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BUTTERFLIES OF CALIFORNIA, by John A. Comstock (facsimile reprint of the 1927 edition). Introduction, Biography, and Revised Checklist by Thomas C. Emmel & John F. Emmel. 1989. Nature Guide No. 2, Scientific Publishers, P.O. Box 15718, Gainesville, Florida 32604. Iviii + 334 pp., 63 color plates (reprinted in black & white). Hard cover, 16 × 23.5 cm, ISBN 0-945417-21-7, \$27.50 (\$1.50 S&H).

My first acquaintance with Comstock's *Butterflies of California* came in August 1979 when I responded to an offer made by the Audubon Nature Training Society in Oakland, California. In exchange for a donation of \$20 (which was to be shared with the Xerces Society), the Audubon Society sent a set of color plates from Comstock's book. (Well, almost a set. What I received were Plates 1-41 and 43; missing were Plates 42 and 44-63.) These were, apparently, left over after the book was published privately by Comstock himself in Los Angeles in 1927. I ordered them for two reasons: a long-standing historical (and esthetic) interest in butterfly books and because the donation went to a good cause. I did not own a copy of Comstock's book but knew of its importance to western lepidoptology.

Butterflies of California (with the subtitle "A Popular Guide to a Knowledge of the Butterflies of California, embracing all of the 477 species and varieties at present recorded for the state") originally was printed in two editions. The Regular Edition was bound in green leatherette and sold for \$9.00. The De Luxe Edition, sporting the imprint of a butterfly embossed on its brown leather cover, was advertised as "hand illuminated and inscribed by the author" and sold for \$15.00. Although the De Luxe Edition was supposed to be limited to 200 numbered copies, the actual number issued was probably much smaller. Nor is it known for sure how many of the Regular Edition were actually printed. But in the 63 years since the appearance of this classic work, surviving copies have appreciated in value at least fifty-fold. The Regular Edition now sells for over \$500 on the rare book market, putting it well out of reach of all but the most serious collectors.

The facsimile reprint reviewed here is a handsome volume issued in brown leatherette with gold lettering on the spine. True to its billing, it includes the entire text of the original, printed on coated paper in crisp photo-reproduction. Over a hundred line drawings and half-tone photographs are interspersed throughout the text and are only slightly less sharp than in the original. The 63 color plates (reproduced in black & white) illustrate spread specimens and were made from 62 Riker mounts prepared by Comstock. These still survive in the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County. The 63rd plate depicts 17 larvae and pupae drawn in color by R. F. Sternitzky.

Added to the reprint of the original book is an extensive and informative introduction by the Emmel brothers, whose lifetimes of field work with California butterflies have produced dozens of publications, including *The Butterflies of Southern California* (1973, Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, Science Series 26, 148 pages, 10 color plates), and the forthcoming *The Butterflies of California* (with Sterling O. Mattoon), to be published by Stanford University Press. The Emmels' Introduction to the Comstock reprint includes a seven-page biography, a complete chronological listing of the 236 scientific papers and books that Dr. Comstock published over 67 years (from 1902-69), and an updated synonymic list of California butterflies, providing currently recognized names for the 236 taxa recognized by Comstock. (Numerologists will no doubt divine great meaning from the fact that Comstock produced one publication for every butterfly species known in California!)

Why, one might ask, would anyone want to purchase a "popular guide" to California butterflies that (a) is six decades out of date and (b) will soon be replaced by the mammoth compendium being prepared by Emmel, Emmel & Mattoon? Not for identifying specimens, certainly, but there are several reasons for owning the book, and Scientific Publishers is banking on lepidopterists recognizing some of them. One, it is a classic and important work that is otherwise unavailable. Two, it is affordable by today's book prices

(lapse of copyright helped by eliminating the need to pay royalties) and cheap compared to the going rate for the original. Three, it is filled with valuable information on where and when to collect in remote localities. Four, it covers extinct species such as the Xerces Blue (considered rare even in Comstock's day) and the Unsilvered Fritillary, *Speyeria* (= *Argynnis*) *adiaste atossa*, providing insight into their past abundance and of the efficacy (and ethics?) of early collectors (Comstock claims he once took over 500 *atossa* in a single day). Five, it is historically fascinating, revealing details of a vanished era when a collector could take over 100 species in the Los Angeles area. Six, if you, like me, obtained a set of color plates back in the 1970's, now you can have the text that goes with them. Seven, the writing is good, sometimes excellent, and occasionally inspired (e.g., "[*Parnassius clodius baldur*] is commonly encountered in our upland meadows of the Sierra Nevadas, or sporting about precipitous cliffs, where it is by no means easy of capture."). Eight (if you're still interested, dear reader), the Emmel, Emmel & Mattoon (EEM) volume has been "forthcoming" for some time—in the Introduction to the Comstock reprint it is cited (optimistically) as having a 1989 publication date (publication is currently projected for fall 1991)—and purchase of the Comstock reprint will give you something to read until *The Butterflies of California* finally appears.

It will be fascinating to compare what was known about California butterflies in 1927 with what we will know in 1991 after *The Butterflies of California* is published. For example, the EEM volume will be twice as long as Comstock's (>700 pages), will include 1200 life history illustrations and more than 50 habitat photographs, and will contain detailed distribution maps for every species and subspecies. Although EEM's *The Butterflies of California* will treat a similar number of species (267 compared to Comstock's 236), over 100 of these are new since Comstock's volume was published, a paradox that results largely from substantial taxonomic rearrangements during the past sixty years. For example, many of the *Speyeria* (= *Argynnis*) and *Euphydryas* that Comstock treated as species are now considered subspecies or forms (in the entire state fauna, over 760 subspecies are recognized by EEM). On the other wing, some species from Comstock's day have been split into as many as five or six species (*Philotes battoides*, for example).

The vast amount of information to be incorporated into EEM's *The Butterflies of California* has been made possible by the huge increase in the number of California collectors (who now make up 15% of the Society's membership) and to the much greater ease with which collectors can reach most areas of the state. The primitive roads in the 1920's meant that it took three days just to get to the desert from Los Angeles; today the trip is a matter of hours by car. As Thomas Emmel says, "It's astonishing how much information Comstock was able to gather for his book considering the logistical obstacles he faced in those early days." Indeed. And what better reminder of that astonishing effort than this timely reprint of one of this country's first and best treatments of the butterflies of a single state.

BOYCE A. DRUMMOND, *Natural Perspectives*, P.O. Box 9061, Woodland Park, Colorado 80866.

ANNOUNCEMENT

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BOYCE A. DRUMMOND, Editor