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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

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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!