

Buchbesprechung/Book-Review

GEORGE W. BECCALONI, ÁNGEL L. VILORIA, STEPHEN K. HALL & GADEN S. ROBINSON (2008): Catalogue of the host-plants of the neotropical butterflies. Catálogo de las plantas huésped de las Mariposas Neotropicales.

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This book is a “must” for everybody who is dealing with neotropical entomology. Butterflies are living creatures, and they are members of communities depending on various plants and plant-associations. The ecology of the butterfly imagines is strongly influenced by the availability of their own species’ larval host. Therefore, if we want to know the biology of the butterflies, we have to have a more or less clear picture about the plants they utilize as host for their caterpillars. Moreover, butterflies have hitherto very vaguely explored associations with other insect groups than ants, and these connections are also partly influenced by certain plants. The catalogue offers an almost inexhaustible source of knowledge regarding these aspects.

The body of the text is structured in five parts: Preliminary section (pp 7-24), Catalogue of host plant associations (pp 25-404), References (pp 405-430), Appendices (pp 431-454) and Indexes (pp 455-536). The text of the preliminary section, with all the necessary technical comments on how the book was compiled and how to use it, is bilingual, which certainly broadens the number of potential users.

The Catalogue is the “lion’s share” of the book. It covers approximately 70% of the entire volume. The host plant data are arranged according to butterfly families and subfamilies in a presumed systematic order, and below these categories the species are listed alphabetically according to their genus- and species-group names. In the case of every species there is a reference (often several) to the larval host, which is given according to the relevant country and the literature source. The literature sources are listed in the reference section.

In the Appendices section the authors provide a list of common names of host plants, plus a list of synonyms of old and current plant names. These are highly useful additions, as entomologists usually do not enter into the labyrinth of botanical nomenclature. The authors also knew well that such a catalogue is almost useless without indexes. Therefore the length of the actual indexes takes more than 15% percent of the text, testifying how extensive and how helpful this part of the book is.

For me the only unpleasant aspect of the publication is the computer layout. However I know that it is only a personal bias, as I am a lover of books which also have artistic value. Otherwise the layout is absolutely user-friendly, easy to read and, so far as I could see, free from any misprint, which is a great credit to the thoroughness of the authors even if assisted no doubt by the computer.

In sum, the authors have done a splendid work, and anyone who deals with neotropical butterflies will want to express their own sincere thanks to the authors for this compilation. In the case of STEVE HALL, this is just a very polite action - as he knows now much more about all the butterflies and their larval host plants in the eternal butterfly house created for lepidopterists. He died tragically, aged only 30. The volume is dedicated to his memory by his co-authors.

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Autor(en)/Author(s): Balint [Bálint] Zsolt

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