

BOOK REVIEW

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ENJOYING MOTHS by Roy Leverton. T & A.D. Poyser Ltd, London, 2001. 276 pp. ISBN 0-85661-124-7 price \$39.95

This is a very refreshing book about moths which is aimed, the author tells us, at stimulating an interest in the group amongst those who enjoy other branches of natural history. I feel he is under-selling his product. Not only does this book contain plenty of fresh biology to interest the serious moth expert, but it is written with an engaging enthusiasm for field-work that makes you want to pull on your boots and get out there. It's also well produced and illustrated, by the author, with some of the best photographs of living moths I have seen.

The fact that this is a book about British moths and British places might seem an immediate drawback for the American reader. But the focus here is moth study in a broad sense and the 'Britishness' of the subjects should only cause a little, initial disorientation. Who knows, perhaps the American reader can actually enjoy a privilege denied to British naturalists of sensing something faintly exotic (through unfamiliarity) about the British fauna.

This is essentially an overview of moth biology and an introduction to methods of finding and studying them. It takes a somewhat 'pointillist' approach, cramming full a framework of broad principles with individual examples. This builds a convincingly rich tapestry of how moths live their lives. There are chapters and sections on biology/ecology which cover all kinds of variations in lifecycles, food-plant choice, mate-finding, voltinism, colors, patterns, shapes and distribution. Then there are the more hands-on subjects such as methods of finding moths in all their stages, rearing in captivity, photography, making a scientific contribution and conservation. There are several appendices including one on moths that have become established in the British Isles from North American introductions, and another on those which have taken the opposite journey. British exports dominate.

There is a satisfyingly eclectic feel about this book of

an enthusiast drawing on a lifetime of experience, anecdote and reading. It's intriguing to read that the author once found an adult of a winter-flying species frozen in a block of ice and that it revived completely when he melted it out. It's fascinating that British entomologists have recently found that the larva of a *Eupithecia* species is a part-time predator on aphids, echoing the entirely predatory Hawaiian species. The discussion of melanism in the Peppered moth (and other species) and modern controversies over Kettlewell's methods is simple, up to date and spiced with personal observations from the author's childhood in a grimly industrialized town.

Photographs illustrate many examples and the chapter on photography offers sound advice. It advocates daylight rather than flash whenever possible and explains why so many well-meaning photographs of moths are shot in unnatural positions and totally fail to demonstrate the subtleties of the various methods of crypsis. The author's arguments are illuminated by his own photographs.

Roy Leverton writes with the robust individuality that only a non-professional can safely adopt. Sometimes he is quirky, describing moth-rearing as 'satisfying and far cheaper than breeding horses'. Sometimes his comments are forthright. Taxonomists who stick rigidly to the rules of priority are, he writes 'a few sad people whose hobby is to overturn long-familiar names'.

Overall it's hard to be critical of a book which succeeds so well in doing exactly what it sets out to do. If you're looking for an in-depth examination of aspects of moth biology or ecology then perhaps this is not for you. Nor is this a text book exhorting its readers to theorise and experiment. But as a book aiming to enthuse, using, as its main tools, a clear demonstration of the variety of its subject matter and the sheer fun and excitement of field-work, it hits the spot. Perhaps its greatest value lies in its subtle theme, which might be described as 'look and enjoy, but above all look—there is much new to learn'. It will be illuminating for non-lepidopterists and a good read for those already sold on the subject.

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