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Biology Curators Group Newsletter

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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.

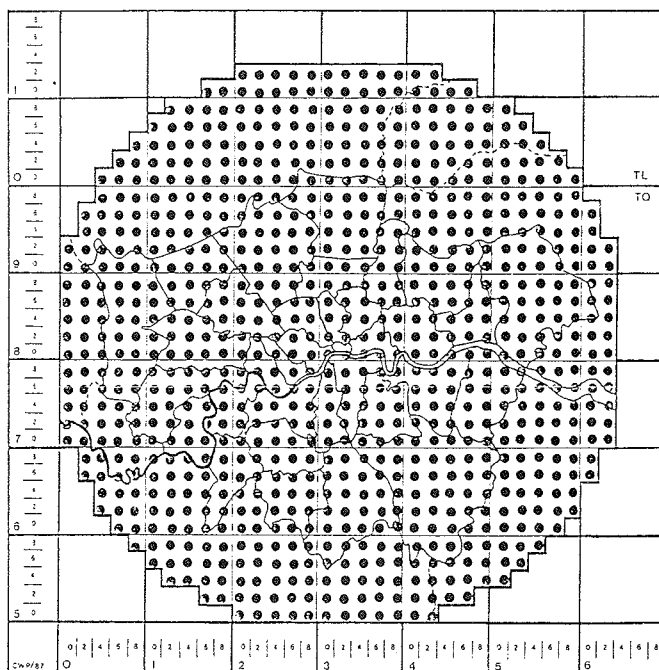
The distribution maps are beautifully produced in two colours on a tetrad (2km square) basis, and are obviously well researched, and appear to be as definitive as distribution maps can be. Small Tortoiseshell has been recorded from every tetrad, demonstrating that, at least, all squares have been visited 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



which is sufficiently flexible to meet the challenges and demands of modern natural history. This book reflects a society spending its resources in pursuit of its objectives - the publication of scientific information.

Introductory chapters include a history of recording, current situation, geology, habitats, conservation, attracting butterflies to the garden, useful addresses and a well-balanced argument on collecting.

There are, no doubt, one or two hair-splitting criticisms that connoisseurs of London's butterflies may find, but most of the errors I spotted have already been sorted out by an erratum slip.

The odd page size (220mm x 180mm) results from printing the maps equal in size to earlier works on London's fauna and flora so as to allow for the eventual production of compatible overlays.

The apparent high price reflects modern production costs; however, the book sells at only a few pence above cost price, and is really a bargain! I recommend this book to everyone interested in butterflies, and it should be essential reading for all London and Home Counties naturalists. Even though I live 150 miles away I still find myself dipping into this book from time to time.

Derek Whiteley

**PROVISIONAL ATLAS OF THE CLICK BEETLES
(COLEOPTERA : ELATEROIDEA) OF THE
BRITISH ISLES**
by Howard Mendel

Published by the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology, 1988. Price £5.50
ISBN 1-870393-11-2

This atlas summarises records gleaned by the national click beetle recording scheme, which is organised by Howard Mendel with the aid of the Biological Records Centre at Monks Wood. Of the 76 species of click beetles currently on the British list as many as 19 are listed in the Red Data Book of British Insects. Many of these are relict species associated with ancient woodland habitats and so an atlas summarising their British status and distribution provides invaluable sustenance to the current debate on insect indicator species of ancient woodland.

To each species the atlas devotes a page consisting of a 10km dot map and a numerical table showing vice county distribution. A map and key to vice

counties is provided at the beginning in order to interpret these tables. Symbols representing three data classes are used in the dot maps in a way which is informative, but not confusing, although of course it must be kept in the mind that the modern increase in recording obscures the visual portrayal in the maps of the real decline of many of the species. Two date classes are used in the vice county tables. Three extremely rare species and several extinct species are given separate treatment in an introduction which describes their recorded history in the British Isles.

It is heartening to see a number of museums mentioned in the acknowledgements. Surely this type of project must be a major justification for providing the resources which our insect collections require for their upkeep. It is to be hoped that the publication of this provisional atlas will stimulate museums and individuals to contribute further records to the recording scheme for eventual publication in the final atlas.

Derek Lott

**PROVISIONAL ATLAS OF THE TICKS
(IXODOIDEA) OF THE BRITISH ISLES**
by K P Martyn

Published by the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology, 1988. Price £4.00
ISBN 1-870393-09-0

This atlas deals with the 23 British species of ticks, which are a group of ectoparasitic mites familiar to many people who take their dogs for walks in the country or even those who wander bare legged through sheep pasture with tall grass.

A brief introduction summarises information on taxonomy, ecology and the medical importance of these animals in a concise, but informative way. A checklist of species is included in order to update the superceded nomenclature in the standard identification work. A map showing the spread of records used in the atlas reveals a surprisingly comprehensive if thinly scattered geographical coverage. The London area shows a relatively dense concentration of records. Sources of the records included in the atlas are listed and there seems to be ample scope for improving on the density of records over much of the country by reference to provincial museum collections.

Each species within the atlas is allocated a double page spread comprising a 10km square dot map and some text. Unfortunately no information on dates of records is