

BOOK REVIEW

Butterflies of Europe and neighbouring regions

by Patrice Leraut, © N.A.P Editions, 2016, pp. 1116,
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Many reference books and field guides on European butterflies exist, that can be useful for the amateur naturalist and, at least to some extent, for the expert entomologist. But few are detailed and authoritative enough to be of value to those who need thorough and reliable information for identifying and studying butterfly species. "Butterflies of Europe and neighbouring regions" by Patrice Leraut is one of these latter.

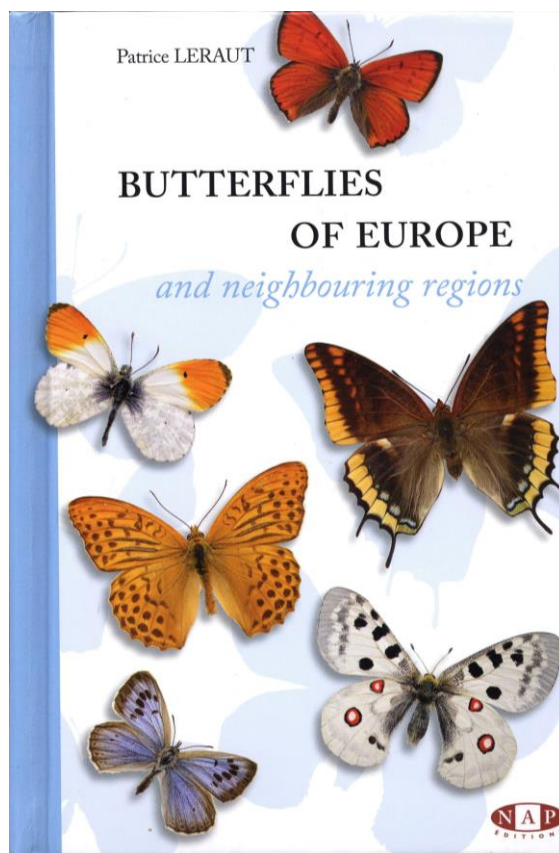
During his forty-year activity as an entomologist, Leraut has written several renowned books on insects, particularly on Lepidoptera. His "Liste systématique et synonymique des Lépidoptères de France, Belgique et Corse" (1980, second edition in 1997) is a benchmark for the nomenclature and taxonomy of European butterflies and moths. After four volumes on moths, published over the last twelve years, this work completes the series of guides on the Lepidoptera of Europe and nearby regions.

The book comprises, in a single volume, an impressive body of up-to-date information about the morphology, taxonomy, biology, and distribution ranges of more than 800 species. The covered species are illustrated in more than 650 colour plates, each containing photos of several specimens. A new species (*Euchloe mirei* Leraut), and four new subspecies are also described.

The introduction begins with some interesting and well-founded considerations on butterfly conservation, then goes on to provide basic information about butterflies and their environments.

The text on each species includes information about type locality, morphologic description, variations, closely related species, biology, flight-time, distribution, and status. Particular attention is paid to recent developments in taxonomy and systematics. Distribution ranges are also shown in maps comprising Europe and a portion of North Africa. While the geographic area covered by the map is sufficient for the majority of the species, species with very small ranges would have benefited from a magnified map.

The colour plates contain photos of preserved specimens, that are shown both on the dorsal and on the ventral side. The choice of showing preserved specimens, with wings positioned so as to show as many morphologic characteristics as possible, allows the reader to appreciate also those particulars that would have been difficult to see in photos of living butterflies. Specimens are depicted at natural size. This is particularly helpful for identification purposes and for obtaining a correct mental picture of each species. Several specimens are shown for each species, which enables the reader to appreciate intra-specific variation. Seasonal and geographic variants are shown, as well as sexual dimorphism. Some individual variants (albinism, melanism, colour aberrations) are also shown.



More than 40 pages are devoted to colour photos of the genitalia of those species that are otherwise difficult to distinguish. This part of the book can be of interest to the expert entomologist, less so for the general reader. Diagnostic characters are indicated in the text and not in the pictures. Showing their position also in the pictures, e.g. with arrows, would have allowed the reader to understand more readily where to look.

The four-page analytic index at the end of the volume is a bit difficult to find and is printed in small font. As this is one of the parts of the book that needs to be consulted most frequently, giving it more evidence would have made it easier to use.

Even though this book is intended as a field guide, considering it merely as such would be reductive. It is also a precious instrument for anyone interested in identifying and studying butterflies, as it provides a huge amount of information and iconographic material. In this work, the reader can also find up-to-date nomenclature, which is particularly important as many changes have been made in taxonomy in recent years. The many bibliographic references indicated in the text are also of value for the reader interested in obtaining further information on the species covered.

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