

### Review of the book 'Butterflies and Moths of Pakke Tiger Reserve'

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The book, a guide to the lepidopteran fauna of Pakke Tiger Reserve in Arunachal Pradesh, northeastern India, follows in the footsteps of the recently published 'Butterflies of the Garo Hills', the author list of which includes Sanjay Sondhi and Krushnamegh Kunte. Krushnamegh Kunte is one of the leading experts on Indian butterflies and is well-known among butterfly circles. Sanjay Sondhi is a keen naturalist, involved in biodiversity documentation and conservation, especially in northeastern India. He has a special interest in Lepidoptera. The collective experience and expertise of the two make them an excellent combination to write such a book. After having largely relied on pre-Independence literature to identify butterflies, I am glad that Indian naturalists are finally taking to authoring literature on our country's butterflies.

The work is based almost entirely on circa 50 days of field observations by the first author and a couple of visits by the second author. It includes photographic reports of 284 butterfly species, supplemented by more photographs of similar looking species that are likely to be found in the area. The authors themselves state that the book is not a comprehensive guide to all butterflies in the area. As far as moths are concerned, the book only covers 83 moths in a concise 13 pages, which form, for all practical purposes, an appendix to butterflies. There are no species descriptions for moths; each species features a photograph of a live specimen with its latin name and wingspan.

Butterfly densities can vary tremendously not only across seasons, but also over years. Categorization of butterflies in a locality into common, rare and other categories merely based on a total of about two months of field work is bound to be tentative for many species. The book would have been a worthwhile addition to literature if it had been more comprehensive, i.e., based on considerably more field data. As it stands now, I am certain that a few more months of field work, and well-designed bait-trapping, will add many more species to the list.

Reviewing this book for a scientific journal, I must

state that from a purely academic perspective, the book does not add greatly to scientific literature. I am mildly disappointed by the 'premature' publication of the book. This is not a comprehensive account of the diversity of



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#### Butterflies and Moths of Pakke Tiger Reserve

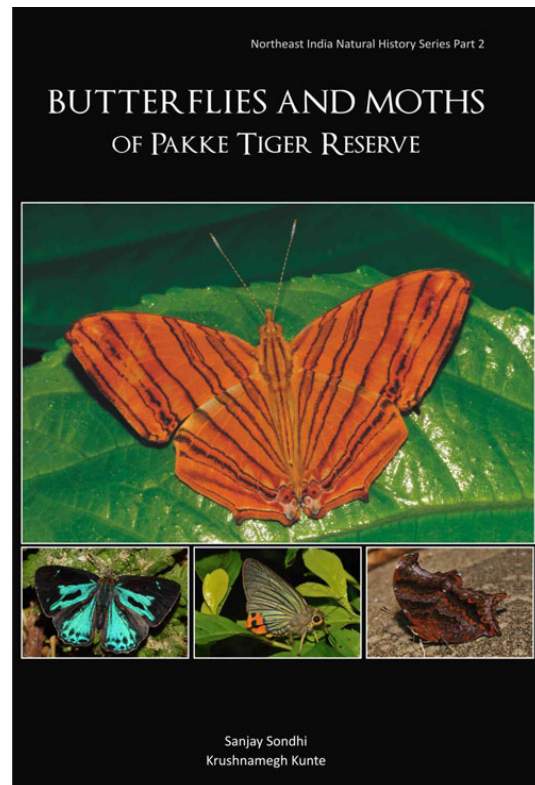
Sanjay Sondhi and Krushnamegh Kunte

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butterflies in the region, and is certainly only a cursory account of moth diversity. The inclusion of moths in the title is rather misleading in so far as it covers but a small fraction of the moth diversity in the locality. The butterfly work would have been more aptly published as

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a paper in a journal such as JoTT. Data from several more days of systematic light-trapping are needed before the moth data qualifies to be published in a reputable journal. As far as moths are concerned, I personally had high expectations upon seeing the title, but ended up being disappointed. Given the enormous diversity of moths, and the complexity of their taxonomy, I am afraid a beginner like me relying on the book may end up wrongly identifying species based on photographic similarity.

However, I gather the book is meant to promote eco-tourism in the reserve. Indubitably a noble goal, but I am unsure who the target users of the book are. Butterfly and bird tourism is an industry waiting to be tapped, especially in the context of improving the livelihoods of local communities critical for conservation in northeastern India. As a bird or butterfly enthusiast, I would certainly prefer to carry a guide-book describing a more or less comprehensive list of species in the region, rather than an incomplete guide to a specific reserve, even if the reserve in question were to be the only place I plan to visit. Of course, we lack a comprehensive guide to Arunachal Pradesh or northeastern Indian butterflies, but a book like Isaac Kehimkar's 'The book of Indian butterflies' is arguably more useful for a butterfly watcher to purchase compared to a book that specializes on a particular locality.

On the plus side, the lovely photographs are well presented, including both dorsal and ventral surfaces

where needed, and some museum photographs that are currently hard to access through literature. Hence, even though this is not a comprehensive account, every species described in the book can be unambiguously identified provided one has usable photographs. This is not necessarily the case with butterfly guides in India. Many identifying characters of species presented in the book are not found in other literature.

In my opinion, from the larger perspective of conservation and promotion of natural history interest in public, the need of the hour is to have comprehensive field guides to our rich flora and fauna, both national and regional. I urge authors embarking on authoring such books to aim for more comprehensive and detailed guides to their taxon of interest, and cover larger geographic areas. That said, the proof is in the pudding. If this book ends up promoting butterfly tourism in and around Pakke and increases revenue for the local communities, the book will be considered a success, and will naturally spawn more such titles.

As a reviewer, I can recommend the book in many cases, especially considering the quality of images and the very reasonable price—Rs. 500. It is certainly a must buy for wildlife enthusiasts living in the surroundings of the reserve. As also for regular visitors to the reserve who are keen butterfly watchers but unwilling to deal with more complicated keys. If you want to chip in towards conservation, like butterflies and enjoy travelling, go ahead, buy a copy and visit Pakke!

