Book Review: Guide to the Butterflies of Honduras, by Robert J. Gallardo and Olivia Diaz (2023)

Emerald Valley International Butterfly Center/Fauna Ventures, Honduras. 370 pp., 113 pl.

Honduras is the "Darién Gap" of northern Central America, as noted by the authors in the Introduction to this book. Biogeographically, this is illustrated by the fact that almost 17% of Honduran butterfly species reach their northern or southern range limit within the country, but the comparison is also appropriate in view of the historically poor knowledge of the country's fauna, and the large expanses of wilderness still awaiting exploration. Starting their intensive inventory of Honduran butterflies only in 2016, the authors have added a remarkable 310 species to the previous checklist for the country (Miller et al., 2012), with a further 100 species added by others, bringing the country total to 1270. Immediate taxonomic results of the authors' efforts in the field include the discovery of four new species (Gallardo et al., 2021; Gallardo & Grishin, 2021), and the first evidence supporting species status for two nearly allopatric euptychiine satyrines (Nakahara & Gallardo, 2019).

This book is a field guide rather than an encyclopedic compilation of knowledge on Honduran butterflies. As such, the book draws almost exclusively on the observations of the authors and their network of correspondents, ranging from collectors to photographers to museum curators. Prominent online and literature sources were also consulted, but the result is still dominated by the authors' own work, and thus represents a primary research publication as well as a field guide.

The book begins by reviewing the geography and habitats of Honduras and important butterfly localities, followed by summary accounts for every species that provide, in telegraphic form, the scientific name, English name, similar species, habitats, flight height, elevation, abundance, habits, localities where observed, and broad distribution. The sections on habits and observations are particularly important, representing a vast amount of new data; observation information includes date, location, observer, and source of record. Sandwiched between the species accounts are 113 plates containing 1695 color images of Honduran butterflies, the great majority of which are living individuals, supplemented by pinned museum specimens.

The book concludes with a list of 92 species reported for the country in publications or other sources but not observed personally by the authors, and a list of 471 species expected from Honduras, including 195 that are almost certain to occur. There is thus still a large amount to learn about the butterfly fauna of Honduras, and the authors follow a holistic approach to improving knowledge of the country's butterflies. In addition to their own field work, the authors own and continue to enhance the landscape of the private reserve Emerald Valley (Gallardo, 2022), with more than 700 butterflies recorded. They have also launched an annual butterfly festival to promote the study, enjoyment, and conservation of butterflies. There are a small number of misidentifications and a few taxonomic names that need updating, but these are minor issues that will be resolved as the authors continue their efforts to promote and expand knowledge of this diverse and poorly known butterfly fauna.

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