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BOOK REVIEW

THE BUTTERFLIES OF VENEZUELA
Part 1: Nymphalidae I (Limenitidinae, Apaturinae, Charaxinae)
A Comprehensive Guide to the Identification of Adult Nymphalidae, Papilionidae and Pieridae

by Andrew F. E. Neild

1996. Meridian Publications, Greenwich, London. 21 x 29 cm, 144 pp. (inc. 32 color plates). Hardback. £75. ISBN: 0-9527657-0-5.

This long awaited and beautiful book is the first comprehensive identification guide to treat the butterfly fauna of any South American country, and is the result of seven years of intense research in the field and in Venezuelan and European collections. Over 30% of the Neotropical butterfly species in the families covered by the book occur in Venezuela, thus making this work an essential reference for all lepidopterists both within Venezuela and in neighboring countries.

This is the first of a proposed four part series and includes 274 species in the nymphalid subfamilies Limenitidinae, Apaturinae and Charaxinae (the tribe Anaeini is co-authored with Tomasz Pyrcz). Part II will cover the nymphalid subfamilies Nymphalinae, Libytheinae, Acraeinae, Danainae, Ithomiinae and Morphinae, and is due to be published in late 1998. Part III, containing Papilionidae and the nymphalid subfamilies Brassolinae and Satyrinae (Pronophilini), and Part IV, containing the Pieridae, Heliconiinae and remaining Satyrinae, will follow at approximately two year intervals.

The three introductory chapters are clearly and concisely written and cover butterfly identification, systematic principles, the study and collection of butterflies and biogeography. The first three of these topics are covered in good detail and certain areas are specifically aimed at and will be of much use to beginners. As the book is intended primarily as an identification guide it is understandable that the author has decided to omit a detailed chapter on butterfly biology and instead simply list other important works. However, given the biogeographical importance of Venezuela as a contact zone between the Central American and Amazonian faunas, the chapter on biogeography is perhaps somewhat brief, and while spectacular black and white photographs of different habitats are provided, it would also have been interesting to have included information on typical species occurring in each. In addition, the section on faunal regions within Venezuela, given under the heading "Subspecies" in the first chapter, perhaps better belongs in the chapter on biogeography.

The main text is refreshingly well written and contains extensive introductory sections to each family, subfamily and genus. These sections provide a good survey of the relevant literature, discuss in detail the systematic arrangements adopted, make general observations on habitats and behavior, list foodplant records and summarise published information on early stages. The complete distribution is given for each species but unfortunately not for each subspecies, which is only given its Venezuelan distribution. One of the great strengths of the book is that the author has spent an immense amount of time trying to ensure the accuracy of the taxonomy and nomenclature employed throughout, resolving many difficult problems in the process, and in this respect the book is superior to all other Neotropical butterfly works. This has resulted in a number of nomenclatural changes and the description of two new species and 24 new subspecies. While we may have a couple of taxonomic quibbles, these are largely a matter of philosophy, and the very detailed discussions given in areas of uncertainty allow the reader to make up their own mind.

The stunning front cover photograph of the charaxine butterfly *Prepona praeneste* gives the reader a foretaste of the superb quality of the 32 color plates to come, all photographed by the world renowned photographer Bernard D'Abrera. Nearly 1200 specimens are illustrated, including over 345 type specimens, many of which have never been figured before. Half wings of all taxa are figured at almost life size, including both dorsal and ventral surfaces and both sexes in the vast majority of cases, and often several specimens of a species are figured to illustrate intraspecific variation. The name of the taxon and a number corresponding to header numbers in the main text are written directly below each specimen, thus allowing the relevant text entry to be quickly and easily located.

Appendices include type data for new taxa, comprehensive label data for all figured specimens and a systematic checklist for taxa covered in this volume. A glossary of largely taxonomic terms is also useful. A gazetteer of collecting localities is provided, and the grid reference given with each locality enables it to be quickly found on the large map of Venezuela on the inside front cover, although the lack of altitudinal data is a drawback. Three smaller maps on the inside back cover, showing centers of endemism, major life zones and the states of Venezuela, complete this work.

The Butterflies of Venezuela, Part 1, with its beautiful color plates and notes on identification, will be of great assistance to all field lepidopterists working in northern South America. In addition, the large amount of taxonomic research incorporated within, and figures of many important type specimens, make this work invaluable for all students of Neotropical butterfly systematics. We eagerly await the remaining volumes in the series.

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