

Book reviews

A Complete Guide to British Butterflies: their entire life histories described and illustrated in colour from photographs taken in their natural surroundings

Margaret Brooks and Charles Knight
Cape, 1982, £1095

The subtitle gives an accurate idea of the essential content of this book. The 60 native British Isles butterflies are presented, mainly as two page spreads, by colour photographs showing the eggs, first instar larvae, mature larvae and adults, together with brief notes on their distribution, habitats, phenology, food plants and variation. This main section is introduced by essays on butterfly biology, breeding butterflies in captivity, collecting, and photography. Although reasonably accurate in general, the section on photography in particular is somewhat misleading and occasionally inaccurate (e.g. high speed films do not have reduced exposure latitude).

Almost all the photographs were taken by Margaret Brooks from living specimens reared by her—a remarkable achievement. Sadly, the author's photography does not always live up to the task. The quality of the micrographs (eggs and first instar larvae) is poor, and many of the macro-photographs lack detail. A few set specimens have been included: these are appalling, being faded and damaged, indifferently photographed, and pinned against 'natural' backgrounds! Despite this, there are many good pictures, and the overall impression is pleasing.

This book gives tangible proof that it is now better to hunt the British butterflies with a camera rather than a net. However, the authors fail to give any insight into the investigative biology that has been done—or desperately needs to be done—using the British species. Nothing on Ford's ecological genetics and the meadow brown, no mention of Tinbergen's ethological studies of the grayling, or Dempster's work on the ecology of the swallowtail, nor Thomas's efforts to conserve the large blue, or Baker's new ideas on the migration of the small white—or the need to compare our marsh fritillary with the related American species studied in such depth by Paul Ehrlich and his school. So many important works for understanding our

butterflies and their needs—but the book does not contain a single reference! Brooks and Knight exist *in vacuo*. Even the BRC mapping scheme and Pollard's monitoring scheme pass unnoticed.

This book is praiseworthy because it presents, first hand, a very clear and useful account of the descriptive biology of our native species; frustrating because the photography could have been so much better and the text could easily have done so much more. Nonetheless, I welcome this work as an original book about British butterflies—and that, in these days of glossy production-line pot-boilers, is indeed a rarity.

R.I. Vane-Wright
Department of Entomology,
British Museum (National History)

Handbuch der Reptilien und Amphibien Europas Vol. 1 Echsen (Lizards Part 1)

W. Bohm, (Editor)

Supplementary Volume of 'Handbuch der Reptilien und Amphibien Europas': Threatened Amphibians and Reptiles in Europe

Rene E. Honegger

Akad. Verlag Weisbaden, 1981,
DM 216·00 and DM 68·00

The *Handbuch* when complete is likely to remain the standard reference work on the European herpetofauna for many years to come, and it is to be regretted that it is only available in German. However, the supplementary volume on the threatened amphibians and reptiles, which is likely to be of greater interest to readers of *Oryx*, is in English.

Honegger's volume is based very closely on a report with the same title which he produced for the Council of Europe (Honegger, 1978), with a considerable amount of updating of the information. Although the present volume contains a considerable amount of very useful data, and for this reason alone is recommended to conservation-minded herpetologists, as a book it is unsatisfactory. There are three reasons: first, the lack of organisation within the book makes it extremely difficult to locate information on any

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