

## BOOK REVIEW

MALCOLM BARCANT

Butterflies of Trinidad and Tobago,  
pp. 314, illustr. Collins, St. James Palace, London, 1970.

The study of the fauna of Trinidad and Tobago is handicapped by the lack of suitable and easily accessible reference texts for the identification of species. Recently, a trickle of publications has begun to appear, among which is the book under review. Mr. Barcant has been a lepidopterist and collector for some fifty years and here he gives us the benefit of his long experience.

The book is divided into three parts of four, three and seven sections respectively. The first five sections deal with the life history, anatomy and nomenclature of butterflies, methods of collection, classification, enemies, protective devices and collecting grounds. The last four sections deal with answers to popular questions, strays, aberrations, doubtful species, and butterfly-attracting flowers, the final section being a complete check list of all species recorded from the two islands. Most of the information contained in these sections is interesting and useful but some is suspect. For example, Mr. Barcant seems to regard rarity as the result of the interplay of enemy attack on the one hand and protective devices on the other (see p. 25). He ignores the contribution of environmental factors such as availability of food plants and the general shaping of habitats by soil conditions and climate.

The meat of the book comes in sections six to ten where 327 of the 617 species known to occur in Trinidad and Tobago are described. These 327 species include all the members of twelve of the thirteen families but only fourteen species of the thirteenth family — the Hesperiiidae. Barcant rejects a straightforward taxonomic classification as being inappropriate to the amateur and groups some species by habits and habitat and the remainder by degree of rarity. But, is this treatment really satisfactory? It results, for example, in the fifteen members of the family Papilionidae being described in six different places in the text and the seven members of the genus *Eurema* in four different places. I imagine that most field naturalists, professional or amateur, would have preferred a taxonomic treatment. A key to the families would also have been welcome.

Throughout the book, Barcant lays much stress on the value of rarity. He speaks, of course, from the collector's point of view. To the field naturalist and ecologist the reverse is more likely to be true — the commoner the butterfly, the more important it is.

Two hundred and forty one species are illustrated in sixteen colour plates. These are excellent and give an exact impression of the butterflies' colours in life from the faded green of the Bamboo Page to the iridescent blues of the Banded King Shoemaker. One hundred and fifteen other species are featured in black-and-white plates which again are excellent. These illustrations greatly enhance the value of the book since most species can be readily identified from the illustrations. It is a pity though that very similar butterflies, such as those of the genus *Eurema* could not have been pictured together. Presumably, the cost of such treatment made this impractical.

This book is likely to remain the standard work of reference on the butterflies of Trinidad and Tobago for many years to come. Everyone with an interest in butterflies will want to own a copy.

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