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Landmark 'The Butterfly Fauna of Sri Lanka' published

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Launch on June 2(Thursday), 6 pm Met Dept. Auditorium, Bauddhaloka Mawatha.Colombo

The life cycle of the butterfly is surely one of the most iconic symbols of beauty and life's transience, especially in its transformation from seemingly negative to positive, or unpleasant to beautiful. How many of us have been motivated to admire and be inspired, to discover the many different facets of this delightful but ephemeral creature? Or pause to gaze in awe at its vibrancy, the brilliantly coloured wings retaining some of the most striking patterns in nature or its astounding flight patterns?

Despite its rich symbolism, as it moves and develops through its life - cycle of egg, larvae and chrysalis, this process of the emergence of the ubiquitous butterfly is alas oft unknown or ignored by us amidst life's tedium.

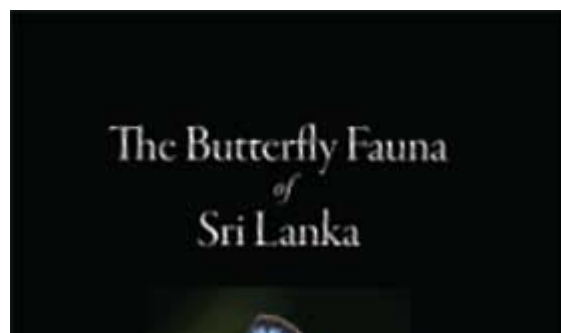
It is in such a context that the publication of the 'Butterfly Fauna of Sri

Lanka', authored by our own renowned lepidopterist, Dr. George Michael van der Poorten and his wife Nancy, is being hailed as one of the most important events in the recent book publishing history of this country.

This landmark publication covers the unique lives of the entire gamut of butterflies in this country (247 species) and illustrates the adults of both sexes with stunning photographs covering the length and breadth of SL. Several images portray very rare species that have eluded the lenses of many a photographer.

This hard cover book of 424 pages, meticulously researched, with a carefully designed layout and state of the art printing, abounds with 3,000 photographs, encompassing the remarkable and varied history of the study of butterflies in Sri Lanka, their biogeography, classification, morphology, and distribution.

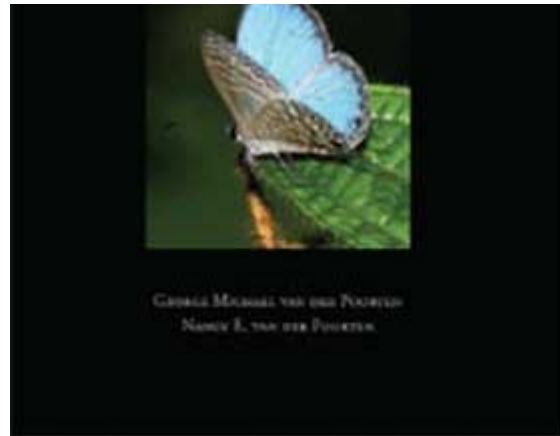
It is further enriched with supplemental material



which includes a species list, endemic status, a distribution by climatic zone, as well as a list of larval food plants and adult nectar sources.

Why is this book so important? For the simple reason that the last significant book in this field, was published as far back 75 years ago.

In fact, the last major work was by Englishmen L.G.O. Woodhouse and G.M. R. Henry titled 'The Butterfly Fauna of Ceylon' written as early as 1942, with Woodhouse, publishing two more editions in 1949 and 1950.



Dr. Van der Poorten, explains the lacuna that prevailed in our knowledge of butterflies thus : "...Woodhouse 1950 edition, which listed 242 species, included descriptions of the immature stages of 191 species. Only 80 of these descriptions however, were based on work done in Sri Lanka (Ceylon, then). 111 were based on work done in peninsular India...The immature stages of 51 species (including endemics and non-endemics) still remained unknown or undescribed at that time".

A student of Trinity College Kandy and subsequently an Honors graduate in Agriculture from the University of Peradeniya (1974), Dr. van der Poorten next Graduated with an M.Sc. in Crop Physiology and Ph.D in Plant Physiology from the University of Guelph. After a brief stint in Canada, on his return he and his wife Nancy commenced documenting anew the butterflies in the island, with new information gathered since the 50's.

Apart from the book's value to those interested in nature, this zealously written work will be the standard reference on the subject for decades and invaluable to students, policy makers, those engaged in ecotourism and the butterfly

lovers of this country.

The invaluable service rendered to this country by Michael and Nancy van der Poorten is evidenced in the vast and punctiliously researched array of information, depicted in the following chapters.



Ceylon Tree
Nymphlarva



Painted Sawtooth

Chapter 1 - Sri Lanka and its butterflies - gives us a description of the origin of butterflies of SL; the current situation; topography and climate; climatic zones and butterflies; seeking out butterflies.

Chapter 2- The life of a butterfly - deals with butterfly names; the life cycle of a butterfly—egg, larva, pupa, adult(anatomy, the search for food and pheromones; enemies and escape mechanisms; migration and dispersal; population structure; the search for mates; courtship; mating and egg-laying).

Chapter 3-Conservation - focuses on the



reasons for the decline of the butterfly fauna; why conserve butterflies?

Conservation:

what does it mean?; conservation measures in Sri Lanka; butterfly gardening; can you make a difference?

Chapter 4- Introduces the species' accounts with Chapters 5-10 dwelling on The Skippers: Hesperidae, The Blues: Lycaenidae, The Brush-footed

butterflies: Nymphalidae, The Swallowtails: Papilionidae, The Whites and

Yellows: Pieridae and The Metalmarks: Riodinidae.

The Appendices comprise an Annotated species list, Annotated list of scientific publications on the butterflies of Sri Lanka, larval food plants

nectar sources, historical accounts of migration, dispersal and large



numbers of butterflies in Sri Lanka, eggs, larvae and pupae.

Known to many as Sri Lanka's, 'Butterfly man' Dr. van der Poorten, in 2008

discovered a new butterfly, *Catopsilia scylla*, belonging to the family

Pieridae, which is native to Australia, Singapore and Malaysia. He also

discovered a Skipper new to Sri Lanka, *Cephenes trichopepla*, a native of

Australia. Both butterflies are now quite widespread across the country.

The author has contributed a plethora of publications on the butterflies of

Sri Lanka in prestigious international scientific journals. A key figure in the



conservation arena, as a consultant to the Ministry of Environment, he has

actively supported the setting up of open-air butterfly gardens throughout the city as seen at the Lady Ridgeway Hospital for Children, Colombo National Museum and Sri Jayawardenapura Hospital, Pediatric



wing, whilst also assisting the Wildlife and Nature Protection Society (WNPS) to establish 100 butterfly plots in schools around the island. He edited the Butterfly Conservation Action Plan (BuCAP) which is the first taxon-specific plan prepared in Sri Lanka and also authored the 2012 Red List report of threatened species in Sri Lanka for the butterfly fauna.

Nancy has specialized in the study of the dragonflies of Sri Lanka and has

been credited with describing three species new to science. She is also

the author and co- author of several scientific publications on dragon flies

and is the co-author of 'Dragonfly Fauna of Sri Lanka : Distribution and

Biology, with Threat Status of its Endemics'(2014), and president- elect

(2015-17) of the Worldwide Dragonfly Association .

The 'Butterfly Fauna of Sri Lanka' is saturated with all kinds of important and interesting information pertaining to butterflies in this country. For instance,

On butterfly names - "...some names such as the Common Bushbrown or the Common Treebrown reflect the species' abundance, geographic range, color and habitat; the Clipper and the Cruiser reflect the style of flight of the butterfly, while in some cases, the names were based on titles or ranks used in institutions and military organizations ...Black Prince, Baron, Baronet and Redspot Duke were

based on titles of the British Court and the Blue Admiral and the

Commander were based on ranks in the British Navy, while names such

as Tawny Rajah and the common Nawab were based titles of royalty in

India...".

On Sizes- "The smallest species in Sri Lanka, the Eastern Grass Jewel

(Freyeria putli) is as small as a thumbnail, while the largest butterfly is the

female Common Birdwing (Troides darsius) , which is as large as a

outstretched palm'."



Michael and Nancy Arlppu

On Feeding- " Nectar and non-nectar sources of food are not the only nutriments that males seek in adult life. Males of many species in the subfamily Daninae use specific chemicals called pheromones to attract females.

These pheromones are derived from chemicals called pyrrolizidine alkaloids, which are obtained during larval development or adult life..."

On butterfly gardening- " ...prepare a list of butterflies that are usually seen in the area where the garden is to be set up.....The next step is to determine the larval food plants needed (see appendix c) and to select the nectar plants that are suitable for butterflies with a long, medium or short proboscis(see Appendix D).

On Conservation- "...Butterflies are particularly important in conservation work as flagship species, ...that have a charismatic appeal to the general public and therefore useful to draw attention to the issues of conservation and to

promote awareness and encourage action".



Michael and Nancy van der Poorten emphasizes that the book has been written "for the general public and younger generation who now need to continue with these efforts.....and there is still much more that we need to learn about these beautiful and fascinating creatures'.

Apart from being the only book of its kind published in English, I believe

there is hardly any material in Sinhala or Tamil on butterflies of Sri Lanka. Our fervent hope and plea is that the authorities take note of key publications of this type and take appropriate measures to translate such important publications for the

benefit of the Sinhala and Tamil readership in this country.

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