

BOOK REVIEW

BENEŠ J., KONVIČKA M., DVOŘÁK J., FRIC Z., HAVELDA Z., PAVLÍČKO A., VRABEC V., WEIDENHOFFER Z. (eds): BUTTERFLIES OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC: DISTRIBUTION AND CONSERVATION I, II. SOM. Prague, Czech Republic, 2003, 857 pp. ISBN 80-903212-0-8. Price EUR 35.

A team of authors, mostly enthusiasts belonging to the Czech Butterfly Conservation Society, produced this work, which is valuable for several groups of users. The books not only give information about butterflies (Lepidoptera: Hesperioidea and Papilionoidea) native to the Czech Republic, but also make general recommendations on conservation. One of the great advantages of this master-piece is the parallel text in both Czech and English, so that the book is suitable both for native non-professional entomologists and scientists worldwide.

More than half of the two paperback volumes contain information on the 161 species living in Bohemia, Moravia and the Czech part of Silesia, plus a few rare immigrants. The information on each species includes its names (Czech, scientific, German and English), life-size colour photographs, often of both sexes and the ventral surface (only adults, caterpillars are difficult to obtain), a table summarising the number of grid squares in the country with records for four periods (to 1950, 1951-1980, 1981-1994, later), and computed trends in incidence (highly negative numbers in threatened species). Global distribution of each species is described and the detailed distribution in the Czech Republic is accompanied by a grid map differentiating the period when last recorded. The paragraphs on habitat affiliation, host plants, life history and behaviour are of appreciable public interest. The last paragraph – threats and conservation – refers only to the situation in the Czech Republic.

Introductory chapters occupy about 100 pages, and the description of survey methods about 50 pages. About three pages are devoted to each species. Results of the distribution

mapping (30 pages) reveals the best and least surveyed areas, with 41 out of a total 675 grid squares with no record. The areas that have attracted little interest (close to the state border or far from large cities) are a challenge for the future. I must mention that some squares on the border (I found four) were overlooked by the authors and not classified as either with or without a record. The resulting red list of butterflies of the Czech Republic differs in many respects from previously published lists.

The last 130 pages (before the references and index, and again in parallel text) deals with conservation (protection) of butterflies and their environment: the diagnosis of crises, risk factors and conservation needs. Butterflies are regarded as umbrella species for the conservation of many other threatened organisms in habitats in early stages of ecological succession, e.g., rock-steppes, peat bogs, alpine pastures and sand areas. This chapter is relevant to other countries, only the list of species will differ.

The suggested conservation methods are non-traditional or heretical. They are based on active habitat management, but not the usual reforestation of damaged (industry-created, mined) areas, but rather the cessation or prevention of artificial reforestation. Spontaneous restoration at minimum cost and prevention of succession by occasional damage e.g. by vehicles and animal pasture are recommended. Such promising processes are partially counteracted by legislation requiring engineered reclamation of the potentially biodiversity sanctuaries.

Thus the book is recommended reading, not only for entomologists but also for people involved in landscape ecology, nature conservation etc., including politicians.

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