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Villa, R., M. Pellecchia & G. B. Pesce 2009 – Farfalle d'Italia. – Editrice Compositori, Bologna, 375 pp., 22 × 28 cm, soft cover, ISBN 978-88-7794-658-4. – 45.00 Euro (cover price; the same book, with the same ISBN number, but a different image on the cover, is presently sold by the publisher for 35 Euro).

This book is probably the first example of an updatable identification guide published on paper. The authors conceived it as a "sticker album", where a full page is dedicated to each of the 281 species of Italian Papilionoidea and Hesperioidea. On each of these pages, standardized spaces are reserved for the photos of adult male and female, egg, newly hatched larva, mature larva, and pupa of a given species. However, the authors left some of these spaces blank, either because they could not photograph the corresponding life stage (which does not necessarily mean that this stage is unknown to science), or because they did not not regard it as essential for identification, as in the case of the adult underside of some species. The reader may add further figures to the book as they become available, although the publication of new figures in the form of stickers is not yet planned. The standardized format of the "stickers" curiously led the authors to rotate all illustrations of nymphalid pupae, which therefore lie on their venter instead of hanging with their heads downwards. For each species, information on the flight period, foodplants, distribution in Italy and in the region Emilia Romagna, and a short description of the habitat are given. The identification of the adults is aided by 25 plates in which similar species are compared noting their diagnostic characters.

The systematic pages are preceded by a general part containing information on lepidopteran morphology, anatomy, life cycle, ethology, and ecology. Although some technical terms are improperly used, and in spite of some avoidable mistakes (adults with "two or more" ocelli; the "jugum" of an arctiid moth...), the quality of the text is acceptable for an identification guide, and most photographic illustrations are good or very good. However, the drawings were apparently not made by an entomologist, and the authors did not check them carefully enough to discover some monstrosities, like adult legs with additional segments, and fancy mouthparts on the head of a caterpillar.

"Farfalle d'Italia" is presented in the introduction as a possible aid for the identification of threatened species of Italian butterflies in the field, for the purpose of habitat management. However, the size and weight of this book are greatly inflated by the space left for further "stickers" and by the fact that comparisons between similar species are printed twice: once as "species A versus species B", and once as "species B versus species A". This may hinder its use as a fieldguide. Moreover, the authors do not mention the endangered or protected status of any of the species. Actually the major merit of this book is to provide the most complete printed colour atlas of the early stages of Italian butterflies, with very good quality photographs, although not accompanied by a discussion of the diagnostic characters. On the other hand, the introduction of Italian vernacular names for all species of butterflies occurring in Italy was in my opinion not desirable. Until now only very few butterflies had Italian vernacular names; therefore all Italian amateurs, children included, had to use scientific names. Villa et al. introduced vernacular names in the hope that this might attract more people to the study of butterflies. However, the scarcity of Italian vernacular names for butterflies probably depends on the scarcity of amateurs, and not vice versa.

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