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New Field Guide to Butterflies of Sri Lanka

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by Harasha Gunewardene

The publication of Field Guide to the Butterflies of Sri Lanka (2018) by George Michael van der Poorten & Nancy E. van der Poorten is surely a ray of sunshine amidst the looming gloom this Christmas. This latest contribution by Sri Lanka's eminent Lepidopterist duo, an up-to-date field guide to help identify all the butterflies of Sri

Lanka, will indeed be indispensable for Sri Lankans nature lovers desiring to recognise, learn, and enjoy our local fauna.

The van der Poortens rose to eminence after the publication of their scholarly and landmark work, The Butterfly Fauna of Sri Lanka (2016). This publication which has fast become a collector's item, has been acclaimed by Lepidopterists the world over. Kelvyn L. Dunn writing in Magazine of the Butterflies and Other Invertebrates Club (Australia) says: "Overall, the work is an astonishing accomplishment by a dedicated couple. It stands, without question, as a milestone in the study of butterflies in this island and more broadly for South Asia region for which there are a few texts to this level of scholarly excellence and scientific detail".

Ullasa Kodandaramaiah in Nota Lepidopterologica (Societas Europaea Lepidopterologica) notes "I can confirm without reservations that 'The Butterfly Fauna of Sri Lanka' is one of the best I have come across in terms of usefulness, comprehensiveness, aesthetics and attention to detail. I am fully confident that this book will turn hordes of Sri Lankans into butterfly watchers, and entice many others from around the world to visit Sri Lanka to experience its marvelous butterfly fauna'. Albert Orr writing in Australian Entomologist says "It is, overall, a remarkable achievement, a credit to its authors and obviously a labour of love. I strongly recommend it to anyone with a serious interest in butterflies, especially as it breaks new ground in the visual material presented and provides a model for a new type of butterfly book... a worthy successor to the iconic works of Moore and Woodhouse...".

Toshiya Hirowatari in Yadoriga, a journal of the Lepidopterological Society of Japan observes "More than 3,300 beautiful photographs make a strong impression, but the content includes a wide range of information about the differentiation of adult morphology, taxonomy, species and habitat, behavior, larval stage, host plants, and conservation, making it a book with high scientific value, not merely a collection of beautiful photographs of butterflies". Keith R. Willmott in Tropical Lepidoptera Research (USA) says "... despite the existence of several books on the island's butterfly fauna (e.g., Woodhouse, 1949; D'Abrera, 2000), the authors decided that an additional book, with a particular focus on the biology and conservation of the fauna, was warranted. The result is a richly illustrated book that draws upon the authors' many years of field research, during which time they documented at least some information for every species on the island, compiled a distribution database of 30,000 records, and compiled immature stage information for 219 species."



Michael F Braby in Austral Entomology says "The Butterfly Fauna of Sri Lanka is a landmark publication and an essential reference for anyone interested in butterflies... provides the foundation for conservation action as an authoritative account and a vehicle for the promotion of its

unique island fauna. I have no doubt that it will inspire the next generation of butterfly enthusiasts and amateur lepidopterists to conserve its biodiversity".

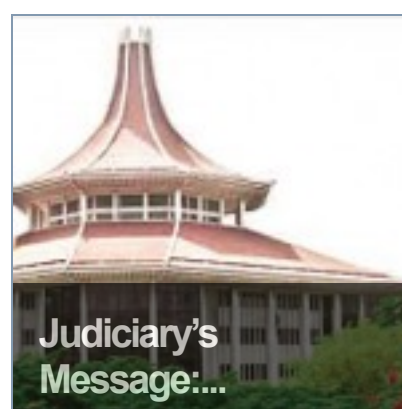
The Lepidopterist duo

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Michael was first smitten by butterflies as a child growing up in Sri Lanka. He grew up in a time when he could freely roam the extensive forests and meadows of the country, which was sparsely populated. Completing his M.Sc. and Ph.D. at the University of Guelph in Canada, he met Nancy, who had just finished her degree in Botany. She also grew up with a love of butterflies, but in Toronto Canada. Since then, they have pursued their shared interest in plants, birds, and insects in both countries. Michael also took up photography so that he could document their findings.

For the past 15 years, they have intensively studied the butterflies in Sri Lanka. Based on their findings, they have published several papers in international peer-reviewed journals and several general articles.

Michael edited the Butterfly Conservation Action Plan of Sri Lanka (2012) and authored The Taxonomy and Conservation Status of Butterflies in Sri Lanka (National Red List 2012). He has given innumerable lectures to universities, schools, associations, and groups, has conducted many field trips for professionals, students, and the public, and has set up and consulted on several open-air butterfly gardens in Sri Lanka.

Nancy has specialized in the study of the dragonflies of Sri Lanka and has described three species new to science. She is also the author or co-author of several scientific publications on dragonflies, and is co-author of Dragonfly Fauna of Sri Lanka: Distribution and Biology, with Threat Status of its Endemics (2014). She was president of the Toronto Entomologists' Association in Canada from 1998–2004 and board member (2013–2015) and president-elect (2015–17) of the Worldwide Dragonfly Association.



This Field Guide to the Butterflies of Sri Lanka now stands as a companion piece to the earlier classic.

A must for nature lovers, this new field guide allows the casual observer to correctly identify the butterflies observed in the field. More advanced naturalists will learn key identification points for the more difficult species. The soft cover paperback is easy to carry (12x19 cm), and its linen embossed cover and its water-resistance should help withstand moderate field handling.

In this 250-page paperback, all 248-species found in the island are illustrated with images of live individuals in the field and are described with key information on appearance, behavior, habitat, flight period and prime locations for observing them. Distribution maps show current and historical records. Identification of similar species is made easier with additional identification keys, images and helpful hints. A brief description of typical butterfly habitats in each zone is also included.

There is no doubt that this field guide will prove to be the indispensable reference for years to come.

The book will be launched on December 20 (Thursday), 6 pm at the Met Department Auditorium, Baudhaloka Mawatha, Colombo 7, and will be specially priced at Rs 3000 for the Book Launch.

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