

Green Guide to Butterflies Of Britain And Europe
Robert Goodden

This is a delightful introduction to something new to me, the Michelin Green Guide series.

I have fond memories of Michelin guides, the red guides to hotels and restaurants send the green guides to what to see, from my days in Germany for decades ago. It appears that they have not lost their dedication to quality.

The authors of such a book have to decide in advance the readership to which they intend to appeal. This is not a book for entomologists, but rather people like me who notice butterflies in the backyard and are curious what they are.

The book starts with two short but very well done chapters on the body structure of butterflies – the names of all the different parts of their bodies – and their life cycle. This is the kind of introduction one needs in order to understand the individual species.

The next chapter is an overview of the families of butterflies. They do not go into evolution or Linnaean taxonomy, but simply describe the groups as they exist. This is essential and pitched at the intelligent layman.

They have a chapter on conservation with some common sense advice on how to observe butterflies. The first bit of advice is, don't kill them! This is a radical change from insect collecting of 50 years ago, where the objective was to amass a collection of dead specimens with pins through their bodies. No! Some butterflies are endangered, and we humans should have respect for all kinds. Their advice is to capture, observe, and release butterflies that are in no danger of extinction. Rare butterflies should be treated with even more care. Don't even capture them.

Lastly, their longest chapter is titled appropriately enough "The Butterflies." They have good illustrations of the butterflies that one is likely to encounter in Britain and Europe: 68 and 360 species, respectively. They obviously cannot provide photographs of all of them, but they certainly provide enough to allow the reader to identify the butterflies he is likely to encounter.

There is some discussion of the differences in morphology among butterflies. Most of them have scent patches on their wings that release pheromones. One family has atrophied front legs, so they move around on four instead of six. Such characteristics are essential to entomologists in distinguishing insects from each other. This book does not present a systematic taxonomic key, as a more scientific book would, but once again presents enough for the average reader to figure it out.

This will be the summer that my young son and I take a harder look at the butterflies in our yard. We might even buy a butterfly net with the intention of catching, photographing and releasing the different species that we see in order to know our environment better. This book will be a tremendous help. It is a five-star effort.