

The Butterflies of Venezuela. Part 2: Nymphalidae II (Acraeinae, Libytheinae, Nymphalinae, Ithominae, Morphinae). A Comprehensive Guide to the Identification of Adult Nymphalidae, Papilionidae, and Pieridae

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NEILD, ANDREW F. E. 2008. *The Butterflies of Venezuela. Part 2: Nymphalidae II (Acraeinae, Libytheinae, Nymphalinae, Ithomiinae, Morphinae). A Comprehensive Guide to the Identification of Adult Nymphalidae, Papilionidae, and Pieridae.* Meridian Publications, London. 275 pp. + 84 color plates, 6 Appendixes, Bibliography, Index. ISBN 9780952765714. Euros 129.00.

Magnificent, superb, comprehensive, deeply traditional, with shining youthful exuberance, a sample of modern scholarship and audacious, were just some of the descriptions given by renowned lepidopterists (Ackery (1997), Austin (1997), De Vries (1997), Viloría (1997), Willmott and Hall (1997)) to welcome the appearance of the first volume of *The Butterflies of Venezuela* back in the mid 90's. The book is a pioneering work dealing with the Nymphalid subfamilies Limenitidinae, Apaturinae and Charaxinae from a single South American country. It is also the first of a series of four volumes dedicated to the study of the Venezuelan butterflies with the only exceptions of the Lycaenidae, Riodinidae and Hesperidae (Neild 1996).

Even though Venezuela is widely recognized as a Megadiverse country, and it has a wide variety and abundance of insects, only a few efforts had been done to show the world a group like the Lepidoptera (González 2005; Rodríguez & Rojas-Suárez 2008). Besides the scientific literature, with access mainly to the scientific world, a handful of works on Lepidoptera of Venezuela have been written to the general public (like those by Álvarez-Sierra & Álvarez-Corral 1984; Manara 1982, 1994; Raymond 1982; Schmid & Endicott 1968). Only Raymond (1982) was originally intended to be a larger work in various volumes and intended to the scientific world. However, after the death of the author only few plates and part of the text survived until finally published in a single volume that masterly combines art and science (Fernández Yépez 1982; González et al. 2005; Orellana & González 2003; Viloría 1990).

The first volume of *The Butterflies of Venezuela* (Neild 1996) was not only appealing to the general public but it is also an accurate work that is now widely used and referenced by scientists. The long awaited and highly anticipated second part of the series has been finally published. This volume is divided into five sections: (1) a basic introduction containing details on how to use the book and a list of collections where the studied specimens are deposited, (2) a species accounts of the five subfamilies included, (3) several appendixes, (4) the plates, and (5) a bibliography with over 800 mentioned works and the Index.

This second volume is dedicated to three highly respected Venezuelan Lepidopterists that are now gone: Rafael De La Fuente, Harold Skinner and Francisco Romero Rodríguez. A well deserved posthumous homage to these men whose efforts have been of great importance in the development and study of the Venezuelan Lepidoptera (González 2004a, 2004b).

The book deals with five subfamilies of the Nymphalidae: the Acraeinae, Libytheinae, Nymphalinae, Ithomiinae, and Morphinae. Detailed accounts on systematics, biology, distribution, behavior and habitat, are presented for 196 species and 355 subspecies. General information on early stages and food plants are also provided in most cases, at least to the genus level. The book is very well written and will appeal to amateurs as well as specialists. Very extensive introductory sections are provided for each subfamily and every genus discussed. Much of the provided information has been obtained from a variety of sources published in Europe and the Americas, including many Latin-American journals difficult to find outside of their countries of origin; this is reflected in the provided bibliography. That formal information has been augmented with the personal collection and observation experience of the author and the use of many unpublished sources, including data gathered from many researchers/amateurs who have collected or investigated butterflies from Venezuela. The author also acknowledges opinions and comments of many active researchers in Lepidoptera, in different groups, covered from amateurs to worldwide recognized authorities.

This particular volume contains 84 color plates that figure over 1450 specimens and about 450 of them are types. Eight new species and 91 subspecies are described herein. In most cases both sexes of representative species and every mentioned ssp. are fully illustrated. Extensive commentaries and notes as well as some 30 figures containing line drawings of genitalia or other diagnostic features and a few B&W photographs will help to appropriately identify all taxa. In addition to the newly described taxa, 4 Neotypes and 10 Lectotypes are designated.

Most taxa are described by the author but in some cases he coauthors with various Venezuelan lepidopterists, including Mauro Costa, Juan Carlos De Souza, Francisco Romero Montesinos, and Andrés Orellana. One species is coauthored with Keith Willmott and another is described solely by Patrick Blandin.

Six appendixes are provided. The first and second appendixes present the data of collection and deposit for every type and figure of specimen respectively. The third appendix is a systematic checklist of the discussed species that complements that of Lamas (2004). Appendix 4 presents additional systematic notes and the 5th is basically a table with the elevations of La Escalera Road, an important area of insect collecting, which is part of the road from El Dorado to Santa Elena de

Uairén, in Bolívar State, Venezuela. The last appendix presents corrections to the first volume of the series. As in the first volume, a map of Venezuela depicting many collecting localities and a gazetteer are present in the end papers of the front and back covers.

We could fill this review with only high praises; however, I necessarily have to mention a couple of possible drawbacks in it. First of all the price of the book could be considered a problem, especially to Venezuelans (and I am certain that the cost will not cover all the expenses in publishing, research, travel, and time dedicated to finish it), and it will probably not help in stimulating buys and spreading the knowledge and information contained in the book (and the series). Also mentioned for Part I by Austin (1997) and De Vries (1997), it will possibly limit the purchases by libraries and institutions and will perhaps discourage Venezuelan denizens and even other South Americans from trying to obtain it (and the series as well). The author is certainly aware of this and has made efforts to bring the book to Venezuela; he has contacted researchers/amateurs and institutions and has tried to sell it for a lower price (A. Neild, personal communication).

The author includes the correct descriptions of new taxa and has fully documented the types in his book. However, since the book is basically an identification guide, such inclusions could be considered a possible problem and be questioned by some as mentioned by Austin (1997) and De Vries (1997) for the previous volume. Even though this is one of the few "old fashion" touches Neild uses, I do not see it as a big problem.

This book more than accomplishes the intention of the author in providing much needed information about the taxa covered. The Butterflies of Venezuela, Part 2, deserves the epithets expressed in the first paragraph and should be on the bookshelves of everyone (or their respective institutions) interested in studying the Neotropical butterflies and the natural history of the region.

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