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BOOK REVIEWS

THE EMPEROR MOTHS OF NAMIBIA

by Rolf Oberprieler

1995. Ecoguild, South Africa. 17 x 24 cm, 91 pp, (30 color plates). Cloth cover, \$24.95. ISBN: 0-9583889-2-X.

Available in the USA from Flora & Fauna Books, P. O. Box 15718, Gainesville, FL 32604.

This well-presented little treatise of the Saturniidae of Namibia, in southwestern Africa, offers excellent color figures of all adults and their larvae, the results of the author's extensive rearing program of many years. An extensive introduction is provided, covering habitats and diversity of these moths in Namibia, followed by sections on their biology and techniques for collection and rearing. Coverage totals 27 species, including 3 thought to occur in Namibian border areas, and only 5 species do not include excellent color photographs of the larvae. Most of the Namibian fauna of Saturniidae

is unique to this area of Africa, with endemic African tribes and genera, so the work is highly interesting in documenting these rarer elements of the family. The work is a fine addition for a remote area of the world and should be on the shelf of everyone interested in these large moths.

J. B. HEPPNERFlorida State Collection of Arthropods,
P. O. Box 147100, Gainesville, FL 32614**CARCASSON'S AFRICAN BUTTERFLIES****An Annotated Catalogue of the Papilionoidea and Hesperioidea of the Afrotropical Region**

edited by P. R. Ackery, C. R. Smith, and R. I. Vane-Wright

1995. CSIRO Australia. 803 pp, cloth. \$140.

More than twenty years have passed since work began on this monumental project, though a summary checklist was published by the late Bob Carcasson and was used by D'Abrera in his illustrated work. Based on the original draft, staff of the Butterfly Section of what was then BMNH, have devoted years of hard labour to the project, assisted by specialists in many groups. It was worth waiting for.

As a tribute to Bob, his lucid paper from 1964 on Afrotropical butterfly biogeography is reprinted in an edited version, with some additional comments. It has stood the test of time well — indeed it remains one of the finest contributions to its subject and is still widely quoted today in papers that have nothing to do with butterflies.

In the systematic part, a total of 3600 species in 300 genera are covered, having generated a total of 14,000 names in nearly 2500 papers and books since 1758, many so obscure as to be virtually unobtainable. For each of these names you get a precise reference to the original publication, the author, a bibliographically correct entry, the type locality, its original combination, and its present status and synonymy in the consideration of the editors or their collaborators. For each species and subspecies considered valid, their broad range in Africa (and beyond) is given, as is host-plant information when known. There must be at least 150,000 'facts' in the book; that's about 1000 facts a dollar!

I am in a rather unique position to review the catalogue, because the editors allowed me full use of the initial manuscript and the proofs during my work on books on the butterflies of Kenya, Botswana, and West Africa (the last two still unpublished). I have also used it to check numerous references in smaller papers for ten years. I must qualify as its 'ideal target audience'.

The verdict of this 'ideal target audience' is as follows: anyone having to deal with just three or four tricky issues in African butterflies, or the description of a few new species, will find that the price of the volume is immediately recouped in terms of time saved. The coverage is encyclopaedic, the cross-referencing efficient, and the relevant literature immediately flagged down. I do not exaggerate when saying that I have saved at least two months of hard work even before the book was published. Paying \$140 for adding two months to your working life is a bargain, if there ever was one! As a bonus, it has also saved me from committing several embarrassing errors and, perhaps just as importantly, guided me towards avoiding errors in matters so abstruse that no embarrassment would have resulted.

It is customary in reviews to quibble, so I shall. Screening my manuscript of 1500 West African butterflies against the Catalogue, I have been constantly irritated by the fact that there is no standard approach to giving the ranges. Thus, *Osmodes costatus* is listed as occurring from 'Uganda, Zaïre, Congo Republic, Cameroun, Nigeria, Ghana and Sierra Leone,' while the

next species, *Osmodes distincta*, is listed as occurring from 'Sierra Leone to Cameroun, Gabon, Congo Republic, Zaïre and Uganda.' It also would have been wonderful to know the sex of the holotypes and where they are presently available (or if they are lost); many are actually in the Natural History Museum, London (even just a * to indicate this would have been helpful).

Errors and omissions in a work of this nature are inevitable, but they are few and far between. Typographical errors are conspicuous by their absence. However, any such compilation is strongly dependent on how far taxonomists have reached in the various genera and species-complexes. And though there are occasional caveats, the user might have liked a bit more guidance. Thus, in the very difficult complex of *Bebearia mardania/cocalia* it should have been mentioned that recent papers by Hancock and Hecq reach very different conclusions, and that synthesis is a long way off. The taxonomy and synonymy of the genus *Mylothris* in the catalogue is of necessity a shambles. It will take me months just to get to grips with the relatively few West African species. But while you cannot demand that the editors of such a catalogue should revise the *Mylothris* (the last — and very inadequate attempt — dates back fifty years), you could have asked for a caveat.

But let this not detract from a splendid effort, for which the editors deserve our thanks and our congratulations. Over the past twenty years, they must often have thought that Sisyphus had a comparatively cushy job! Well, they have now done theirs, and what they have done is just the kind of thing that people dealing with faunistics, biogeography, and biodiversity need. And what they have done is just what institutions like the Natural History Museum ought to be doing.

CSIRO/Australia has done an excellent production job. The book is well laid out. Typography is easy and restful. Paper quality is splendid. Little vignettes and a B/W photograph of a representative member of each genus (well in some cases not that representative) do much to enliven what is by definition a very dull read. CSIRO/Australia!?!? — I hear you cry. Was not most of the work done at the Natural History Museum? Are all the editors not staff members there? The answers are yes. That this 'triumph of scholarship in taxonomy and systematics' (as Robert R. May calls the book in his foreword) — at a time where conservation of remaining biodiversity, especially in the Afrotropical Region, is of paramount concern — is not published by its parent institution is a greater mystery to me than the convoluted taxonomy and nomenclature of the genus *Mylothris*.

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