

Butterfly Conservation
West Midlands Branch Newsletter, January 2007

BOOK REVIEW

Discover Butterflies in Britain by D.E. Newland (2006) published by WILDGuides and available via Butterfly Conservation at £19 inclusive of post and packing

Many years ago when I first became interested in birdwatching, my second purchase (after a good field guide) was a book by John Gooders called "Where to watch Birds". First published forty years ago, it provided an invaluable resource to beginner birdwatchers such as myself on where to actually find many of those elusive birds that I was keen to see. Butterfly enthusiasts have had a long wait for their own 'John Gooders' but I am pleased to report that it has at last arrived. David Newland's beautifully illustrated book provides a detailed guide to some of the best butterfly sites in Britain from Devon to the Highlands of Scotland. Each of the 66 main locations included has a detailed double-page site description, directions on how to find the nearest parking areas and a very clear map. For each location, a list of target species is provided together often with pointers as to the ideal time of the year to visit. The sites chosen, as the author recognises, are essentially personal but if you visit them all at the right season and in the right weather conditions you should have a good chance to see all 58 of the butterflies to be found in Britain. To be fully comprehensive even the Dutch site for the Large Copper, now sadly extinct in the UK, has been thrown in for good measure! Grafton Wood and the Wyre Forest are the two West Midlands sites to receive star billing but a secondary list also includes our other BC reserves in the region plus Cannock Chase and Chaddesley Wood NNR. If you are keen to see a particular butterfly but not sure where to go, then the second half of the book provides a species by species account with a list of hotspots where the less widespread species might be seen. A final gazetteer provides an excellent summary including every site mentioned by county, a full six-figure grid reference and a list of target species. While the book is ideal for beginners and the second section can also double up as a field guide, even the more experienced butterfly buff will almost certainly be pointed to sites with which they are not familiar. Indeed, there is enough here to plan a series of butterfly holidays for at least the next ten years.

The book is well referenced and includes a number of very useful website addresses. Apart from the valuable information it contains, the publishers are to be congratulated on the design of the book which is generally very pleasing. One minor niggle from an aesthetic viewpoint are the montages of butterflies included on the inside front and back covers which are completely out of keeping with the rest of the book. Something which hopefully might be addressed if there is ever a reprint. The quality of the photographs, all taken by the author, are consistently high and the landscape images included, certainly for the sites I know, give a real feel for the places visited. There are few books which manage to be both informative and also a pleasure to look at and it is a credit to all concerned that this book manages to be both. Inevitably, in a book of this nature, the geographical spread of sites is a little uneven and no doubt some readers will complain that some good butterfly sites in their area have been excluded. While there are nine sites included, for example, in glorious Devon, poor old neighbouring Cornwall misses out completely. Closer to home, our colleagues in Warwickshire branch may feel miffed that there is apparently nowhere in their county worthy of inclusion. The book, however, serves as a reminder that there are still some great places to watch butterflies in Britain and perhaps the I'm sure overwhelmingly positive response

from reviewers will encourage the author to produce a second volume at a later stage and include many more of these fantastic sites. This has been clearly a labour of love on the part of David Newland and his enthusiasm for butterflies and enjoyment of the countryside stands out on every page. The conservation message also comes across very strongly and purchasers have the added satisfaction of knowing that a donation will be made to Butterfly Conservation for every copy sold. Definitely a book which should find its place on every butterfly enthusiasts' bookshelf and one which I guarantee will be well used.

Mike Williams