



BOOK REVIEW

Butterflies of the Kruger National Park and Surrounds – Herbert Otto

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CITATION AND DETAILS

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REVIEW

Those of us who have been around a bit will remember Johan Kloppers and Dr Georges Van Son's volume "The butterflies of the Kruger National Park" (National Parks Board of South Africa, 1978, ISBN 978-0-86953-021-4). I bought mine many years ago on my very first visit to KNP, even before I could afford a Pennington's – back in 1982! I still have it now... it covers 219 species in its 109 pages, and well I remember being frustrated because back then Pafuri was off limits... and so I had little chance of seeing rarities like Forest Queen *Euxanthe wakefieldi* and African Map *Cyrestis camillus sublineatus*, as they were called at the time. I had no idea how long I had to go before I encountered these specials for real!

Fast forward to 2014 and we have digital cameras, desk top publishing, the internet, citizen science... the list is too long to mention. Living close to the KNP, Herbert Otto devoted many years of his life to producing an updated Kruger Park butterfly guide. It covers 277 species, over 472 pages. And it uses a modern publishing vehicle – the e-book.

"Butterflies of the Kruger National Park and Surrounds" is an attractive book with a clean design. Park visitors will find it easy to use, and identify the butterflies they see. Not only does Herbert cover all the butterflies found there (including single-record vagrants), he covers sexual and seasonal polymorphism too. It is good to see difficult polymorphic butterflies such as female Dancing Acraea, *Telchinia serena*, and the Purple/Orange Tip *Colotis* species, covered this way. These often confuse the layman. Another plus is the use of different angle views of species that have iridescent wings. Often the colour can vary dramatically as the angle changes, and he tries to show this when he can. This will also help the newcomer to decide which species he or she is looking at.

Herbert goes a lot further than the original book, giving a lot of detail on the early stages of butterflies. Where possible, he has used his own photographs, or those of fellow lepidopterists, to depict as many stages as he can. This can only enrich the experience park visitors have of its butterflies, and lead to a

greater understanding.

This book is not just about butterflies and their larval host-plants (or host-insects – he has Alison Sharp's fascinating Southern Pied Woolly Legs *Lachnocnema laches* photographs). There are many bonuses. It has a large section covering nomenclature, biology and behaviour – and even delves into the realms of mythology! And butterflies' relationships with plants are covered fully. Each species account has a full description of the known host-plant relationships in the park, including where possible, photographs of the plants.

Perhaps the most unusual thing Herbert has done, is to go into the etymology behind butterfly names. Each species account has a go at explaining how the common name was coined. Some are good – such as the reason behind Hottentot Skipper. I'm not too sure about some of the others... I always thought 'Foxy' for *Charaxes jasius saturnus* made reference to its 'foxy' colour and not its cunning. But he takes it further than that – there is a 17-page section devoted to the linguistic roots behind the scientific names. My view is that Linnean binomial nomenclature is much preferable to vernacular, or 'common' names – because it is stable and governed by scientific principles. But people new to them are put off by their apparent complexity. Herbert helps to make them more approachable, which can only help. He points out that a lot of the names were applied in a deliberately obscure manner by the people describing species, so he has to rely on educated guesswork a lot of the time. There are some fascinating tales in that part of the book... as witness this account of Bibulus, one of the Woolly Legs species:

"Bibulus: Denotes a love of drinking, which may refer to the quick, but staggering flight pattern. A surname from early Roman times of the plebeian Calpurnia clan. Calpurnius Bibulus was a contemporary of Julius Caesar and received each of his public magistracies in the same year as Caesar. Curule Aedile in 65 BC, Praetor in 62 BC, and Consul in 59 BC. He became a recluse (reputed to be inebriated) and opposed Caesar in writing."

There are lots of little gems like that in there. Perhaps that was a reference to LepSoc members' well known affinity for certain brands of Port...

He explains names of not just butterflies – he even covers the reasons behind some of the place names in KNP! There are also extensive references and bibliographies – not only for butterflies, but for

plants, and even etymology. Plenty for visitors to mug up on when the weather is bad and there aren't any animals, butterflies or birds to see...

There is no such thing as an error-free book and this is no exception. People who live in glass houses should not throw stones, so I have to be careful here after some of the howlers that appeared in the first print runs of my own books. But I did spot a couple of areas where the text is out of date. Some examples: it is now generally accepted that the Nymphalid subfamily Danainae does not carry cardiac glycoside toxins from the larval to adult stage – the toxic principle in the adults being alkaloids ingested by the males. But Herbert repeats the older view. And he uses the outdated *Acacia* for our thorn trees and climbers, not the modern *Vachellia* and *Senegalia*. *Ehrharta erecta* is quoted as being the preferred host-plant of many Satyrinae, when we know that the reason it is quoted for so many species is that it was convenient as a food-plant for early workers attempting to rear the larvae. There are also some photographs mixed up.

One thing that jarred a bit was the strangely inconsistent inclusion of drawings of ova, larva and pupa in the margins. Only a few of the species accounts have this. And they are not, as one might expect, always species for which there are no available life history photographs. Several of them have superb photographs, making the drawings superfluous.

But these are minor cavils, and can be corrected easily in an e-book – and only experts will pick them up anyway. This book is aimed at the visitor to the Kruger National Park who wishes to go deeper into the bush experience than just bagging the 'Big 5', and learn some fascinating facts about butterflies as well as identifying them. And in that it succeeds admirably, for which I congratulate Herbert.

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