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review

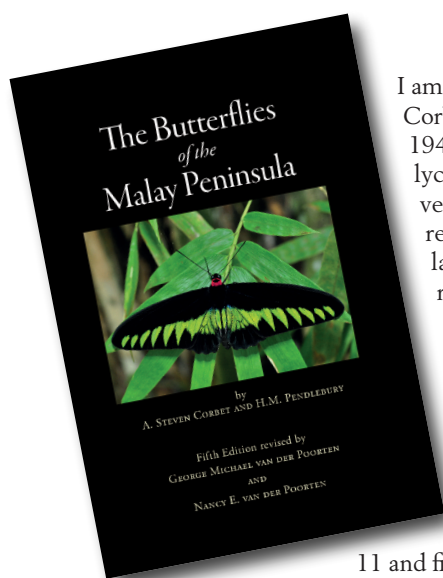
The butterflies of the Malay Peninsula (5th edition)

Steven Corbet and Henry Pendlebury; revised by Michael and Nancy van der Poorten,

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I am flattered to be asked to review the 5th edition of this iconic book. It was first published by Corbet and Pendlebury in 1934; a 2nd edition largely prepared by Corbet prior to his death in 1948 was issued in 1956; and 3rd and 4th editions in 1978 and 1992 were revised by eminent lycaenid and Malaysian butterfly specialist John Eliot. By definition all editions are revised versions of the original, although the 4th significantly extended the 3rd. The 5th edition has a revised text which comfortably and professionally lifts it into the 21st century: a modern layout includes double columns; some line drawings embedded in the text have been redrawn; and layout has been greatly improved with the use of emboldened section headings and spacing. It is the first edition with a laminated cover.

Front matter begins with a publisher's note, 'about the revisers' section, preface, and Eliot's preface from the 4th edition. The first 10 short introductory chapters (pp. [1]-[51]) follow previous editions, with edits and rearrangements: for example, redrawn wing venation diagrams and a table comparing the Comstock and Numerical systems in the 'external anatomy' section, introduced in the 4th edition spread over pp. 3-5, are usefully placed on the same page (p. 4) in the 5th edition. The butterflies – 1051 species and 153 subspecies now recognised from the Malay Peninsula and Singapore – start at Chapter 11 and fill pages [53]-343 with closely packed text, keys and text drawings. Each family begins with a key to genera and each genus with a key to species. These are largely the same as previous incarnations, but text content has been updated with new information on distribution, early stages and host-plants, and there are six superb plates illustrating egg, final instar larva and pupa of selected species in each subfamily.

Appendices are important. Appendix A (pp. 345-383) is a checklist of species found in the region; it provides author and year (not in the text sections) for all taxa, and includes issues concerning systematics and regional distribution indicated by 239 sequential numbers explained in notes in Appendix E (pp. 387-404), not in the main text. Further notes explain why two previously included "species" are omitted from the checklist (*Hasora mavis*; *Erionata harmachis* – Appendix B, p. 384). A dozen questionable records are discussed (Appendix C, pp. 384-385), and notes on endemic species and species new to the checklist appear in Appendix D (p. 386). There follows a consolidated census of taxa reliably recorded from the Malay Peninsula including Singapore (Appendix F, pp. 405-406). The final appendix (G, pp. 407-409) presents discussion on reliability of previously published host-plant records, the revisers' sensible criteria for acceptance of genuine host-plant data, and some specific instances where previously accepted data are believed to be incorrect. Eleven pages (pp. 410-424) contain references. This is followed by lists of figures, tables and abbreviations, with a corrigenda for the 4th edition. Illustration and photo credits and acknowledgements are followed by general and species indices.

This is a painstaking revision, but it is the plates that raise the 5th edition above any of its precursors. Genitalia figures (pp. 467-492) are taken from previous editions, updated by placing captions below each set of drawings instead of the previous wasteful layout of having them on an otherwise blank page. The 132 colour plates of adult butterflies are completely new and, with few exceptions, illustrate both surfaces of both sexes of all species occurring in the region. Scales vary widely, from $\frac{3}{5}$ to x2 natural size. Plates 1-12 illustrate papilionids and danainae at $\frac{2}{3}$ natural size, followed by most pierids at $\frac{3}{4}$ natural size and remaining pierids at natural size ... etc. Scales after that are variable, although satyrines on plate 37 might have easily presented at natural size rather than $\frac{2}{3}$, but it really doesn't matter. Diagnostic features can be clearly seen throughout. Lycaenids and hesperiids, which together occupy all the plates from 70-132, are mostly natural size, although some are 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ and notoriously difficult yellow and brown hesperiids in the genera *Taractrocera*, *Oriens*, *Potanthus*, *Cephrenes* and *Telicota* are helpfully presented at x2.

In previous editions, a series of monochrome plates displaying the under surface of *Arhopala* species was provided, supported by several pages of keys. This was fine; features of very many *Arhopala* species are fundamentally related to the arrangement of fine lines on brown underside markings, but they are colourful and sexually dimorphic on the upper surface. In the 5th edition *Arhopala* are underpinned by the same detailed keys (pp. 234-241) but new plates (86-94) depict each species at natural size, almost all with male upperside, underside, and female upperside, which allows more certain identification than did any previous edition. Aesthetically, these spectacular butterflies do look dramatically better in colour.

It may seem unusual for species notes to be discussed in appendices A (checklist) and E (notes) rather than in the main text and index (e.g. *Vagrans egista* v. *V. sinha*, pp. 134, 355, 393), but this is easy to get used to. Variation in specimen sizes, sometimes mixed on the same page, might also seem unusual, but scales are sensible, and effectively allow identification of large species that are well known and easy to identify, and small species that are not.

Revision of such a notable text is not something to be undertaken lightly. There is a huge volume of data between the covers of this book, but it is not cluttered. Michael and Nancy van der Poorten have brought clarity to the text and layout of the 5th edition and excelled themselves with the beautiful plates. They can be rightly proud of not just continuing but raising the high standard of a book that has been familiar to Lepidopterists since the 1930s.

Such a weighty project is unlikely to be error free, but there are hardly any typographical errors. The revisers pointed out that the female depicted on Plate 38:6 is *Ragadia critolaus*, not *R. crisilda critolina* as stated; Plate 43:3 illustrates *Amathusia p. phiddipus* f. *gunneryi*, not *A. binghami*, and Plate 102:4 is a female *Jacoona a. anasuja*, not *Neocheritra a. amrita*. A corrigenda is in preparation for the 5th edition; this will be posted by the revisers in due course on http://www.lepodonbooks.com/TheButterfliesOfTheMalayPeninsula_5thEdition.html.

John Tennent