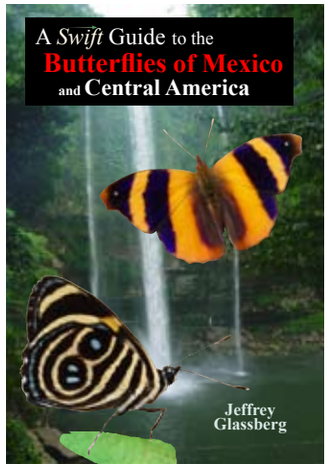
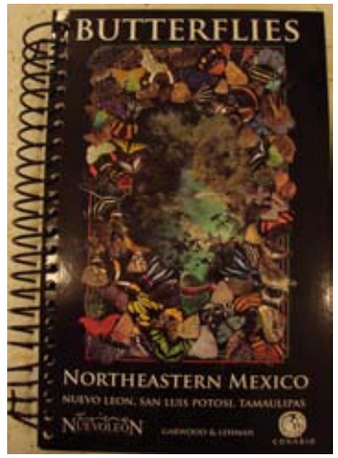
Book Reviews





A Swift Guide to the Butterflies of Mexico and Central America, by Jeffrey Glassberg. Sunstreak Books, Inc., 2007. 266 pages. $34.95. It can be purchased at www.sunstreaktours.com/ , at a number of New Jersey Audubon Nature Stores, and at a few locations in the Rio Grande Valley in Texas.

Butterflies of Northeastern Mexico by Kim Garwood & Richard Lehman. Eye Scry Publishing, 2005. 194 pages. $37.50. It can be purchased at www.neotropicalbutterflies.com/

Reviews by Patricia Sutton

If you've explored natural areas and gardens in Mexico, Central America, or South America, and you're now reading this review in American Butterflies, you too have been entertained, and probably confused, by great numbers and diversity of butterflies. Until recently, sorting out these gems was a true test in patience and brawn. Books were weighty, illustrated with pinned specimens, and quite often in Spanish.

Beginning in 1989, we had the great fortune to first take and then later lead birding trips in Venezuela's magnificent Llanos and Henri Pittier National Park. This was our first naturalist's trek south of the U.S. border. We dutifully carried DeVries' 1987 *Butterflies of Costa Rica and their Natural History*, *Volume 1* (covering only swallowtails, white and yellows, and brushfoots). We enjoyed the rich natural history included in this amazing book, but struggled to identify winged gems from its limited scope of spread specimens.

Between 1998 and 2000, we again had the privilege to lead birding (and butterflying) trips south of the U.S. border, this time to Veracruz, Mexico, to witness the incomparable "River of Raptors." When DeVries' *Butterflies of Costa Rica and their Natural History, Volume II* (covering metalmarks), was published in 1997, we quickly purchased it, put it to use on these trips, wore it out, and began going back through unidentified slides from previous trips.

DeVries' two volumes combined weighed 3½ pounds. Despite these weighty treatises, hairstreaks and skippers still remained mysteries, so we began purchasing oversized coffee-table books: (1) H.L. Lewis' 1974 *Butterflies of the World* (at 3½ pounds), (2) *Mariposas Diurnas de Venezuela*, written in 1984 by Jose Ramon Alvarez Sierra and Jose Ramon Alvarez Corral (2 pounds), (3) the reprint of Theophile Raymond's *Mariposas de Venezuela* (3 pounds), (4) Roberto de la Maza's 1987 *Mariposas Mexicanas* (3 pounds), and (5) Bernard D'Abrera's 1995 *Butterflies of the Neotropical Region, Part VII* Lycaenidae (hairstreaks) (10" x 14" in size and weighing 4 pounds). All of these books were helpful to two keen naturalists; they were useful as references but using them as field guides was out of the question. In the end, we grew increasingly frustrated with our butterfly library for travels south of the U.S. border. Many of our books left us high and dry with little hope or help in field identification; the books were better suited for collectors than naturalists.

When Jeffrey Glassberg's *Butterflies Through Binoculars, A Field Guide to Butterflies in the Boston-New York-Washington Region* was published in 1993, it set the bar very high for future butterfly field guides. With this book, and the many others since that Glassberg has written (each more refined and user-friendly than the last), butterfliers in the United States and Canada have been spoiled. Thanks to these books we've learned in leaps and bounds.

In the years prior to Glassberg's new guide to Mexican butterflies, our two most satisfying butterfly trips to Mexico were with Sunstreak Tours and Jeff Glassberg (and fellow butterfly enthusiast and friend, Jane Ruffin): (1) El Rosario for wintering Monarchs and on to Mismaloya (Jalisco, Mexico) in 1995, and (2) Veracruz, Mexico, in 2002. Glassberg was a walking, talking butterfly field guide. He proudly shared some of the draft plates for his "in the works" Mexican guide and we couldn't wait to see it and use it.

In the meantime, when Kim Garwood and Richard Lehman's *Butterflies of Northeastern Mexico* (Nuevo Leon, San Luis Potosí, Tamaulipas) was published in 2005 we bought it in a flash, despite the initial high price tag. The 2nd edition (and 2nd printing, later in 2005) is much more affordable & includes many corrections brought to the attention of Garwood and Lehman. We were dazzled by page after page filled with large photos of live butterflies (in most cases) grouped by family; 600 species are illustrated on 157 pages/color plates. Their use of minimal text was quite daring, but definitely worked and kept the book size manageable. And the weight, at 1 pound 1 ounce, is delightful after years of straining and hurting shoulders, necks, and backs with heavy suitcases, book bags, fanny packs, and knapsacks (and dreaming of sherpas who could carry all these books for us). The one disappointment with Garwood and Lehman's book is the sometimes use of non-NABA English names. It is illustrated with excellent photos of live butterflies, but it lacks range maps and descriptions of field marks. It covers the Mexican states of Nuevo Leon, Tamaulipas and San Luis Potosí.

In 2007, Jeffrey Glassberg's long anticipated book, *A Swift Guide to the Butterflies of Mexico and Central Americ*a, was published. It weighs in at a mere 1 pound 4 ounces. It is a compact 5.5 inches by 8.25 inches, with a heavy duty cover — stiff but at the same time flexible. Its 272 pages are packed with 3,250 color photographs that generously illustrate almost all of the 1,714 butterflies found in Mexico (including skippers), plus many species found in other parts of Central America. It includes over two-thirds of all Costa Rican species.

Quizzing Glassberg, I learned that the germ of the idea of doing a field guide to the butterflies of Mexico started around 1997 and grew stronger each year. He'd been photographing butterflies in Mexico since 1989, but the heart of the book was completed over the past 5 years. The project came about after thirty trips to Mexico, each lasting about ten days. These trips were complemented by specimen study visits to collections at three museums: the American Museum of Natural History in New York, the United States National Museum in the Smithsonian Institution, and to the Allyn Museum/Mcguire Center in Sarasota/Gainesville, Florida. The time and effort that went into the *Swift Guide* is almost incomprehensible. To say that this book was a labor of love is an understatement.

The book is amazingly succinct, packing more into each page than the casual user realizes, and is also very user-friendly! Page edges are color coded by family, making it easy (and swift) to turn to hairstreaks, brushfoots, skippers, or whatever. All