

# Exploring Moths of India

The *Birdwing Field Guide to Indian Moths*, filled with illustrations and natural facts, is bound to get casual readers interested in these insects.

REVIEWED BY: DR. ASAD RAHMANI



Grey Brahmids Moth, *Brahmaea wallichii*

*Birdwing Field Guide to Indian Moths*, by V. Shubhalaxmi (2018). Birdwing Publisher, Navi Mumbai, India. 458 pp. Price Indian Rupees 3,500/-.

There are some books that take a long time to produce but the final product turns out to be very satisfying. *Field Guide to Indian Moths* is one such book that took nearly 20 years of dedicated work by Dr. V. Shubhalaxmi, mostly in her spare time on holidays and occasionally in the night. If you are working on nocturnal insects, you have to have sleepless nights. This

served Shubhalaxmi very well as she devoted her day hours to official work and spent nights searching and studying moths – her passion.

This pocket-sized book is bursting with information on moths, which makes it difficult to be unimpressed by the author's knowledge. This book has everything one wants to know about Indian moths. It is certainly not a treatise on moths – that will take 15-10 volumes to describe 12,000 species of moths supposedly present in India – but a very good field guide



Yellow Grey-tip Geometer, *Celerena divisa*

ISAAC KEHIMKAR



Tropical Swallowtail Moth, *Lyssa zampa*

to get a glimpse of India's moth diversity.

The book starts with a four-page chapter: "How to use this book". Through symbols and images, it describes habitat types, behaviour, ecology, and anatomical features of moths. The Introduction describes the difference between moths and butterflies (a frequently asked question), general morphology, food and diet, breeding biology, behaviour, moth watching, moth photography, identification of moths, role of moths in ecosystems, moth education, finally listing numerous links and social media sources on moths. This chapter – like the later chapters – is peppered with interesting life-history information of moths. Sample this: "The female senses host plant from the smell of it which she tastes with her feet." Male moths have slightly bigger eyes than their female companions, which enables them to search for a female with a suitable shape, colour and size. Or, a caterpillar feeds on its own eggshell for its first meal. What a wonderful way of using natural resources judiciously. Perhaps, human beings can learn from the lowly caterpillars! Such factual nuggets make this book interesting for the general reader.

The bulk of the book is dedicated to describing about 700 species in a systematic way, family-wise. A one-page description of the family is given with representative images of adults, cocoon and caterpillar. Symbols are used to describe habitat (undisturbed, disturbed and mixed), behaviour (diurnal, nocturnal, visits lights, impact on agriculture, flight period), resting position, antenna types and few other details. The book is profusely illustrated with images taken by the author or

gathered from moth experts.

Many good books are available on the butterflies of India, the most famous being the one by Isaac Kehimkar. However, there was no good field guide on Indian moths. This book has fulfilled that lacuna. Just like butterfly watching is catching up fast in India, I am sure that moth watching will also grow, with full credit to Dr. Shubhalaxmi. We need more such books in India, perhaps region-wise or habitat-wise since it is impossible to cover all moth species in one book. Nevertheless, a good start has been made. ◉



Melastome Nolid, *Risoba repugnans*