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BOOK REVIEW

SMITH D.A.S. 2014: AFRICAN QUEENS AND THEIR KIN. A DARWINIAN ODYSSEY. Brambleby Books, Tauton, Somerset, 848 pp. ISBN 9781908241153. Price GBP 90.00.

There is no doubt that the Monarch (*Danaus plexippus*), a species famous for migrating over long distances, is one of the most studied butterflies. David A.S. Smith shows in this book that its Old World congeneric species, Old World Queen (*Danaus chrysippus*), need not be in the shadow of her noble relative. Smith presents a review of all the available data along with his observation and a re-interpretation of older ideas. This book is heavily embellished with quotes, starting with the classics. For example, we can read about the two possible origins of the name *Danaus* from Greek mythology. Then the topic diverges in many directions from experimental studies, done by the author early in his career in West and East Africa, through mimicry and how individual butterflies become toxic to detailed life history as well as almost every other aspect of the life of this species. But the central topic of the book is the evolution of this species and its relatives. The author argues in favour of (and repeats in various chapters) his idea that this species, especially in Africa, is a semi-species consisting of several evolutionary units, which are still not fully separated due to persistent genetic flow between them. The effects of intracellular parasites on this butterflies' sex ratio, inheritance of different colour morphs and the evolution of the author's interpretations over time are frequently discussed. This fascinating book is, at the same time, a history of research that began in Africa almost half century ago. The book is not small as it consists of about 800 pages.

When I decided to write this review, I tried to read the book from start to finish, but after several months, I had to give up as I was unable to read more than few pages per session. Not only my eyes ached because of the small size of the font but also my mind kept switching to thinking how the general knowledge of butterflies would improve if we had such detailed information available for a greater proportion of species. So I appreciate not only the diligence of the author but also the editors who had the difficult task of reading the whole manuscript several times. I am happy that I now have a copy of this book in my library and thus can reread chapters and read those that remain unread. Apart from the density of the text and extensive treatment of the subject matter, the only other problem for me was to find the figures. Some of the figures are embedded in the appropriate text, whereas coloured pictures are in separate plates in the middle of the book. Searching for a specific picture was made more difficult because I had no idea whether a particular figure was coloured or black-and-white. However, these are the only real weaknesses of this book.

In summary, I recommend this book to anybody interested in evolution, ecology, genetics and butterflies. Finally, not many species of butterfly have the honour having such a book written only about them.

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