

## BOOK REVIEWS

CALIFORNIA BUTTERFLIES, by J. S. Garth and J. W. Tilden. 1986. University of California Press, Berkeley, California. 246 pp., 20 color plates, hardcover. \$19.95.

California leads the nation in lepidopterous interest according to membership in the Lepidopterists' Society. This first of two contemporary books aimed at the California audience (Emmel & Emmel will be at least another year in process) is a great disappointment. The book offers little more and a great deal less than its classic 60-year-old antecedent, Comstock's *Butterflies of California*. The rather out-of-perspective dust cover illustration is a metaphoric warning about the contents. Following on the heels of Opler and Krizek, and the just published Scott, this work falls in the category of an anachronism.

The authors introduce the book as a field guide, so that "users may learn where to find the butterflies and skippers of California . . . may learn how to observe these Lepidoptera, how to study their fascinating habits, how to record observations so they will have meaning to others, and how to collect and preserve specimens." Of these topics, the overwhelming emphasis is on collecting. With space at a premium, we here get a half page figure on how to mount a moth ball on a pin without mention of the Environmental Protection Agency listing of naphthalene as a potent carcinogen. In contrast, there are two and a half pages on disappearing butterflies. But not to despair. Even though major expansion of urban areas has led to major irreparable habitat destruction and extinctions, "freeways provide quick access to some more distant butterfly haunts." I was unable to find anything substantive on how to study habits or make meaningful observations, although these two topics should charge the goals of today's butterfly "collector."

The field guide aspect of the book is another unfilled promise. Here we are instructed to use the key to families and then thumb through the illustrations. Without dwelling on the quality of the latter, one must conclude this could be a very frustrating experience. There are no maps, only general distribution data, and limited information on flight periods. Life history data are exemplified for *Glaucopsyche lygdamus*: "egg echinoid, flattened, with a raised white network; larva bright green with a magenta dorsal band; pupa brown with black dots." This kind of "description" is unfortunately not unique to this book, but stands as a sad commentary on the primitive and almost useless state of information on early-stage morphology.

In the wisdom of recognizing that to look up information on, discuss, or exchange a specific butterfly, you need to know its name, Garth and Tilden than go on to unquestioningly apply the 1983 Miller and Brown check list (as in Check list of the Lepidoptera of America north of Mexico, R. W. Hodges, ed.). Not to add more to this over-discussed issue, it may be worth noting that the decision will hardly help those attempting to "look up" information on some of the appellations. *Occidryas editha* won't yield much from *Biological Abstracts*, although this butterfly is widely used in population studies. A further deference to instability with the use of common names is incredible: "What should become of a common name that is based on a scientific name that changes? The mountain vagabond was a perfect common name for the fritillary *Argynnis* (now *Speyeria*) *montivaga*. But because *montivaga* has been shown to be a synonym of *egleis*, its common name has been changed in the present field guide to *Egleis* Fritillary." Follow that logic and you might understand the charge of the Light Brigade. Failure of the authors to confront the ferment in taxonomy and nomenclature can be expected to turn off any serious users of the book, who, in consulting other resources will wonder what is going on, and why.

A brief history of butterfly collecting in California was the section I personally found most interesting—but then I have lived a good part of it. Some of the really flavorful stories, those uniquely Californian, are missing. We should have recorded such events as the night an intense midget jumped up during a Lorquin club meeting and called John Comstock a Nazi murderer for taking 500 *Atossa* fritillaries in a day. Then, the midget may have had a point because *Atossa* was never common after that day and became extinct three decades later.

I must recommend waiting and hoping Emmel and Emmel will answer our prayers. It is difficult being so negative about a work that caps two lives of involvement by two fine gentlemen who have otherwise contributed a great deal. To do otherwise would not be fair to the present generation.

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