

improbable species in his impressive-looking but tragically-flawed list.

Fortunately, such calamitous failures of identification should now be a thing of the past, as anybody armed with *Field Guide to the Dragonflies of Hong Kong*, and a good dose of common sense, ought to be capable of making a decent fist of putting a name to most dragonflies they encounter in Hong Kong. An impressive total of 112 species has now been recorded in the SAR, and all of them are illustrated in this 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Good, clear photographs of adult males and females are provided in most cases, along with useful information on distinguishing features, biometrics, habitat and distribution. This information is backed up with excellent, user-friendly keys to adults at sub-order, family, genus and species levels. There is also a handy pull-out photo index, a check-list, and a section on additional species which could be expected to occur locally. The layout is compact and attractive. Best of all, it fits easily into a field bag. One could wish for a more robust, hard-back production, and a less cursory treatment of the larvae, but otherwise this has all that one might reasonably ask of a field guide to adult dragonflies.

Graham Reels

## Hong Kong Butterflies

by Philip Yik-fui Lo and Wing-leung Hui,  
571 pages, softcover. Cosmos Books Ltd,  
Hong Kong, 2004.

In terms of the amount that has been written about them, Hong Kong butterflies are right up there with the birds. Certainly, no other insect group has received anything remotely approaching the attention that has been given to this small component of the Lepidoptera. I can think of at least ten books on the subject over the past four decades, including such major texts as Marsh's *Hong Kong Butterflies* (1968), Johnston & Johnston's *This is Hong Kong: Butterflies* (1980), Young & Yiu's *Butterfly Watching in Hong Kong* (2002) and, of course, the magnificent (and unrivalled) *The Butterflies of Hong Kong* by Bascombe, Johnston and Bascombe (1999). So the authors of *Hong Kong Butterflies* have built their attractive and impressive guide on a well-established foundation, and certainly could not have produced such a comprehensive text without the work of their accomplished predecessors.

Sadly, you would not know this from reading the book, which somehow manages to give the impression that the serious study of butterflies in Hong Kong began when AFCD belatedly took an interest in them in 2001 (there is a limited bibliography, but I could not find a single citation in the text outside of the brief sections on vagrants and suspected species). This failure to give due credit is perplexing. Some rather spurious "firsts" are claimed for the book on the back cover ("first butterfly guidebook in Hong Kong complete with information on 238 local species"; never-before-published species photographs) but in truth only one "first" can plausibly be claimed: Lo and Hui's *Hong Kong Butterflies* is

the first major local text on this attractive group of insects to be published in field guide format.

This fact alone ought, one would think, to represent a significant step forward for the active study of butterflies in Hong Kong. Unfortunately, however, it is more a case of one step forward, two steps back. Information on larval food plants for the vast majority of Hong Kong species was provided by Bascombe *et al.*, while the local status and known flight periods of more than 230 butterfly species were given by Young & Yiu (who in turn were building on the work of George Walthew in the 1990s). Such readily-accessible information would have added immeasurably to the value of any butterfly field guide, but the authors of *Hong Kong Butterflies* appear to have ignored these rich sources of knowledge. Instead we have terse family-level generalisations for larval food plants, and a bizarre "status" system tucked away in the check-list at the back of the book, in which the vast majority of local butterflies, irrespective of their rarity or otherwise, are classified as "General Species", whatever that means. And there are no keys.

As for the information on local distribution of the Hong Kong species (another invaluable quality for a good field guide), one would again be better off turning to previous texts. Lo and Hui have a curiously myopic vision of Hong Kong, whereby the commonest (indeed, almost the only) geographical unit is the Country Park. Thus, if you wish to see common fare, such as Lesser Grass Blue, you can take heart from the fact that it is distributed in "Most Country Parks." If, however, you have a yearning to see the tiny Pigmy Scrub Hopper, you are advised to go to Sai Kung West or Plover Cove. Couldn't be simpler, could it? Except for the fact that many of the best butterfly sites in Hong Kong are not actually in Country Parks. Perhaps AFCD prefer not to let that particular cat out of the bag.

In spite of all this carping, I rather like this book. Although the authors have perversely contrived to prevent it from being the perfect field guide package, to have put together such a complete set of very high quality species photographs in such a short period of time is nothing less than remarkable, even with a large number of AFCD staff involved. The combination of live field photographs and set specimen photographs works very well indeed, and this is certainly one area in which *Hong Kong Butterflies* outdoes Young & Yiu's *Butterfly Watching in Hong Kong* (in which there are no specimen photographs, and many of the live photographs are of rather poor quality). Limited biometric information is provided for each species, along with useful pointers as to habitat and diagnostic features. Larvae are illustrated for many species. As with its companion, *Field Guide to the Dragonflies of Hong Kong*, the book is compact, easy to use and almost ridiculously inexpensive.

I particularly like the book because of the choice of photograph on the back cover. Whether or not this is the first "published" live photograph of the rare endemic Beggar's Ace skipper (and I suspect the Hong Kong Lepidopterist's Society might have something to say about that), this fabulous butterfly was, ahem, first discovered by me.

Graham Reels