

BOOK REVIEWS

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THE FAMILIES OF MALESIAN MOTHS AND BUTTERFLIES, by J. D. Holloway, G. Kibby and D. Peggie, with contributions by D. Carter and S. E. Miller and photographic color plates by B. D'Abbrera. 2001. Brill Academic Publishers, Leiden, Netherlands. ISBN 90-04-11846-2. List Price: U.S. \$124, EUR 118, NLG 222.57

This important treatment of the Lepidoptera is part three of the Fauna Melesiana Handbook series. For those wanting the basic systematics, morphology and biology, and to identify families of butterflies and moths quickly and easily, this is the handbook for you. But it is much more than that. The scholarship and writing style provide historical and current perspectives of where interesting research questions lie. Although expensive, this well produced, solidly bound book will remain an important resource for research on Lepidoptera for many years to come.

Chapter 1 introduces principles and practices of classification, phylogenetic relationships, diversity, and biogeography of Malesian Lepidoptera. The tone is a balance of engaging enthusiasm for the Lepidoptera and a rigorous understanding of their systematics that is at a gentle simmer rather than a furious boil. Although the systematic techniques advocated utilize strict methods, they are elegantly interjected such that the reader is drawn in and convinced of their importance rather than bludgeoned in fundamentalist manner as in many modern treatments. This chapter also includes a useful section (contributed by D. Carter) on the practicalities of making, studying and managing collections.

Chapter 2 is a uniformly excellent summary of early stage and adult morphology supported with lucid, annotated illustrations. It demystifies the morphology of Lepidoptera such that one is eager to have a look for oneself. As such Chapter 2 is certain to be consulted repeatedly by veterans wanting comparative facts and reminders, and because of its clarity it will also inspire up-and-coming generations of lepidopterists. The direct, simple style of enthusiasm is once again more engaging than the obfuscated technicalities given in many texts of this type.

Chapter 3 is concerned with identification. Rather than simply presenting a key that is logical only to those who wrote it, the authors give a short review of previous identification keys pertinent to the fauna, and provide cautions for the beginning lepidopterist (or reminders to the veterans) that few specimens that come in for examination are “perfect”—perfection being an

implicit assumption in all keys. The authors engender a suspicion that one must develop an appreciation for the variation in specimen condition, and then through practice, a familiarity with the major groups, and eventually experience will aid the user in identifying the specimen at hand. In essence the authors acknowledge that mistakes are normal in the course of learning, and that one must learn to read between the lines of specimens, so to speak. To this end we are shown that certain characters in the key are important: venation, tymbal organs, head structures, and even resting postures of the live insects, but they may show variation, and this is interesting. Proceed to the keys with confidence. Here we find a no-nonsense approach that not only includes keys to adults, but subsequent treatments of larvae also point to important characters (not just technical ones) that easily separate various groups: prolegs, spines, hairs, filaments and beyond. Finally we are provided a summary of the foods caterpillars in major groups feed upon (leaves, bark, wood, roots, fungus, other insects, etc.), and the major themes of host plant associations in the various families.

Chapter 4 provides the banquet: detailed accounts of each family that offer pertinent taxonomic, behavioral and ecological characteristics for each group. The experience distilled over a lifetime study of the Lepidoptera supplies the rhythms, melody, tenor and tasteful improvisation. The accounts are extremely well done, and here I seem to detect Holloway's literary stamp—an inherent mixture of classical scholarship and awareness of new horizons.

We are offered eight color plates that are uniformly excellent. However, given the thoroughness and scope of the text (and the monetary price), one immediately asks the question, why so few? Whatever the constraints were during production it is unfortunate that this book was not allocated many more color plates. An increased number of plates would have gained a wider audience and amplified the accessibility of an already impressive work.

There are two appendices. The first compares species richness of families among relevant areas, and puts them into context of the world fauna. Those interested in comparative diversity will use this section. The second appendix is a comprehensively detailed tabulation of known pest species, thus providing an important resource for those with a leaning toward the agricultural.

And then there is the reference section. Admirable. Wonderfully rich. Redolent of quiet, vertical tasting within the cellars of classical scholars. One could, and should get lost within this section for years to come. What more can I say?

The two indexes, one to morphological and the second to the scientific names, are both equally good. However, confining the indexes only to these topics does omit some things in the behavioral and evolutionary realm that would be of interest to many users. For example, a favorite topic of mine, myrmecophily, is not in either index. Rather, the trait must be sought via browsing with prior suspicion in particular groups (some Lycaenidae and Riodinidae). But the fact that myrmecophily also occurs in other, less well-known groups (e.g., Cyclotornidae) cannot be accessed via the index, it must be stumbled upon. A general index would have been welcome and useful indeed.

It may be one of those humorous examples where British and Americans are 'divided by a common language', but I was puzzled by one word choice. In this book the term used to denote the need for experience to develop a "gestalt" to identify various groups has repeatedly and amusingly sprung unbidden to my mind. The fact that experience imparts the ability to correctly identify butterflies and moths by a "feel" is a very real phenomenon among experts. But using the word "jizz" to describe the result of that mental process (and including it in the index) conjures up dated, but seminal American hipster slang that typically means something altogether different. What an interesting experiment in linguistic evolution has been set in motion!

In sum, I believe this important handbook will inspire genuine enthusiasm for a hands-on research approach to topics concerned with Lepidoptera. We need more books of this type to counter the facile "look but don't touch" method of studying the natural world that is advocated by the popular media, and the authors are to be congratulated on their ability to rise above this. The serious students of Lepidoptera (current and future) who will make fundamental contributions toward understanding the natural world will thank the authors for this handbook.

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THE GEOMETRID MOTHS OF EUROPE, VOLUME 1, INTRODUCTION, ARCHIEARINAE, ORTHOSTIXINAE, DESMOBATHRINAE, ALSOPHILINAE, GEOMETRINAE, by Axel Hausmann. 2001. Apollo Books. Stenstrup, Denmark. 282 pp., 8 color plates. 17 cm by 24 cm. ISBN: 87-88757-35-8. Retail cost DKK 490,00 (approximately

USD 61.00). Hard cover. A 10% discount is offered to subscribers of the series when ordered from Apollo Books.

Before the 1968 reprint of Holland's *Moth Book* by Dover Press, it was not easy for many average persons in the U.S.A. to study moths, beyond the *Golden Nature Guide*. Shortly following Dover's 1968 reprint, Ronald W. Hodges (1971) gave us the first, *Sphingidae*, of several volumes in the exquisite *Moths of America North of Mexico* series. Charlie Covell's eagerly awaited *Field Guide to Eastern Moths* in 1984 was aimed at a general audience.

My fellow moth-enthusiast acquaintances often mention their awe at which the Europeans publish smartly produced, high quality, pithy, and easy to use books on moths, not only of a general nature, but also for the specialist. Such are two new books from Apollo Books; *The Geometrid Moths of Europe Volume 1*, and *The Sesiidae of Europe*. This is a review of the former.

Wow!! What a book! This is terrific. My first impression was "They did it again" or to be more specific "Peder Skou did it again." Skou's Apollo Books, long a publishing house of high quality scientific books is here again with another tome—one that will be referenced for many years to come. The European users of this book will have much more to say about the nomenclature and systematics. As a general volume on Geometridae, it is terrific. As a general volume on moths it is terrific. As a general volume on much of Lepidoptera, it is terrific.

Axel Hausmann, the author of Volume 1 is the Editor-in-Chief of a project planned to cover 6 volumes. Volume 1 is full of general information and an appeal for assistance with the remaining volumes.

When I first looked at this book I liked it. Then I scanned and began to see the goodies. Then I read it in detail, and I was overwhelmed. This is a must read for all persons interested in Geometridae anywhere. The introductory sections are an extremely valuable important read for all persons interested in Lepidoptera.

There are many reasons why I am so enthusiastic:

1. The distribution maps provide two sets of data simultaneously. Black dots show the exact sites of specimens examined for this publication. Gray shading shows where the species might be seen. The gray shading represents extrapolated distributions based on ideal habitats, known dispersal patterns, and previously published distributions.

2. The introductory sections provide information on many ancillary subjects, of interest to persons studying