

Butterflies of West Africa, vol.1-2. Torben B. Larsen. 2005. Apollo Books (In North America, available from International Specialized Book Services, Inc., Portland, Oregon www.isbs.com). 900 pages including 130 colour plates. (Hardcover) \$256.00 US. ISBN 87-88757-43-9

Butterflies of West Africa by Torben Larsen is a monumental and exceptional work. This two volume set stands as the definitive taxonomic treatment currently existing for butterflies of western West Africa and will undoubtedly continue in this respect far into the future. Its publication has already had considerable impact judging by the plethora of recent interest and activity in the region.

Dr. Larsen "...attempts to summarize all that is known about the nearly 1500 butterfly species known from West Africa, the fifteen countries that stretch from Senegal and Mauritania on the Atlantic to Nigeria and Niger in the east..." and bordered by the Sahara Desert in the north. Included are the nearly 400 species that have been added to the checklist since

Carcasson's African Butterflies (Ackery et al. 1995) and 18 newly described species. Over 10 years of research went into making this book, including substantial in-country field collecting, an exhaustive review of existing literature, broad-scale examination of materials in museums and private collections, and extensive consultation with those working within the region and discipline.

The text volume provides a lucid, insightful introductory section that discusses evolution, biogeography, and conservation of West African butterflies and includes 12 informative data tables. The bulk of this 600 page volume consists of species accounts well-organized into subsections on identification, taxonomic notes, early stages, habits, and distributions. Illustrated identification aids are largely restricted to line drawings of genitalia for a number of difficult-to-identify species. This systematic section also includes a helpful gazetteer and glossary of technical terms, and an informative table of global range distributions for all Afrotropical genera. This table additionally summarizes the taxonomic framework used by the author. The newly described species and summary of Dr. Larsen's suggested taxonomic changes are added as Appendices. The plate volume consists of 125 full-color plates, each of which has a facing, cross-reference text page. Plates depict 3900 individual butterfly photos shown at actual size. Nearly all 1500 species are represented, the large majority by multiple photos that show dorsal and ventral views and sexual or seasonal polymorphism. The unique number assigned to each species allows for easy cross-referencing between the text and plate volumes. Both volumes end with an index of species names.

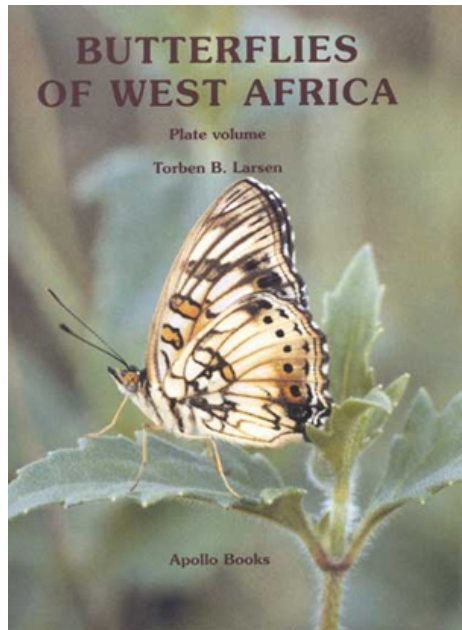
The author has made a valiant effort to produce an authoritative taxonomic treatment that also could be used as an on-the-ground butterfly identification guide. The decision to split the material into separate text and plate volumes resulted from polling of likely users who thought two volumes would facilitate field activities. But given the sheer magnitude of the taxonomic coverage and need to balance

production costs with affordability, it's not surprising that its usefulness in this regard is restricted. The volumes are relatively large and heavy, the binding doesn't seem to hold up well under serious use, many photos aren't true to color, and intraspecific variation, which can cause significant confusion, could not be adequately represented.

Butterflies of West Africa is a must have for all professional Lepidopterists and serious avocational experts and should be on the library shelves of all major museums and research institutions. General enthusiasts of tropical butterflies and their biogeography will also want to add it to their collection. The author has a neat writing style that interweaves humor and anecdotal accounts with well-researched natural history and scientific information. Many enjoyable hours will be spent perusing the vast wealth of information contained in these two volumes and dreaming of butterfly field studies in West Africa.

Ackerly, P.R., Smith, C.R., and Vane-Wright, R.I. 1995. *Carcasson's African Butterflies: An Annotated Catalogue of the Papilionoidea and Hesperioidea of the Afrotropical Region*. CSIRO. Australia.

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The Encyclopedia of Entomology (4 volumes).
Capinera, J. L. (ed.). 2008. Springer, New
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