

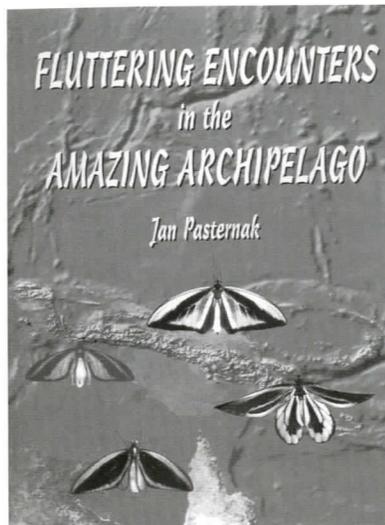
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BOOK REVIEW

FLUTTERING ENCOUNTERS IN THE AMAZING ARCHIPELAGO

by J. Pasternak

2000. Český Těšín, Czech Rep. 135pp (23 x 30cm). \$75.00 cloth. (no ISBN).



Jan Pasternak's 30 years as a manager of rubber plantations in New Guinea, and his travels (since 1969) in the island world from Indonesia to the Solomons and Australia, plus his great fondness for butterflies, have resulted in this new large-format (9 x 12 inches) color book on the butterflies and nature of these islands. Almost all the 135 pages have one or more full color photographs of butterflies or natural scenes from various islands. There are three "chapters": New Guinea, Sulawesi, and Java. About half the book pertains to New Guinea, both Papua and Irian Jaya. The focus

of the book involves the birdwing butterflies, many shown with metamorphosis sequences, but many other species are also illustrated. This is one of those rare books — unlike other color books that only deal with the life histories of various tropical butterflies — that also calls into question our rampant destruction of the biodiversity of this natural world.

The text of the book is somewhat of a running commentary on the travels of the author, mixed in with discussions on the nature and butterflies of the region, plus notes on current conservation prospects (or the lack thereof), all interspersed among the illustrations. The text is in English; the only detraction to the text is the lack of italics for scientific names. The dust jacket has a two-page spread map of the Indonesia and New Guinea region, overlain with birdwings (duplicated on the book cover). The color photographs and printing are superb: the book was composed and printed in the Czech Republic and is as fine a printing as any of the best books from recent years. Some of the images of natural scenery are stunning: the author evidently spent considerable time in climbing various mountain peaks (although, possibly from small planes). It remains surprising that even in Java, one of the most densely populated areas in the world, there still are substantial tracts of rainforest remaining, although increasingly threatened. Other areas, like large regions of New Guinea, are noted by the author as already having been clear-cut since the early 1970s. This is a unique guide to the butterfly and natural splendor of the island world of Indonesia and New Guinea, and entreats us to renew our efforts to preserve as much of this natural world as still possible.

In the view of this reviewer, although large areas are already set aside as national parks, one must remember that parks require constant protection from the daily hacking away at the borders by destitute farmers searching for ever scarcer firewood. However, the small farmers are less of a problem than global lumber companies which can "buy" land and clear-cut everything in sight, no matter what butterflies or orangutans or tigers or elephants or rare plants may be in the way, all just to make billions of chopsticks or wood panels for endless tracts of houses in the USA: of course, the same thing is being done in the Pacific Northwest of North America, where large areas of primeval old-growth forests are being clear-cut. One can recall photographs of giant sequoia trees (now protected) being lumbered in California 120 years ago, yet this still continues in much of the world, particularly in the

remaining tropical forests. It is ironic, and somewhat macabre and grotesque, that lumber companies can clear-cut and literally completely denude whole mountain ranges (hardly different than dropping an atomic bomb), of forest and undergrowth, and rare plants and animals, all with governmental blessing (and, of course, profit), while the lowly butterfly enthusiast or scientist gets lectured about "endangered species" and needs endless numbers of permits to even touch one butterfly or ant in many of these countries (actually, the same is true even in much of North America and Europe) — an astounding absurdity of "1984"-type hypocrisy that would be worthy of a Nabokov or a Kafka to make a novel of were it not so real. All this is not restricted to Southeast Asia, it also is on-going in North America, in Africa, and in South America (the latter not just in the Amazon, but also in such remote regions as the few remaining temperate forests of Patagonia): Europe is already for the most part devoid of original forest except for a few isolated patches in reserves and in some steep ravines that somehow escaped the axe.

The book really is a focus on a little-known world of the rare and beautiful that should be sent to every lumber company president and governmental leader in the region, and to the customers in the industrial world. Unfortunately, few of these persons will ever see this book, and many would not care anyway, but at least all us lepidopterists should have a copy of it, even if for no other reason than to have it available to show to visitors who are not familiar with the world of tropical butterflies.

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