

Opt In For Dioptines

Review by Larry Gall

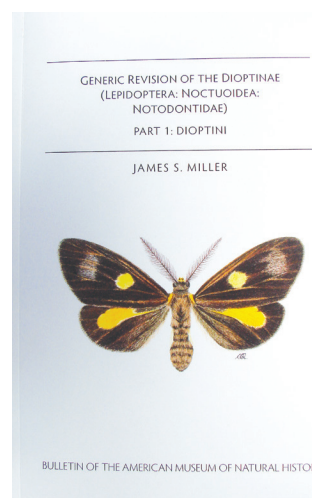
James S. Miller. 2009. *Generic Revision of the Dioprinae (Lepidoptera: Noctuoidea: Notodontidae)*. Part 1: Dioptrini and Part 2: Josiini. *Bulletin of the American Museum of Natural History* 321: 1-1022, 362 figs., 9 tables, 48 color plates. \$110.

Many day-flying moths are showy in comparison to their nocturnal brethren, and there is a hoary old refrain that extols these day-fliers as “Honorary Butterflies.” This depends on one’s point of view, of course, as those of us who have traveled to the lepidopteran dark side will counter that butterflies are merely an honorary evolutionary twig on the gigantic tree of moths.

But we digress...some of the more gaudily patterned day-flying moths are tropical noctuids, and among these is an offshoot of the notodontids (=Prominent Moths) known as the dioptines, the subject of a recent (2009) monograph by Jim Miller. In all my years of taxonomizing, I have rarely, if ever, encountered anything as prodigiously and meticulously documented as Miller’s tome. Teenage taxonomists (are there such?) would likely christen it da bomb.

Miller details more than 450 different species, and his command of the material is so sprawling and eclectic that a two volume paperback set is barely enough to keep the details from bursting both spines. If you haven’t heard of dioptines, don’t fret, you’re not alone. Although active during the daytime, most dioptines are rather furtive moths, and even the few common neotropical ones are often overlooked.

A single species, the California oakworm (*Phryganidia californica*), makes its way along the west coast into the United States, where it undergoes periodic population explosions that can lead to its caterpillars defoliating oaks.



A mated pair of *Erbessa priverna*.
Sept. 4, 2008. Atlantic Forest, Bahia, Brazil.

Although there are few living dioptines figured in Miller’s monograph, the specimens illustrated at the end of Part 2 are beautiful and capture the variability of this group nicely. The plates of live immatures include crazily colored caterpillars and caterpillar appendages, and harlequin-like pupas, and Miller documents streams, mountains, and other tropical habitats that also sport many butterflies.

His dioptine monograph is well written and easy to peruse — it may not be your cup of tea if you are technically faint of heart, but if you want to partake of one of the best modern morphologists strutting the right lep stuff, this would be it.

If Hugo to Venezuela

Review by Jeffrey Glassberg

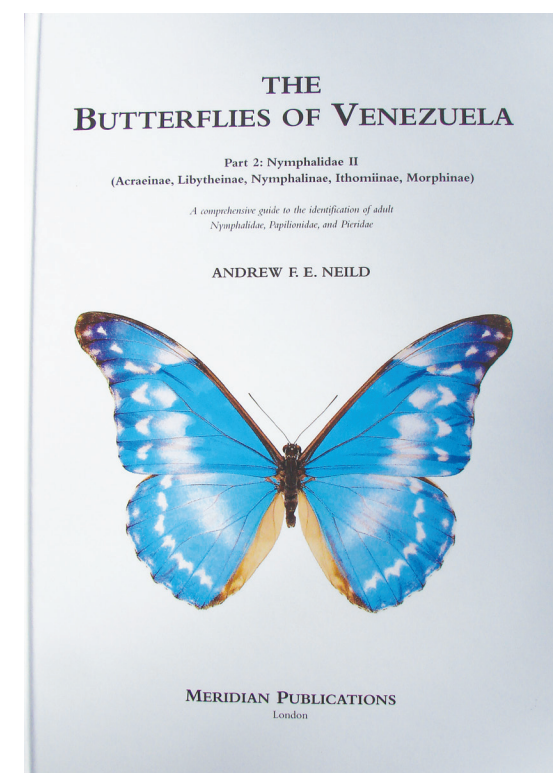
Andrew F.E. Neild. 2009. *The Butterflies of Venezuela*. Andrew F.E. Neild. Part 2; Nymphalidae II (Acraeinae, Libytheinae, Nymphalinae, Ithomiinae, Morphinae). Meridian Publications. London. 275 pgs. + 84 color plates. £110 (approximately \$165)

This the second volume of a work intended to treat the swallowtails, white and yellows and brushfoots of Venezuela (Volume 1 was reviewed in *American Butterflies*, Winter 1997). This book, a 4 pound, large format (8 ½ inches x 12 inches) reference work — obviously not a field guide — contains a wealth of detail about the 196 butterfly species treated, including a tremendous amount of valuable information never before published. The author used his extensive stays in Venezuela to develop a deep knowledge of the Venezuelan butterfly fauna and in this book he shares his knowledge with the reader.

The book not only illustrates all of the species (in the treated groups) that are found in Venezuela, it also illustrates essentially every subspecies found in Venezuela. In addition, many new subspecies and some new species are described here for the first time.

The photographs, which are of dried and spread specimens, are cropped in a style typically employed by butterfly collectors, to show only one-half the wings (as a space saving device). However, providing a great boon to butterflyers, unlike most existing regional books showing specimens, both the upperside and underside of most specimens are shown. The quality of the printing is good, but doesn’t completely capture the vibrancy of the butterfly wing colors.

It goes almost without saying that if you intend to go butterflying in Venezuela, this book (and the previous volume) is a must have (I’m assuming that if you can afford to travel to Venezuela that you can also afford



the book). But, are there other reasons to purchase this book? Yes. The book will also be useful to those who travel to surrounding South American countries. Actually, since many of the species treated in this work are found throughout the Neotropics, including Mexico (although usually as different subspecies) the book will be of interest to anyone traveling south of the United States.

Unfortunately, the high price of this volume (justified as it is) may discourage most potential readers from purchasing it. Publishers believe that only a small number of specialists will buy books such as this one and therefore peg the price very high so as to recover all of their costs from the limited number of anticipated purchasers. In my view, this type of pricing is a self-fulfilling prophecy. The author has put a tremendous amount of time and effort into this work — why not try to reach as many readers as possible?