

placement of species in the subfamilies. The systematic section recognises the subfamily Polyommatae (p. 34) with 36 species, but this subfamily is not listed in the Checklist (pp. 182–183), where these species are listed under the subfamily Lycaeninae. Clearly, the book very democratically incorporates divergent opinions, which unfortunately, leaves readers puzzled.

Of interest is the section called “Similar Species”. This is meant to help separate butterflies that look similar. I tried using this section, but ran into a bit of trouble. For example, if I had a dark brown Skipper to be identified, I might look up Dark Velvet Bob *K. butleri* on page 7, where it would be suggested that I check Chocolate Demon *A. nigrita* on page 11. However, if I had turned to the Chocolate Demon first, I would not be referred back to the Dark Velvet Bob on page 6, but to Watson’s Demon *S. swinhoei*, which, after due diligence, I discovered is not included in the book (it has not been recorded from the area so far).

Most species are represented by a single photograph, which is often adequate to recognise the species in the case of distinctive species. However, in the case of similar looking species, like the Sergeants, the book is extremely unhelpful. For example, on page 92, the females (not illustrated) of the Staff Sergeant and the very similar Small Staff Sergeant have been described in nearly identical terms. Beginners will find it challenging to imagine what they look like and to distinguish between the two.

For whatever reasons, some species that do not occur in the Garo Hills and are also not described in the book figure in the checklist. It would have been better if these had not been included in the checklist or marked.

The lack of records of some common butterflies like the Spotless Grass Yellow *Eurema herla laeta*, Small Grass Yellow *Eurema brigitta*, Club Beak *Libythea myrrha*, and Common Beak *Libythea lepita* in the Garo Hills is surprising. Similarly, it seems unusual that only two members of the Rings

Ypthima sp. have been recorded from these hills. Clearly, much more work needs to be done.

The systematic section is followed by “Butterfly Hotspots in the Garo Hills”, which includes 7 useful maps of the area. The Suggested Reading and Websites section is a useful compilation of books and sites that would take one beyond the scope of the present book. The Glossary and Abbreviations might have been more profitably placed at the beginning of the book, for the convenience of users. The “Checklist of the Butterflies of the Garo Hills” is a list of all butterflies recorded so far from the area. Finally, there are the Common Name and the Scientific Name indices. The latter should more appropriately have been called the Generic Names Index (for that is what it is), for if one is searching for a species name, it is not available. Given the irritating frequency with which genera are re-assigned, the species names index would have been extremely useful.

The inside of the back cover lists the organisations represented by the authors and sponsors. Interestingly, there is the Indian Foundation for Butterflies, which is described as a group of professional butterfly biologists and amateur naturalists who are involved in research on the natural history, ecology, conservation needs, and other aspects of the biology of Indian butterflies. Nowhere does it state that the organization has anything to do with the Government of India or state governments. If it is not a governmental or at least quasi-governmental organization, I am curious to know how the use of the name “Indian” was permitted. Normally, private organizations are not permitted to use “Indian” or “National” in their names, since this gives the impression of official sanction to the activities of that organisation.

In conclusion, the book is a useful addition to existing literature and it is hoped that the authors will look into the matters outlined above in the next edition of the book.

■ PETER SMETACEK

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2. HIMALAYA: MOUNTAIN OF LIFE by Kamal Bawa and Sandesh Kadur (2013). Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment, Bangalore. Size: 30.5 cm x 27.5 cm. 308 pp. Price not given. Hardback.

There are some areas in this world which will never stop fascinating you, and there are some people who will never stop impressing you with their knowledge, dedication,

and single-minded pursuit of excellence. When the two come together, the results are expectedly of high quality. The book HIMALAYA: MOUNTAIN OF LIFE proves this on every page. Kamal

Bawa is a distinguished Professor of Biology at the University of Massachusetts-Boston and a Founder-President of the Bengaluru-based Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE). He has published nearly 200 scientific papers and authored or edited 10 books and monographs. Prof. Bawa's primary interest is plant life. The other author, the much younger Sandesh V. Kadur is an award-winning wildlife photographer and cinematographer, with a passion for outdoors, wildlife, and conservation.

This lavish coffee-table book starts with a picture of a pensive-looking Golden Langur, one of the last large primates to be discovered in the Indian subcontinent, and perhaps the most beautiful species amongst its peers. The first 32 pages introduce you to the landscape, people, plants, and animals, not through any technical description but through wonderful images by Sandesh. Although titled HIMALAYA, the book mainly focuses on the eastern portion of this 2,400 km chain of mountains, considered to be the youngest mountain chain in the world. The Himalaya is the result of slow-motion collision of the Indian tectonic plate, part of the massive Gondwanaland, with the southern coastal edge of the Asian plate, resulting in the slow upward thrust of the land. This happened nearly 70 million years ago – a short time in the geological time frame. What it lacks in geological history is compensated by its rich biological wealth. The book celebrates the biological and cultural diversity of these majestic and mysterious mountains. It covers the region from central Nepal through Darjeeling Hills, Sikkim, Bhutan, and into the north-eastern Indian states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, and Nagaland – a subset of the whole Himalaya.

The Eastern Himalaya, which the book mainly deals with, is considered to be one of the 34 biodiversity hotspots of the world. These hotspots are the cradle of evolution and diversification of plant and animal life. Sadly, these hotspots are also areas that have lost 90% or more of their original habitats. Through large landscape images, this book showcases the spectacular richness of life in these mountains, and also points out to the destruction that is going on in the area mainly through human-related activities. The area that harboured and nurtured more than 200 distinct ethnic groups now faces an extinction crisis on an unprecedented scale.

Thanks to large-scale cultural osmosis, many ethnic groups with their own traditions, dress, food, and languages are disappearing, and some are more threatened than the species on the IUCN Red List!

The book not only has wonderful pictures of habitats, species, people, landscapes, and rivers, it has superb maps and illustrations to add value to the document. Each habitat picture has an extended caption, full of scientific information written in layman's language. This book further proves that the best of science is written in simple language. I would say the images and captions complement each other, vastly improving the appeal of the book.

The book covers almost all major taxa, from flowers to fish, to birds and mammals. I am particularly delighted that the book includes fish diversity. Out of over 14,000 species of freshwater fishes of the world, more than 900 are recorded here. Fish diversity is the highest in lowland rivers, with species richness declining with increase in altitude. Unfortunately, Himalayan fish diversity is under tremendous biotic pressure from overfishing, pollution, and introduction of invasive species. Strangely, the protection of local fish heritage is an issue that does not come to the minds of decision makers and conservationists, although the fish gene pool is one of the most important components of our biological wealth. It is a classic case of 'out of sight, out of mind'.

As can be expected from two committed conservationists, the book ends with a chapter *Threats to Biodiversity*. It makes sad reading, but all is not lost yet. Given a chance, nature can bounce back and heal some of the damage that we have inflicted on the Himalaya. The question is: Will the decision makers who think only of 10% GDP growth, allow this?

Although large in size, I think this book is a "must buy" for anyone interested in the protection of this fragile corner of the world. Composite pictures of the Mount Everest's East Rongbuk Glacier (pages 280–281) showing that between 1921 and 2008, the glacier has lost 380 vertical feet of snow, should convince any decision maker that the Himalaya is crying out for conservation attention. Books like this show that emergency actions are required to save what is appropriately called the *Mountain of Life*.

■ ASAD R. RAHMANI

3. FAUNAL HERITAGE OF RAJASTHAN, INDIA Edited by B.K. Sharma, Seema Kulshreshtha, and Asad R. Rahmani (2013). Published by Springer. Volume 1: General Background and Ecology of Vertebrates; Volume 2: Conservation and Management of Vertebrates. Size: 15.5 cm x 24.5 cm. 313 pp. Price: Rs. 1,450/-. Hardback.

The state of Rajasthan is fascinating due to its history, culture, palaces of former kingdoms, and its peace-loving and colourful people with the elaborate and multihued turbans of

the men and the catchy embroidery on the clothes of the women. Likewise, the landscape is enchanting, especially of the stark and beautiful Thar, the hills of the Aravallis, and the