

Book reviews — Buchbesprechungen — Analyses

P. Whally: *Butterflies*. (Hamlyn nature guides). 128 pp., 212 col. photos
Boards, ca. 12×19 cm. Hamlyn, London 1979. Price: 1.95.

This slender volume is one of a series of Hamlyn nature guides, and falls into the category of publisher-generated pot-boilers, designed to cash in on the apparently insatiable demand for lavishly illustrated books on natural history. The Book, it is claimed, will enable the butterfly watcher to identify 147 of the most common European species. In his introductory remarks the author stresses that the book is for butterfly watchers; and it is indeed refreshing to see a book that does not instruct the learner in the art of killing butterflies. There are nine further pages of introductory text containing necessarily brief notes chiefly on the biology of butterflies. Seldom can so large a subject have been treated with such brevity. It is extremely difficult for an author to say anything very illuminating about the ecology of butterflies on one page, or about migration in less than half.

The greater part of the book is devoted to the colour plates and accompanying brief text. There is one page illustrating the life history of *Papilio machaon*, five pages of photographs of larvae and pupae, and forty nine pages each illustrating 3 species of butterfly. The text printed opposite each photograph on the adjoining page gives for each species an English name, the scientific name, wing expanse in millimetres, a short description of the insect together with notes on its life history, distribution, flight period and habitat.

The photographs have been very well printed (in Italy), and many of them are of the highest standard. Even so, some of those of the commonest species are of very tattered specimens (l. g. *Pieris brassicae*). Another minor criticism is that many photographs have been reproduced at too large a scale for the space available, so that antennae or even wing tips have had to be 'cut off'. Also, some plates have been made from originals that are showing their age and should have been pensioned off years ago (e.g. *Carterocephalus palaemon*, larvae of *Strymonidia w-album* and *Maniola jurtina*). The original green in these has almost faded away to a brownish hue. There are, however, much more serious criticisms to be made of a book that claims to enable beginners to identify butterflies. It is regrettable that one or two of the photographic contributors have been unable to resist the temptation to resort to manipulation of anaesthetised insects or even the posing of dead ones. There is something fishy about the pictures of *Colias phicomone* and *Argynnis pandora* to say nothing of one or two others. Some experienced lepidopterists may also be surprised to see *Colias myrmidone* at rest with wings spread. Oddly, the accompanying text appears to assume that the underside has been depicted.

The least one should be able to expect from a book of this kind is that the illustrations should be correctly identified. The error on the first of the larval plates, where the larva of *P. machaon* is labeled as that of *Iphiclydes podalirius* is too obvious to be misleading. However there are some more insidious and therefore more serious errors. The photographs purporting to be of *Nordmannia acaciae* and *Aricia allous* are certainly not of these species. Even *Pieris rapae* seems to be misrepresented. The insect shown looks more like *P. napi* f. *napaeae*. By far the most spectacular blunder, however, is to be found on page 87. The text opposite leads us to expect a photograph of

Lopinga achine. What we find instead is a delightful portrait of the North American butterfly *Lethe eurydice*. The book ends with a list of larval food-plants for the species illustrated, and a checklist of European butterflies with a rough guide to their distribution. The list of larval foodplants is a mine of dubious information. The literature is already full of unreliable records, and it is depressing to see them uncritically reproduced here. A few of the more glaring examples will have to suffice. *Lotus corniculatus* and *Ornithopus perpusillus* are given as foodplants for *Hesperia comma*, and *Glechoma hederacea* and *Plantago* spp. for *Carterocephalus palaemon*. Furthermore, *C. palaemon* is not listed under *Brachypodium sylvaticum*, one of its few really well attested foodplants.

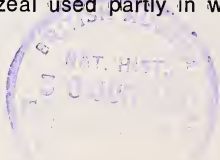
It is a shame that scarce resources have gone into the production of such a seriously flawed book. It is questionable whether a book of this type can enable a beginner to identify reliably any more than a few of the most distinctive species; but this can be no excuse for the slapdash way in which it seems to have been put together.

M. J. Skelton

W. Schmidt-Koehl: Die Groß-Schmetterlinge des Saarlandes. [1] Abh. ArbGemeinsch. tier- u. pflgeogr. Heimatforsch. Saarland 7 (1977): 1–234; [2] 9 (1979) : 1–242. Price: not stated.

Comprehensive, reliable faunistic monographs have considerable significance as sound base for further ecological, biogeographical, taxonomic and other research. Schmidt-Koehl tried hard to score his goal, but achieved only a near miss at best. He compiled too much — including the insignificant, immaterial, irrelevant — and produced a work at least twice as long as necessary, where the significant data are covered by thick layers of long winded waffle: why the countless repetitions of meaningless words, e.g. 'Untersuchungsgebiet'?; discussion of subspecies of *Saturnia pyri* from Elba and Iran is surely irrelevant to the subject (and meaningless anyway!); and why the flood of combinations like: '*Maniola* Schrank, 1801 (= *Epinephele* Huebner, 1820) *jurtina* (L., 1758) *janira* (L., 1758) (= *monoculus* Goeze, 1779)'? On the other hand Schmidt-Koehl used again the curious one-letter abbreviations for species names of all nominate subspecies, as if the subspecies names were more important for the combination — a bad habit which seems to be spreading rapidly since the publication of the 'Field Guide' by Higgins & Riley. (The correct use of subspecies names can be made only after the revision of the taxonomic group and examination of all relevant types and will remain highly subjective, as much as the questionable taxonomic category itself). It would have been much better for the author to concentrate on existing and new biological, ecological and geographical information directly relevant to the subject (e.g. food plants, habitat description etc.) instead of making 'detours' into the unknown: the structural differences of the butterfly referred to by Schmid-Koehl as: '*Hipparchia* Fabricius, 1807 *fagi* (Scopoli, 1763) (= *hermione* L. 1764) *hermione* (L., 1764)' . . . 'det. Dr. H.-E. Back, Bonn (genitaliter) and W. Schmidt-Koehl (habituell)' have been known some 70 years and were discovered by H. Fruhstorfer and J. Jullien! Faunistic papers on Lepidoptera are much needed. It is therefore a great pity if rare resources are owing to the lack of control of authors' zeal used partly in wrong place.

O. Kudrna



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