Book Review: *Field Guide to the Butterflies of Sri Lanka*, by George M. van der Poorten and Nancy E. van der Poorten (2018)

Lepodon Books, Toronto, Canada. vi + 250 pp, 1154 figs., 248+ maps

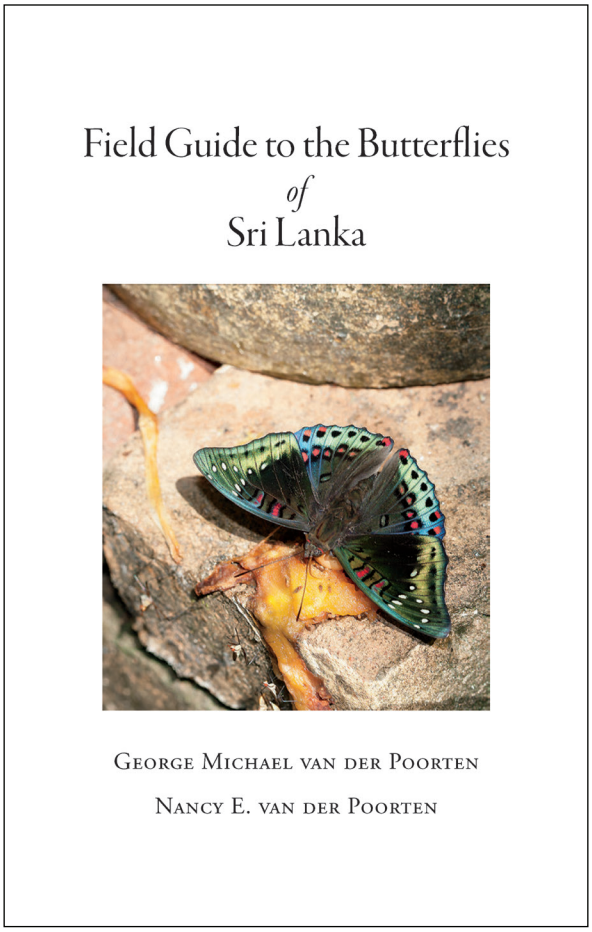
In 2016, I had the pleasure of reviewing one of the most remarkable books on a tropical butterfly fauna that I have seen, namely *The Butterfly Fauna of Sri Lanka* by George and Nancy van der Poorten (G. & M. van der Poorten, 2016; Willmott, 2016). That book was so complete that I was momentarily surprised to see the prompt subsequent appearance of *Field Guide to the Butterfly Fauna of Sri Lanka*, by the same authors, published in 2018. The latter book seemed on first inspection to contain so much information that I had to re-examine their 2016 publication to see what was left out. Essentially, the 2018 guide is a condensed version of the 2016 book, much smaller, slimmer, lighter, and lacking the several dozen 'publishable units' of information that the former contained, but otherwise a field guide that stands firmly on its own as a fine and highly useful work.

The book begins with a short but informative introduction to Sri Lanka and its 248 species of butterflies, with descriptions of the major climatic zones and habitats and the characteristic butterfly species occurring in each. Single page sections on butterfly anatomy, life cycle, species conservation and butterfly gardening provide excellent summaries of the more extensive chapters on these topics in the 2016 book.

The next section describes the layout of the book and its use. Clearly, the authors have put a great deal of thought into how to construct a field guide that is as user-friendly, informative, compact and effective as possible, without unduly compromising the information contained. Unlike most traditional butterfly books which are arranged in strictly taxonomic order, species in this field guide are grouped more by wing pattern similarity, at least within major taxonomic groups. In some cases, males and females of sexually dimorphic species may be figured in different parts of the book.

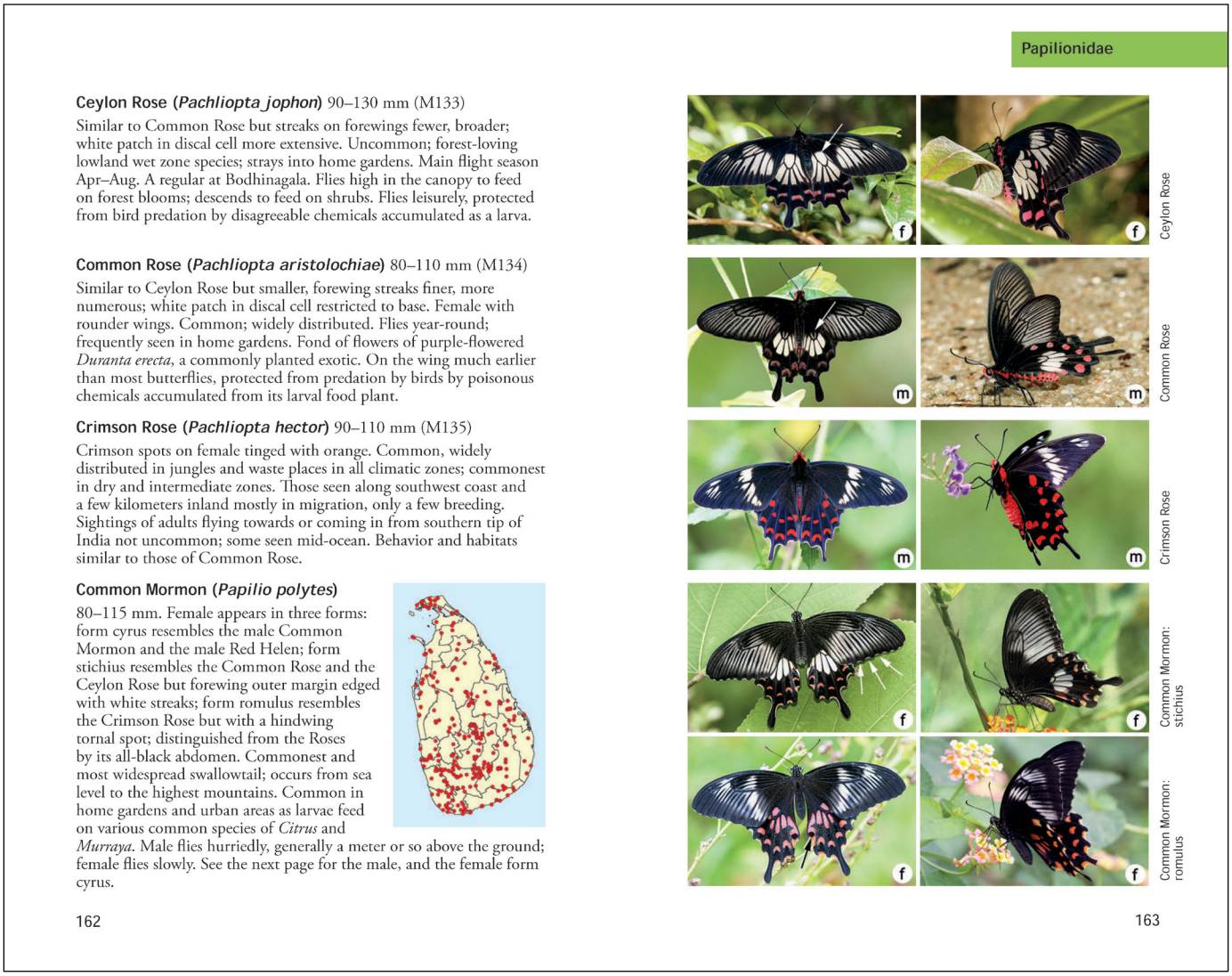
The remainder of the book sees each family treated to a one page summary of its diversity, appearance, behavior and life history, followed by the individual species accounts. Figures of mostly living butterflies are grouped into plates on the the right page, and accompanying text and sometimes maps on the facing page. Essentially, as many images are provided as are necessary to permit confident identification – perhaps only two (one for dorsal and one for ventral surface) for a distinctive species where the sexes are similar, in other cases ten or more to illustrate significant sexual dimorphism or intraspecific variation. As in the 2016 book, the images are spectacular, crisp, colorful and typically provide remarkably consistent views across similar species to facilitate identification. Although some images from the first book have been used in the second, in other accounts the images are entirely new.

The species accounts are short and telegraphic, pointing out diagnostic features and providing information on abundance, habitats, elevation, seasonality and behavior, and sites where the species may reliably be observed are often listed. Arrows on some figures indicate important characters, while some particularly challenging species feature in separate dichotomous identification keys. Dot maps illustrating record localities within Sri Lanka are provided for all species, either accompanying the accounts, or in Appendix A at the end of the book, with dots color-coded to indicate historical, recent or dubious records. Appendix B provides a taxonomic checklist accompanied by common names, followed by 20 notes on accepted or proposed changes to the taxonomy and status of species, mostly resulting from publications since the 2016 book. Appendix C provides the names of larval and nectar plants, their families and common names in English, Sinhala and Tamil. A glossary, short list of references, and an index complete the book.



Field Guide to the Butterflies of Sri Lanka, cover.

Serious butterfly enthusiasts or researchers, or those with a particular interest in the butterfly fauna of Sri Lanka and adjacent regions, will appreciate the vast store of information contained in the 2016 book. On the other hand, those visiting Sri Lanka, or with a more modest interest in its butterflies, will be well served by this meticulously executed, beautiful field guide.



Example species accounts.

LITERATURE CITED

Van der Poorten, G. M., van der Poorten, N. E. 2016. *The Butterfly Fauna of Sri Lanka*. Toronto, Lepodon Books. vi + 418 pp.

Willmott, K. R. 2016. Book Review. Van der Poorten, G. M., van der Poorten, N. E. (2016). *The Butterfly Fauna of Sri Lanka*. *Tropical Lepidoptera Research* 26(1): 60-61.

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Facing page: *Cethosia cydippe damasippe*, Papua New Guinea, Milne Bay, Ulumani Treetops.