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Cover: A Warty Hammer Orchid *Drakaea livida* gets pollinated by a male thynnine wasp through 'sexual deception' — a colour pencil reproduction of photos by ron_n_beths (flickr.com) and Rod Peakall; Water colour reproduction of Flame Lily *Gloriosa superba* — photo by Passakoran_14; and a bag worm and its architectural genius (source unknown). Art work by Pannagasri G.



A book review of moths from the Eastern Ghats: Moths of Agastya

Sanjay Sondhi

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In recent years, the study of moths by amateur naturalists, and photographers has gained remarkable momentum. This surge in interest has been driven largely by the publication of accessible field guides. Dr. V. Shubhalaxmi's 'Birdwing Field Guide to Indian Moths' (2018) introduced readers to 773 species. In 2022, Unnikrishnan M.P. followed with 'A Beginner's Field Guide to Moths of Malabar', documenting over 400 species. In 2024, Titli Trust published 'Moths of India: A Field Guide', authored by me, covering 1,500 species. Adding to this growing literature is 'Moths of Agastya' by Dr. R. Bhanumati—an important, and timely contribution.

What sets 'Moths of Agastya' apart is its focus on the Eastern Ghats, a region underrepresented in recent moth literature. The book is based on an impressive four years and eight months of surveys, and documents 653 species and genera, including 369 macromoths, 231 micromoths, and 53 unidentified species.

The book opens with a brief introduction to moth morphology and ecology, along with useful sections on moth watching, tourism, and awareness. A concise guide to moth identification makes the book accessible to beginners. The main species accounts are divided into two sections—macromoths and micromoths—organized by superfamily, family, subfamily, and genus. Though tribe-level classification is generally omitted in the species descriptions, it is included in the comprehensive checklist at the end. Short notes on moth families and subfamilies provide helpful context.

The photographs are of consistently high quality, with some examples showing dorsal, and lateral views, posture variations, and sexual dimorphism. The absence of scale bars is a minor limitation, but the images remain highly effective for identification.

The design is simple yet effective, and the print quality is excellent. Most significantly, the identifications are robust, and carefully considered. Dr. Bhanumati takes

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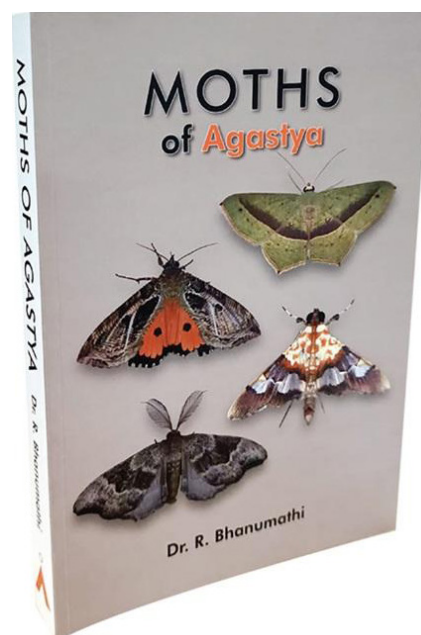
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a commendably cautious approach, recording taxa at the genus or subfamily level where necessary, and using the “cf.” designation when image-based identification was inconclusive. This scientific rigour enhances the credibility of the work.

While the book is largely free of errors—aside from a few typographical slips—there are areas where additional information would have added value. For instance, data on larval host plants, where available, could have enriched the text. Similarly, a dedicated section showcasing caterpillars across families would

have broadened its appeal to both researchers and enthusiasts.

Overall, *Moths of Agastya* is a significant contribution to Indian lepidopteran studies. It will serve scientists, naturalists, moth watchers, and institutions as both a reference and a source of inspiration. By highlighting the moth diversity of the Eastern Ghats, it fills a critical gap in regional biodiversity literature. I hope this fine publication inspires further efforts to document and conserve the remarkable moth fauna of India.



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