

## NOTES AND NEWS

## Recent Letters

Dear Dr. Godfrey:

I noted with great interest Dr. Ferris's review of *The Butterflies of North America* by William H. Howe in the recent issue of the *Journal* (vol. 30(2): 138-143). As a devoted collector and student of Holarctic Rhopalocera, I purchased the volume shortly after it appeared, although strong misgivings had been expressed to me by several American friends who, like Dr. Ferris, are to be considered leading professional lepidopterists. As far as I can judge (from collecting Nearctic butterflies only during the first six and most inept years of my 30 as a lepidopterist), their and Dr. Ferris's criticisms are beyond dispute and extremely well-founded.

In very large part the shortcomings of this volume could have been avoided; rather few seem to be attributable to lax editorship and the inevitable unevenness that results from the varying competence of 21 contributors. In a particular field where I am better informed (worldwide *Parnassiinae* being one of my areas of specialization), Dr. Ferris's judgment, though basically sound, has perhaps been more severe than necessary. The current status of *Parnassius* Latreille is so totally chaotic the world over, due to hopeless oversplitting, that Jon and Sigrid Shepard have understandably and even properly gone in for some solid "lumping." Almost undoubtedly they have overdone this. But, like most workers in this group, they have uncritically accepted most of the voluminous work of the two most recent authorities among Parnassiologists, F. Bryk and C. Eisner, who are heavily responsible for the oversplitting; for instance, by now 200 odd subspecies of Palaearctic *P. apollo* L. have been described.

Undoubtedly, however, Dr. Ferris's strictures must be considered as entirely fair on Howe's book as a whole, and we are left with the problem of making the best of it. I feel strongly that we cannot content ourselves with criticism. For most of us, the book has been too heavy a personal investment, and, much more important, it is likely to remain the only major modern work in print on Nearctic Rhopalocera for amateur and professional alike. Nor, unfortunately, do I believe that there will soon be a new edition in which errors could be corrected and omissions rectified. Admittedly, this is a mere guess, for the present volume does not carry any indication of how large an edition was printed; but in view of its bulk, high cost, and inadequacies, the present edition seems unlikely to be exhausted soon and replaced by a new one. Conditions are undoubtedly very different for the highly portable, inexpensive, highly praised, and by now well-established *Field Guides* on butterflies. These, deservedly, sell extremely well—often even getting into a publisher's best-seller list—and therefore run fairly rapidly through several editions.

Thus, Klots's superb, even uniquely excellent, *Field Guide to the Butterflies of North America, East of the Great Plains* was, and perhaps even still is, a distinct publishing success, though probably not so great as that of Roger Tory Peterson's *Field Guide to the Birds*, which initiated the series, and which, as the Chief Editor of Houghton Mifflin told me in the late forties, had become *the* best-selling book in American publishing history, after the *Bible*. Dr. Higgins told me when his very good *Field Guide to the Butterflies of Britain and Europe* first appeared that the British publishing house had run off 400,000 (sic!) copies of the color plates to provide for English and foreign language editions. The newest English edition, just out, is thus the *third* in six years. It is a sad reflection, incidentally, that the color plates in Higgins & Riley, which costs less than one-fifth of the Howe book, should be of greatly superior quality, and life-size to scale throughout.

Therefore, I wish to suggest that the Lepidopterists' Society assume the burden and responsibility of raising the value of Howe's book. To begin with, and taking

Dr. Ferris's review as a point of departure, I recommend that a succinct, page by page, *corrections and addenda* to Howe be published in the *Journal*, quite particularly bringing the status of subspecific taxa in the various groups up to date. If Dr. Ferris cannot be persuaded to undertake this task, it should not be too difficult for the Editorial Board of the *Journal* to appoint a panel of experts for it, perhaps including at least some of the specialists who contributed to the Howe volume. Thereafter the *Journal* might publish at regular (annual?) intervals, or as the number of discoveries warrants, a brief annotated list of *addenda* that will keep the book up to date. Society members may recall that early in its history the *News*, and then the *Journal*, published regularly a worldwide section called "Recent Literature on Lepidoptera." This highly ambitious and most valuable service, which provided brief abstracts of *all* new lepidoptera literature, was discontinued with vol. 20, no. 2, in 1966, no doubt because it proved too space-consuming for the publication and too time-consuming for the contributors. Although the Society is happily and successfully international, still, its area of greatest expertise and prime scientific responsibility, as well as the main interest of most of its readers, remains the Nearctic. The service of bringing Howe's volume regularly up to date would therefore, on a more manageable and modest scale, resume the abstracting service of earlier times.

Nor is this entirely an innovation for the *Journal*. Cyril F. dos Passos himself published *addenda and corrigenda* to his *Synonymic List of the Nearctic Rhopalocera* (1964) in the *Journal* (19: 192; 23: 115-125; 24: 26-38). This uniquely valuable and excellent work has thus maintained its great value, and it is to be hoped that the *Journal* will continue to publish *addenda* for the new taxa described. Conceivably, the *Journal* editors may be able to publish such additions to either of the works in such a form that they can be readily inserted into the individual owner's copy, selling such *separata* for a reasonably low charge. But even failing this, one can readily bring one's own copy up to date by making marginal notes or, even better, by interleaving the volume (small and thin interleaf sheets, gummed along one edge, are available for just such purpose at many university bookstores).

HANS J. EPSTEIN

ED. NOTE: Mr. Epstein's comments and suggestions regarding *The Butterflies of North America* are most notable and challenging. I too am interested in the accuracy of all lepidopterological information. However, the responsibility for rectifying mistakes in non-Society publications rests squarely on the shoulders of their publishers, editors, and authors. With the exception of the following letter by Dr. Ferris, I suggest that any additional comments and corrections be sent directly to the author(s) of the book in question. They may then use them more advantageously for compiling an *Addenda et Corrigenda* to be published either in the *Journal* or elsewhere than if the Society was to take the initiative.

G. L. GODFREY

Dear Dr. Godfrey:

Regarding my recent review of Howe's *The Butterflies of North America* (J. Lepid. Soc. 30(2): 138-143, 1976), Mr. H. A. Freeman has kindly pointed out two oversights on my part. The chromosome number of *Megathymus coloradensis* is 27 and that of *M. yuccae* is 26. Thus two distinct species are involved and Killian Roever, who prepared this section of the book, was in error in placing *coloradensis* as a subspecies of *yuccae*.

In the *Agathymus* section, *chisosensis* was placed as a subspecies of *neumoegeni*. *A. chisosensis* belongs to a different species group as its chromosome count is 18 while that of *neumoegeni* is 10.

Partial chromosome numbers of the Megathymidae are given in Freeman's review of the family (J. Lepid. Soc. Supp. 1, 23: 1-59, 1969).

CLIFFORD D. FERRIS

Dear Dr. Godfrey,

With reference to the note, "Aberrant *Chlosyne lacinia* Nymphalidae) from central Texas" (Neck 1975, J. Lepid. Soc. 29: 259): if Mr. Neck examines the forelegs of his abdomen-less specimen, he should have little difficulty in determining its sex. The fore-legs in both sexes of the Nymphalidae are useless for walking, but that of the female bears some likeness to a leg, whilst that of the male has degenerated into little more than a brush.

American authors seem strangely reluctant to mention the use of the fore-leg as a means of sexing butterflies. British authors, using any form of key for classification, invariably mention the condition of the fore-leg as one of the basic couplets . . . . Imms (*A General Text Book of Entomology*) . . .

D. G. SEVASTOPULO

Dear Sir:

The suggestion by Professor Ehrlich (vol. 30, p. 149) that *P. xuthus* may have reached Hawaii by natural dispersal may well be correct, although I think the intervention of some form of human agency is more probable. However, the analogy of the Lycaenid *Vaga* is misleading. "*Vaga*" *ogasawaraensis* of the Bonin Is. is a *Celastrina* species very closely allied to, and clearly derived from, *C. sugitanii* (Matsumura) of Japan, which in turn is closely allied to *C. argiolus* (L.). None of these species are at all closely allied to the Hawaiian *Vaga blackburni*, which, to judge by its male genitalia, has its nearest relatives in a group of Papuan species which includes "*Candalides*" *meeki* Bethune-Baker, "*Holochila*" *owgarra* Bethune-Baker, "*Lycaenopsis*" *manokwariensis* Joicey & Noakes, "*L.*" *pullus* Joicey & Noakes and several other unnamed species, for which a new genus is required and will be named in the review of the *Lycaenopsis* section currently being undertaken by Akito Kawazoe and myself.

It is certain that the ancestor of *Vaga* must have reached Hawaii by transoceanic dispersal, but it seems likely that the route followed was a more southerly one than that taken by *P. xuthus*.

L. N. ELIOT

#### Corrigendum

The species name *myrtale* was misspelled "*myratle*" in the title of Dr. Ichiro Nakamura's recent article (J. Lepid. Soc. 30: 305-309). I thank Dr. Nakamura for pointing out my error.

Editor