

Lafranchis, T. 2004. Butterflies of Europe. New Field Guide and Key. – DIATHEO, Paris. 351 pp., 13 × 19 cm, softcover. ISBN 2-9521620-0-X. Price: 32,00 € (+ 3,20 € postage).

This book is an impressive, pocket field guide supported by more than 1300 colour figures of living butterflies and skippers, which are reproduced from photographs by B. Watts, T. Benton and D. Jutzeler. It is a richly illustrated identification key accompanied by distribution maps; line drawings are also provided when identifications require special attention to detail and selected characters. The book has been very well received and reviewed and it has been accepted by the lepidopterist community as a valuable addition to the existing literature.

However, it is being reviewed again in *Nota lepidopterologica* because of the necessity to discuss and rectify some of the remarks by Tristan Lafranchis in the introduction of his work. The main intention of his guide is to make it possible to identify butterflies and skippers in the field without collecting and killing them. For this he has undertaken remarkable effort and, without doubt, has succeeded in creating an excellent book based on his views that lepidopterists should be prevented from collecting specimens. Lafranchis formulates his ideas as 'a wish'. He writes, '... Very recently, I found people overcollecting local butterflies in Greece and in southern France, killing dozens of specimens of the same species at the same place in a couple of hours. Asking them why, they always answered it was for some study, but this argument did not stand up to questioning. They were really killing butterflies only for their collections, for exchange or for trade. Even some serious lepidopterists still consider they have to collect most of the European butterflies to identify them carefully at home. I hope this book will help to convince everybody that almost all the butterflies flying in Europe can be identified in the field and alive. Collecting should be reserved for small insects of difficult orders, excluding both butterflies and dragonflies. Killing and trading should be banned in the whole of European Union, as it is in the case in Spain and Germany, scientists only getting a permit when they really need to collect specimens for study. We now need more studies on the ecology and the biology of butterflies, in order to understand them and to prevent their decline. We hope that the few nets we will see in the future will be carried only to check some difficult butterfly before releasing it. These creatures are really much nicer seen in a flowery slope than put in a line in a cabinet drawer'.

As the acting head of the Conservation Committee of SEL and the current SEL President, I cannot avoid commenting on such words even though I appreciate some of the views of Lafranchis. I accept his wish to contribute to nature conservation and I agree with him that mass collecting of selected, well-known species merely for the sake of dealing has nothing to do with science. However, his well-intentioned words reflect many dangers. For example, they could influence authorities to compensate their often helpless attempts to protect nature from the omnipresent destruction of biotopes through agriculture and forestry, industry and building lobbies, by drawing even further attention to entomologists and 'identifying' them as an easy target to blame for the decline of species biodiversity and population densities in Europe. The consequences of this could be disastrous. The existing restrictions on fieldwork would increase, it would become more difficult to transport specimens and even laws that forbid private reference collections can well be imagined.

If we want to conserve nature and Lepidoptera especially, we need a European-wide programme to emphasise, especially to young people, that the diversity of nature is a real treasure. In order to succeed we have to teach people how to learn as much as possible about species and their life histories. Children between the age of 8 and 13 years old can easily be inspired by the wonders of biodiversity. Because of their enquiring minds, they will want to know the names of various species and to recognise differences. For this some collecting is absolutely essential, as one has to be trained to recognise different characters. To look carefully and to observe the habits of larvae and adults also requires training and sometimes one has to be inspired to find a love for such exacting

work. Accurate documentation of observations has to be learned, as well as the proper preparation of specimens and the accuracy of their labelling; in this respect, a small reference collection has always been the best method of reaching such a goal.

Lafranchis is correct when he states that many of the European butterflies can be identified in the field and that it is therefore not necessary to collect and kill them. This can be accepted if the aim of fieldwork is, for example, monitoring populations and counting population densities of well-known, easily recognisable species, or observing the habits of such species – in this respect I have to agree that a lot of valuable work can be done without killing specimens. However, not a single species of Lepidoptera would ever have been recognised as new and therefore not have been described (including all the butterflies and skippers) if it were based on observations alone. In order to acquire genuine documentation of sustainable value we need to have collected specimens for reference purposes. The study of microscopic external and internal morphological characters, Mendelian genetics and modern DNA analyses, and the comparison of geographical differences between populations, cannot be undertaken without possessing collected material. Moreover, it is dangerous to use butterflies as an example against collecting, as they are almost a synonym for all Lepidoptera in the minds of the average laypersons. Who but an entomologist or zoologist knows that butterflies represent only a very small percentage of the order? Banning the collection of butterflies could inevitably lead to a total ban on the collecting of Lepidoptera. The majority of Lepidoptera species cannot be accurately identified in the field by observation alone, or by looking at photographs of them, even when the observer is an experienced local person who knows the fauna of a restricted area very well. What is needed are many knowledgeable recorders and the way to become a good recorder is through responsible collecting and accurate documentation. We all know that, because of the dramatic decline of their biotopes to their small, present-day relict areas, most of the populations of butterfly species that are threatened have decreased from what were formerly rich populations with wider distributions. Collecting has hardly ever been a real factor for such population decline although, of course, there have been a few exceptions in those localities where the populations were already small and extremely isolated. In such exceptional cases a complete ban on collecting a certain species would then be justified. I realise that a positive aspect in motivating young people to observe nature and to collect a few insects can, in very few cases, easily turn a person that is greedy by nature into the well-known ‘maniac collector’. I hope Tristan Lafranchis was thinking of this when he states, ‘... they were really killing butterflies only for their collections, for exchange or for trade’. We all know that such people do exist, but fortunately they are few and far between. Therefore, it should be emphasised that serious and responsible lepidopterists only collect specimens as reference material for study and research and not as ‘nuggets’ in order to make money or to subsidise expeditions.

To summarise the pros and cons, I am deeply convinced that there is no real pathway to science without responsible collecting, which has to be accompanied by exact documentation of the locality, the circumstances of the collecting and all observational data. This needs concentration, responsibility and experience. Lepidopterists, be they professional or amateur, contribute significantly to our knowledge of biodiversity and the present changes that are taking place and their research has high priority value for Europe and for the rest of the world. Therefore they deserve to be treated and respected as valued members of society and they should not to be discriminated against. The numbers of specialists with a thorough knowledge of certain groups, or with an overall taxonomic/faunistic view of certain geographical areas, are nowadays rare and only a small body of experts are doing profound faunistic research; therefore, we urgently need more trained taxonomists and more local faunists. As a consequence, SEL is fighting for greater freedom for Lepidoptera collecting and our Society, as a responsible body, strongly opposes any additional useless restrictions.

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Autor(en)/Author(s): Tarmann Gerhard Michael

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