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Author(s): Mathias, J.

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Book Reviews

THE MOTHS AND BUTTERFLIES OF GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND VOLUME 7, PART 1, HESPERIIDAE - NYMPHALIDAE; THE BUTTERFLIES.

Editor A M Emmet and J Heath. Harley Books. £49.50.

This volume must be considered as one of the trickiest for the authors to produce. Not only does it have to maintain the extremely high standards reached by earlier volumes in this series but it has to compete in a sector of the market already well catered for by many titles; that of butterfly books. British butterflies, with under one hundred species, form a favourite subject for comprehensive identification guides available with drawings, photographs, maps, graphs and many other details. Very few provide a really good account of our fauna.

This publication certainly surpasses any other with its extensive species accounts and revised, up-to-date distribution maps. Extremely detailed accounts of the life cycle of each species are given, and are accompanied by many recent observations concerning the conservation and management of habitats for many of the rare species. Despite the Biological Records Centre stopping its butterfly recording scheme in 1982, the maps have been updated and show significant improvements in coverage since the publication of the 'final' atlas.

Identification of our butterflies is usually achieved by 'looking at the pictures'. However, there are keys to all species and detailed descriptions in the text. Critical species are not a feature of the British butterfly fauna, but it is useful to have drawings of the genitalia of Essex Skipper and Small Skipper to hand for problem specimens. It is a pity that this was not done in Volume 2 of the series for Zygaena lonicerae and Z. trifolii!

A discussion about identification brings us to the plates. These tend to be the feature that attracts most comment whenever a book like this is published. All I can say is that I have set them alongside other 'classics' such as Souths British Butterflies by Howarth and the Field Guide by Higgins and Riley. Try it and I think you will agree that a really close look will show you the high quality and detail Richard Lewington has achieved in his immaculate reproduction of these by Harley Books. The detail outshines the competition. I am pleased that this book has not been tempted to illustrate all of the more unusual aberrations yet again. These tend to be of greatest interest to collectors, not to modern

field entomologists and ecologists. However, the text mentions most recognised aberrations and gives details of publications where they are illustrated. Welcome inclusions are the adventives and accidentally introduced species, many of which have not been illustrated before in British butterfly books.

The references are extensive and include a list of county and regional publications on butterflies. A useful reference for anyone extracting records from early lists is the first chapter examining the history of vernacular names. It is also an interesting read, discussing many early publications and early illustrations and descriptions of our butterfly fauna.

Finally there is a thought-provoking chapter entitled 'Re-establishment of Insect Populations' - essential reading, no matter what your views.

In summary, I was very pleased to find that this was not just another butterfly book as I suspected it might be!

Steve Garland

BRITISH WILDLIFE

Published by British Wildlife Publishing. ISSN 0958-0956. Subscription rate £15.95 p a. Published bi-monthly.

BRITISH WILDLIFE is subtitled 'The Magazine for the Modern Naturalist' and that sums it up pretty well. It fills a gap in the market that has been apparent for some time, treating field-based natural history seriously across a broad spectrum. Its appeal is mainly to the serious and informed generalist, which is how I would describe most museum-based biologists whose professional brief and personal interests cover field survey, biological recording, conservation, and related issues. It appears to do for general natural history what 'British Birds' does for ornithology: gives an in-depth study of a few selected subjects alongside newsy pieces on events and issues of interest to everyone.

Volume 1 number 3 illustrates this well. The in-depth papers include Basking Sharks (fishery and conservation), British River Plants and the threats they face (a readable and informative review by Nigel Holmes), Management of Peatlands for Conservation and the Identification feature is on British Toads and Frogs. This is a good mix and what is more important, the style of writing and presentation make the papers accessible so that the reader's interest does not flag half-way through; I wish I could say this of some other publications with a conservation theme!

The newsy sections are divided into Wildlife Reports (with summaries of current issues by well-known experts in the various groups, like Paul Bright for mammals; Chris Mead for birds; Brian Banks for herptiles; Alan Stubbs for flies etc - the coverage is extensive and very useful) and Conservation News (around-the-country format, including a section on political issues). The other feature sections are Reserve Focus (one reserve per issue - here Beinn Eighe, Wester Ross), Photofocus (barn owls) and Book Reviews. In summary, a stimulating 64 page read which you will not get through in one sitting but which will draw you back again and again.

It's a nice size, smaller than A4, bigger than A5, and the cover is unflashy - it has a 'traditional' look about it which I find is well in tune with the contents. The paper is of a good quality but there is some show-through of print; it is also acid-free so it should not deteriorate on the library shelf. The paper has a high quality finish which allows for good photographic reproduction - the coloured figures are as good as one would expect, but the black and whites are very grey on my copy and the publishers should perhaps pay more attention to these.

Where, then, does BRITISH WILDLIFE fit in the spectrum of biological publications? It clearly is not a learned journal - its much too accessible for that! It calls itself a magazine but to my mind that does not do it justice. Perhaps 'learned magazine' is a new category we can create for this informative, readable and altogether excellent periodical.

John Mathias

THE BUTTERFLIES OF THE LONDON AREA By Colin W Plant

Published by the London Natural History Society, 1987. Price £15.95 (including p & p), payable to LNHS; available from C W Plant, 14 West Road, Bishops Stortford, Herts CM23 3QP.

This book has got to be the 'Rolls-Royce' of local butterfly publications. In this extraordinarily comprehensive work Colin has left no stone unturned to provide a detailed historical and up to date account of the butterflies within 20 miles of St Pauls (3424 square kilometres), the recording area of the London Natural History Society. Seventy-four species are listed and described, including residents, migrants, extinctions, aliens and species of dubious origin (for example the Blue Pansy (*Junonia oenone*) an African butterfly captured in an exhausted condition in Roehampton

on 5 June 1950). There are many other examples, all well worth documenting, and adding a touch of spice to the main meat of the book.

The distribution maps are beautifully produced in two colours on a tetrad (2km square) basis, and are obviously well researched, and appear to be as definitive as distribution maps can be. Small Tortoiseshell has been recorded from every tetrad, demonstrating that, at least, all squares have been visited during the amazingly short date band 1980-1986. Thus, an accurate base-line has now been established, and future surveys in the 1990s and beyond will be able to demonstrate real changes in distribution.

The book is liberally illustrated throughout with colour photographs from transparencies. Whilst I have seen better portrait photographs of many species, it is refreshing to see butterflies in their natural habitats looking very much alive. I admire the author's courage for including shots of some of my European favourites, Long-tailed Blue, Scarce Swallowtail, Milkweed and Apollo, at the expense of some more frequent London species.

Ian Robertson provides an interesting preface about the relationships and liaison between the Passmore Edwards Museum and local natural history societies, which is well worth reading in itself.

I must confess, I am a long-standing fan of the London Natural History Society. It is a good example of a traditional natural history society

SMALL TORTOISESHELL 1980-1986

