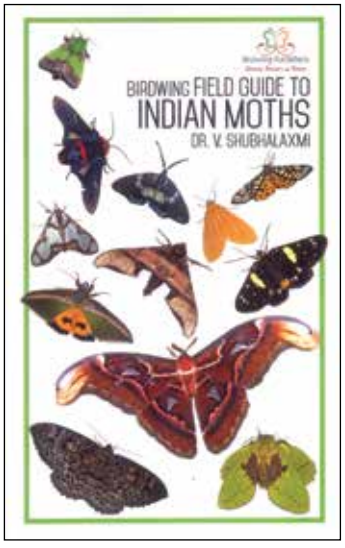
The chapter titles create a sense of anticipation, leading the young reader to discovery. "Sunjoy's Magic Tree" is one chapter that I loved reading. It talks about the entire food web related to the life of a Red Silk Cotton tree, from the bugs that ate the seeds and made them viable, through the growth of the sapling into a tree, when butterflies laid eggs on it, producing caterpillars that ate the leaves. Flowerpeckers came and shed Loranthus seeds on the tree, and this parasitic creeper itself hosted sunbirds that came to feed on its flower nectar.

All along, a lesson in field biology is being delivered, skillfully garbed in a story, and it can be imbibed as learning should be imbibed, in fun. Some interesting story-poems include: Why are leaves born red? Battle among the mangroves, The lonely goatherd, Magic monsoon spell, The hermit crabs, The return of the feathered performers (about the Bengal Florican).

Finally, the illustrations are lively black and white sketches by the author herself, and they add much interest to the poems. The fireflies (p. 77), the march of the hermit crabs (pp. 86–87), and the denizens of Sunjoy's tree, all of them animate the text. Priced at Rs 175/-, the book is not beyond the reach of its target readership. ■



Birdwing Field Guide to Indian Moths
by V. Shubhalaxmi
Published by: Birdwing Publishers, Navi Mumbai. 2018
Size: 18 x 10.5 cm
Pages: vi + 461
Price: INR 3,500/-
Paperback

Reviewed by: **Asad R. Rahmani**

Biodiversity-wise, India is blessed. Whichever taxa we take, we find that India has an abundance of species. Take for example moths, the nocturnal cousins of butterflies. In India, till now, more than 12,000 species have been recorded, out of the 1,42,000 odd species listed worldwide. Just imagine, a country consisting of about 2.8% of the total landmass of the world, has 8% of the moths described in the world till now.

In our vast and diverse country, we need good books on all major taxa, particularly the so-called lower taxa. Fortunately, there are a few books on butterflies, but there was no popular book on moths. Dr V. Shubhalaxmi has filled this lacuna. As there are so many species of moths in India, I would say that this book is the beginning of knowing our moth diversity, though it covers only 773 species – less than 10 percent of the total number of moth species found in India. The Bible for Indian moths has been a set of four volumes in the FAUNA series published more than 120 years ago: Hampson, G.F. (1892–1896) THE FAUNA OF BRITISH INDIA. MOTHS (Vols 1 to 4). There was another work by J.S. Kirti and Navneet Singh (2015–2016) ARCTIID MOTHS OF INDIA (Vols 1 & 2), but these are highly technical books.

The present book is designed and written in a typical field guide style and has many plus points and a few minus ones. The plus points are that it is handy, easy to use in the field, gives a very good introduction to moths for the general public, and is profusely illustrated with over 300 photographs. The negative is that less than 10% of Indian moths are covered, so moth aficionados will always find many species in the field that are not covered in this book. Actually, if we consider this point profoundly, it is really not negative – it provides a stimulus to others to bring out more books on moths, perhaps region-wise or habitat-wise. One of the **refined impacts** of any book is to spark more interest in the subject, which this book has done.

With the success of this wonderful book, I hope Shubhalaxmi, affectionately known as The Moth Lady to her admirers, will write more books on her life-long passion. India is such a large country with so many habitat types, and we need books on moths (and other taxa) of every major habitat/region (e.g., Western Ghats, Central India, grasslands, tropical forests, etc). I think, I am suggesting a life-long work for her!

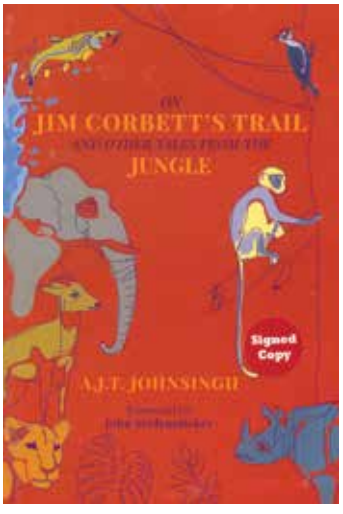
The Introduction sets the tone and quality of the book. It deals with the popular question of the difference between moths and butterflies in a nicely illustrated manner. The second

chapter Moth Body describes the head, thorax and abdomen – the main parts of a moth. I did not know that some moths (Noctuids) have hairy or lashed compound eyes. In the Food chapter, there is an extraordinary photograph of a moth sucking tears from a bird in Madagascar. Yes, there are some moths and butterflies that feed exclusively on the tears and blood of birds and mammals! Chapters on Breeding Biology and Moth Behaviour are full of interesting information. The Moth Watching chapter teaches us how to watch moths, how to attract them towards light, and how to identify them without taking a specimen. The Moth Photography chapter that follows, gives us useful tips. It also deals with the ethics of moth photography. Specific identification of moths is a herculean task which can dent the enthusiasm of any amateur, but the book provides useful tips on how to narrow down to the species or generic level by noting size, resting position, shapes and patterns, structure of legs, antennae, and habitat. Reading this chapter will not make you a moth taxonomist, but it will certainly help you in identification, at least up to family or genus level.

The bulk of the book contains species accounts Symbols are used to tell us where a species lives (e.g., undisturbed, disturbed, or mixed habitats), impacts on agriculture, dimorphism, flight pattern, wingspan, wing shape when sitting, etc. Five to six species are described per page, sometimes only three for the larger species. Most illustrations are life-size, so the relative size of taxonomically close species is easily seen.

This book has many firsts: 1) Coined common names for most of the moth species/subfamilies; 2) Ecology section for most of the species; 3) 'Made easy' steps on moth identification; 4) Cut-out image style used for moth pictures; 5) Use of symbols to reduce text; and 6) Section on Moth Education.

This is a wonderful addition to the long list of books on Indian biodiversity, and I hope it will generate interest in moths that play such an enormous ecological role on this planet. Admittedly, the caterpillars of some moths are agriculture 'pests', but most of the moths are not harmful to us. Eggs, larvae, caterpillars, and adult moths are vital parts of the food chain. Moths are also very good indicators of environmental pollution and disturbed habitats. The time has come to pay more attention to these nocturnal aerial fairies that daintily flutter around night lights. Purchase a copy of this book and your nocturnal life will never be boring again! ■



On Jim Corbett's Trail and Other Tales from the Jungle
by A.J.T. Johnsingh
Natraj Publishers, Dehra Dun, 2018
Size: 21.5 x 13.5 cm
Pages: 258
Price: INR 595/-
Paperback

Reviewed by: **Kumaran Sathasivam**

Dr A.J.T. Johnsingh grew up in a small town close to the southern tip of India. When he was a schoolboy, he chanced upon a Tamil translation of Jim Corbett's MAN-EATERS OF KUMAON. He was stirred by Corbett's descriptions of Kumaon, with its forests full of Tiger and Sambar, and its rivers full of the Golden Mahseer. This was the beginning of a great fascination with the author and the land he wrote about. It was not long before the young Johnsingh had read all of Corbett's books.

Johnsingh was also inspired by Corbett to write of his experiences in the wild. He was to have a great many of these experiences in the following years. Beginning as a naturalist, he grew into a professional wildlife biologist. Indeed, he carried out the first scientific research by an Indian biologist on a free-ranging large mammal. In the 1970s, he carried out a doctoral study on the Dhole, or Asian Wild Dog, in Bandipur. Thanks to both his profession, which involved studying and conserving wildlife, and his passion, he has "walked hundreds of kilometres through dense bush and tall grass, ideal resting places for all forms of potentially dangerous animals".

What is it like to go for a walk in a forest with Dr Johnsingh? In the foreword, John Seidensticker draws our attention to Johnsingh's good humour, his joy at walking in the