

## BOOK REVIEW

GAY T., KEHIMKAR I.D. & PUNETHA J.: BUTTERFLIES OF INDIA. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2008, 71 pp., ISBN 978-0-19-568801-6.

India is one of the countries with an amazing diversity of butterflies and has attracted the attention of generations of expert and amateur lepidopterologists. There is a long tradition of studying Indian insects and many papers have been published, even in local journals, dating back to the 19th century. Despite the rich fauna and long interest in Indian butterflies there has not been a concise book published on this topic since that of Wynter-Blyth (1957). Last year, this book written by Gay et al. was published with the promising title "Butterflies of India". Enthusiastically I looked for this book hoping to find new information on Indian butterflies. This thin book starts with general information on butterflies. On the next 32 text pages of the book information on 102 species of Indian butterflies, about ten per cent of the Indian butterfly fauna, is presented. The following chapter consists of a list of the host plants of these butterflies, however, for all the species of butterflies and many of the plants only vernacular names are given as in other parts of the book. The list of host plants is followed by information on butterfly gardening, photography and conservation. Unfortunately, all information is rather anecdotal and generally there is an absence of any information on the distribution, seasonality or detailed information on the life cycles of the butterflies. There are photographs of the majority of the species. However, the quality of the photographs is very low and some are depicted twice, once in colour and once in black & white. Moreover, I did not find any explanation or reason, why the authors also included pictures of some of American species, on the page opposite the

Introduction, and pages 59, 60, 64 and 66, or the picture (page 69) of *Symbrenthia lilaea formosana* from Taiwan, but no information on Indian species of this genus. Furthermore, the most problematic are the drawings of the butterflies. Unfortunately, they do not meet the standards currently required for scientific publication, or even for popular books. In fact, they are more like those drawn by children than scientific illustrations.

Finally, what can one conclude about this book? It was "written for people who enjoy the beauty of butterflies and want to know more about them". Unfortunately, the authors did not achieve this goal. There is no new or interesting information, neither for students or amateurs, not to mention lepidopterologists. A far better option would be a revised edition of Wynter-Blyth's book than this book by Gay et al., which only contains general information that is available in better quality elsewhere. This book only confirms the view expressed in the Preface of Wynter-Blyth's (1957) book on the common and more interesting species as "it is impossible to make a satisfactory selection to cover so huge an area as the Indian Region, but also because such a book is of very little use to the serious collector". I should add that not only to serious collectors (as insect collecting is often prohibited or criminalized in some parts of the world), but also of very little use to anyone, who is seriously interested in learning about or conserving nature.

## REFERENCES

WYNTER-BLYTH M.A. 1957: *Butterflies of the Indian Region*. The Bombay Natural History Society, Bombay, 523 pp.

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