

MARIA SIBYLLA MERIAN

(1647 - 1717)

Subject: Butterflies & moths

Field: Physiology/Ecology

Nationality: German

ENTOMOLOGIST
of the
MONTH



Merian is considered the “Mother of Entomology” and was one of the first naturalists to study insects considered to be economically irrelevant. Merian was born in Frankfurt, Germany, at the time a regional center of the silk trade. Because of this, silk worms were a common part of life for the people of Frankfurt, including for a young Merian who raised them and observed and recorded their metamorphosis, nearly a decade before published accounts. Merian studied and made illustrations of life cycles of 186 insect species throughout her life, as well as illustrations of many other plant and animal species. Some of these are in two collections of engravings she published while living in Germany, *Neues Blumenbuch* (*New Book of Flowers*) and *Der Raupen wunderbare Verwandlung und sonderbare Blumennahrung* (*The Caterpillar, Marvelous Transformation and Strange Floral Food*), which helped to transform our understanding of insect development. She later spent some time in Suriname in South America and published *Metamorphosis Insectorum Surinamensium* based on observations she made there, which was the first published work on the ecology of the country.

References:

- Pictures via Wikimedia Commons; Left: Jacob Marrel's *Bildnis der Maria Sibylla Merian* (1679), Right: Plate 9, Maria Sibylla Merian's *Metamorphosis Insectorum Surinamensium* (1730)
- Fessenden, M. "Meet the 17th Century Female Entomologist Who Illustrated Butterfly Life Cycles". *Smithsonian Magazine* (2015).
- Tyrrell, K. "About Maria Sibylla Merian (1647-1717)". *Botanical Art & Artists* (2020).
- This factsheet was produced by Anne Johnson, a Penn State Entomology graduate student

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