

TROPICAL LEPIDOPTERA, 10(2): 83 (1999)

BOOK REVIEWS

NABOKOV'S BLUES: the Scientific Odyssey of a Literary Genius

by Kurt Johnson and Steve Coates

1999. Zoland Books, Cambridge, Massachusetts. 372 pp (8 halftone pl.) (16 x 24 cm). \$27.00 cloth. ISBN 1-58195-009-8.

This is a wonderful book. Anyone with the slightest interest in the pursuit of butterflies or fine literature (or both) will find many hours of enjoyable reading in this masterfully written volume. It surely is a unique circumstance to have the most famous lepidopterist in the world (at least to the general public outside professional lepidopterist circles) presented in such a human light, an approach which combines a detailed analysis of Nabokov's scientific contributions with a discussion of the grand story of the scientific exploration of the continent of South America and its natural history, and continues onward to the interpretation of the biogeography and evolution of biodiversity across this most fascinating continental area.

The book begins with a summary of the life of Vladimir Nabokov. The authors show that his scientific work opened the doors to many future workers and created a field of research which is still expanding, including endeavoring to answer "the larger questions that contemporary biologists are asking about evolution and biogeography." The second chapter eloquently discusses some of the fascinating biological details and taxonomic questions found among the Lepidoptera, while leading the reader painlessly into discourses as diverse as Dr. Albert Schwartz looking for prehistoric biological remnants on the island of Hispaniola to the adventures of one of the most modern young workers in Lepidoptera, Dr. Andrei Sourakov, whose manifold discoveries include finding an eccentric but productive American biologist, David Kenneth Wetherbee, who had reclusively retired to a remote village in Hispaniola's Central Cordillera where he had spent the ensuing years typing (on an old manual typewriter) a series of detailed studies of Hispaniolan natural history, including butterflies, which reflect on Nabokov's blues!

Tying these diverse themes together, whether in discussing the methods for dissection of the genitalia from a tiny lycaenid butterfly or in musing on Nabokov's interest in genitalia in general, brings the readers to successive chapters on Lumpers and Splitters, Scientists and Strategy, Finding the Frontiers, Dancing with Fire, and even the competitive race among some specialists to name more species of Nabokov's Blues. This reviewer will not spoil the reader's own adventures by going into detail about these chapters, but let it suffice to say that you will not spend any dull minutes reading this book!

To any reader who enjoys fine writing and an outstanding amount of new information being absorbed almost painlessly, this book is deservedly and unreservedly recommended. The halftone plates of specimens, maps, charts, and pictures of Nabokov add much to the fascinating text. This book should not only entrance older, more experienced lepidopterists with new information of high scientific value, but also provide a fascinating introduction to how people pursue research with Lepidoptera and why these insects so enthrall us. In this light, Nabokov's book would be an extremely appropriate gift to any young aspiring lepidopterist whom you know, and certainly every public and institutional library should have a copy of this masterful work on the shelf for ready perusal by students of all ages. You could not give a finer gift this year (at very modest cost) to yourself and others than this superb and attractive volume.

THOMAS C. EMMEL

Division of Lepidoptera Research
Dept. of Zoology and Entomology, University of Florida
Gainesville, Florida 32611

MARIPOSAS BONAERENSIS: Butterflies of Buenos Aires

by Gustavo R. Canals

[2000]. Edición L.O.L.A., Buenos Aires, Argentina. 347 pp (12 x 20 cm). \$32.00 paper. ISBN 950-9725-36-6.

This is a very attractively done field guide to the butterflies of the Buenos Aires area of northeastern Argentina. The author is a veterinarian who has devoted much time to the study of the Argentine butterflies in the field, in major private collections, and in the major collection of the Natural Science Museum of La Plata. This is his second field guide to butterflies of Argentina, the first being an identification guide for the butterflies of the hills around Buenos Aires. Every section of text is given in both Spanish and English so that this field guide should enjoy wide utilization by those interested in the butterflies of South America.

The book begins with a concise introduction to the structure, biology, and life cycle of butterflies, followed by a short primer on taxonomy. Then each family of butterflies found in Argentina is described, down to characteristics of the various subfamilies included within each family. The Province of Argentina (the total study area covered by this field guide) is described in terms of its ecology and biogeography. This introductory section of the book is followed by detailed descriptions for the species of butterflies found to date in Buenos Aires Province. Each species description includes the common name, scientific name (with author and year of description), family/subfamily/tribe, adult description, remarks on the behavior and habitat, and notes on the origin of common names or taxonomic placement. Each species is usually illustrated by a photograph of the dorsal and ventral surface of the male, using either spread specimens or living butterflies photographed in the field. Blue colored squares are placed on many of the photographs to emphasize the features that distinguish that particular species from other similar species

found in the same area.

The book is printed on top-quality glossy paper with a clear text but with varying quality of color reproduction of the illustrations. Most are good to excellent; a few photographs (and a few text pages) are blurry (these pages are the fault of the publisher, not the author). Smaller species such as skippers, blues, and metalmarks are reproduced larger than life-size. I found only a few typographical errors (e.g., the spelling of the rioidinid genus name *Adelotypa*, not "*Adlerotypa*", on page 232).

Anyone interested in neotropical butterflies, or in comparisons of the fauna of the more temperate parts of southern South America with similar ecological areas in California and the western United States, will find this book of special interest. Certainly the modest price, convenient size, and wealth of information make it an invaluable reference to take along into the field for any collecting in Argentina.

THOMAS C. EMMEL

Division of Lepidoptera Research
Dept. of Zoology and Entomology, University of Florida
Gainesville, Florida 32611