. Generally spiders are not a real problem and rarely a threat to human health (remember that I saying this from the country that has the most deadly spider in the world - the Sydney Funnel web). Many people do not like the cosmetic look of spider webs around the home, nor the spiders themselves, due to some innate irrational fear of the eight legged beast. As a consequence, homes are often sprayed with insecticide when it is completely unnecessary. By brushing away the cobwebs, you take away the spider's snare, and with no prey, it starves to death. Furthermore, spiders are a form of Nature's pest control that can reduce nuisance insects around the home. Plus they are the most fascinating group of arthropods, thus why get rid of them? Curiously, with the Sydney Funnel Web, spraying insecticides around its habitat causes the spider to wander and then it is more likely to enter the home and encounter (and bite) people. Naturally this is all my personal opinion and the reality is that some companies

make good money from clients with spider management, and it is important that the job is done properly, hence the need for expert advice such as that given in the field guide.

Beyond an introduction, the field guide starts with a comprehensive chapter on spider biology. This is followed by chapters on the role of spiders have had in human history, and then health related aspects of spiders, notably the effects of their bite upon people. The care and maintenance of spiders in captivity is followed by a chapter on spider anatomy, which is required for proper identification. Understandably, there is a large section on spider management that features both non-chemical and chemical forms of control. A chapter on identification incorporates a fairly easy to use taxonomic key, although the user would have to possess a decent stereomicroscope to see most of the features. A handy glossary covers many commonly used spider related terms, and numerous references are listed, although most of these are from scientific papers and not readily accessible to someone who does not hold library rights to a tertiary institution.

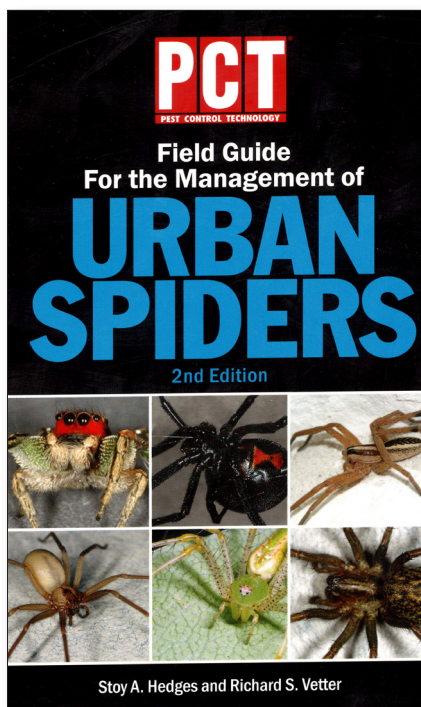
Included are some 72 colour photographs, which to be honest are only fair in quality – a better flash diffuser would have reduced the harsh shadows and resulted in clearer images (sorry, but I am a perfectionist when it comes to photography!). Hopefully, new photos can be obtained for the next edition. The additional disappointing aspect with the images is that no scale is included; considering

the vast difference in size between jumping spiders and huntsmen, the lack of a scale is a notable omission.



to secondary infections. Many ants sting and some species such as fire ants can even result in a life threatening anaphylaxis in hypersensitive patients. Some introduced ant species (including the fire ant) can have a tremendous negative impact on native flora and fauna, and even threaten the existence of vulnerable species.

The challenge is that ant control can be very difficult. Some species are meat feeders, others sugar feeders, while some even swap their feeding preferences at different times. Furthermore, the strategy of insecticide application varies between ants. Without knowing the specifics of feeding behaviour for different ant species or the limitations of the management strategy, then control will not be achieved. Hence the need for high quality pest management



guides.

The structure of the ant book is similar to the other text. Basic ant biology is initially covered, followed by identification (with a taxonomic key), inspection tips, and control strategies. Like the spider book, much of the text is devoted to individual species. There are 48 photographic images captured by Joe MacGown of the Mississippi Entomological Museum, which are superb. Most importantly each image includes a scale. I would have liked to have salient features highlighted on each image, but I feel the shots would have to have been bigger in order to do this, which is difficult in a small field guide.

Obviously both books are geared towards the American market and their species. However, learning about the nuances of the control for individual species will make you a better pest manager for any creature that you are tasked to control.

As noted above, neither text is available as an e-book and herein lies a major issue. The spider book was published in 2012 and the ant text in 2010. Allowing for production time, the information dates back some 10-12 years. Over this time there would have been hundreds of papers published on ants and spiders, and new insecticide products and formulations emerged onto the market. In the end, the pest technician wants to know what is *available now* for the management of the species they are tasked to control. Not only do they need to know what is currently available, even more importantly, they need to understand the limitations of the tool they are going to use. An e-book would mean that photographs could be clickable to reveal larger images that would make inspection of key taxonomic features easier to see. Moreover, text books are carbon wasteful, and as the negative impacts of climate change become increasingly apparent, we need to consider the impact of such products on the world and our future generations.

It is time we need a rethink about pest management books; a hard copy is fixed in time and not a living document. There needs to be a move to a subscription based service for such

texts, which are reviewed every year and thus have ongoing relevance.

Having said that, much of the information in both books is not going to change dramatically over time and both texts are extremely comprehensive, superbly produced, and would be worthy additions to your library. I can only hope that both texts will be available electronically in the not too far distant future.

*About the Authors:* Stoy A. Hedges is the senior author on both books (and sole author on the ant tome). He is an entomologist that graduated from Purdue University and later joined Terminix as the Manager for Technical Services. He has produced more than 150 articles for Pest Control Technology and served as Editorial Director for a number of editions of the *Mallis Handbook of Pest Control*, the premier pest management text in the US. Richard S. Vetter was co-author on the spider book and worked at the University of California, publishing more than 100 spider related papers. Thus the biography of both authors is impeccable (as well as being very impressive) and therefore readers can have assurance that the information included is accurate at the time of publication.

*Field Guide for the Management of Urban Spiders* (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition) was released in 2012 and retails for USD\$12.95. *Field Guide of the Management of Structure-Infesting Ants* (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition) was released in 2010 and retails for USD\$9.95. Both are available from the PCT book store: <https://store.pctonline.com/en/pct-books>

**Special offer to FAOPMA Magazine readers; use the coupon code FAOPMA to receive 20% off the order of any of the PCT Field Guides.**

Thank you to Brad Harbison from PCT for providing the two guides. ■

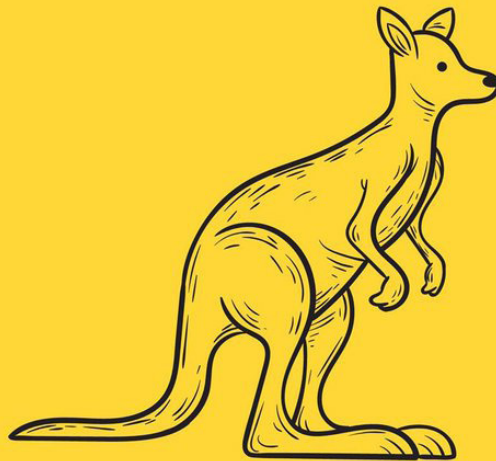
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# *Social Distancing tips from Australia*

## **Social Distancing**

At least one adult  
kangaroo apart



← 1.5 Metres →



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