

SINDACO, R., DORIA, G., RAZZETTI, E & F. BERNINI (eds., 2006): *Atlante degli anfibii e dei rettili d'Italia*. Atlas of Italian amphibians and reptiles. – Firenze (Polistampa), 789 pp., numerous colour pictures (photographs, historical reproductions, distribution maps). ISBN 88-8304-941-1.

The new Italian herpetological atlas is an impressive, voluminous book. Although a considerable part of its voluminousness is due to the bilinguality, it would still be as impressive if it would have been published in Italian only. However, the fact that it has been conceived as an Italian/English book from the very beginning, makes it certainly a particularly laudable enterprise and a true supranational contribution to the herpetology of Italy as a part of Europe.

The atlas is the result of a great mapping project initiated by the Italian Herpetological Society in 1994 with ca. 900 collaborators. It covers 51 species of amphibians and reptiles currently recognized to live within Italy's boundaries.

For each of these species, a 10 × 10 km UTM grid map is provided, based on altogether 70.000 records. The maps are especially informative because they use a coloured geographic physical matrix with the main orographic and hydrographic systems. Moreover, the red distribution symbols are differentiated by shape and size according to different time periods. Each species chapter is subdivided in the following paragraphs: taxonomy, general distribution, comments to the distribution maps, habitat, altitudinal distribution, annual activity cycle, reproduction and protection status of the Italian populations. All these species accounts are illustrated with superb colour photographs so that a mere first look into this book gets the reader already an aesthetic delight.

The modern shape of this atlas is also reflected by the modern taxonomy and nomenclature used. The editors followed all relevant generic and specific partitions of the Italian species that have been discovered in the past years, but their concept can naturally only be an instantaneous picture of the current taxonomic situation. Shortly after the appearance of this atlas, the huge "Amphibians tree of life" by FROST et al. (2006: *Bull. Amer. Mus. Nat. Hist.*, 297: 1-370) has been published, resulting (among else) in the partition of the collective and partly paraphyletic genera *Triturus*, *Bufo* and *Rana* which

affects also a number of Italian species. But this is the fate of any of such great works that further research and new knowledge do not stop after the publication of important bibliographic milestones.

In some instances, the editors and authors were already aware of new taxonomic developments, e.g. *Pelobates fuscus insubricus* is already said to be most likely a full species different from *fuscus* but work in progress on this problem is not yet finished. Here, the elevation to species rank will not change the number of Italy's herpetological species, but similar cases of elevating former subspecies to species rank did considerably increase this number: e.g. the members of *Speleomantis*, *Bombina pachypus*, *Hyla sarda* and *H. intermedia*, *Lacerta bilineata* and *L. viridis*, *Podarcis raffonei* and *Zamenis lineatus*. Most of these closely related sibling species have distribution maps of their own, but in the case of the two green lizard species, both have an identical map. The two species of Aesculapian snakes (*Zamenis longissimus* and *Z. lineatus*), however, have a joint map where the geographic symbols do not distinguish between them; it is easily understood that such a distinction would simply be too difficult. The same is true for the polytypic Italian species, e.g. *Bufo bufo* (*B. b. bufo* and *B. b. spinosus*), or *Zootoca vivipara* (*Z. v. vivipara* and *Z. v. carniolica*). Again, a distinction between the subspecies would have been nice on the maps, but obviously beyond the possibility of the editors to perform such maps in a reasonable time span. A special case are the green frogs (now to be treated as a full genus *Pelophylax*) existing in hybridogenetic systems called *synklepta*. Here, the biological species *P. bergeri* and *P. lessonae* are treated and mapped jointly with their hybrid satellites: *P. kl. hispanicus* and *P. kl. esculentus* respectively. *P. ridibundus*, however, is treated again with its morphologically most similar sister species *P. kurtmuelleri*.

Despite the book's name, the geographic maps with their species chapters are, not the only content of this atlas. There are general chapters in biogeography, on history of herpetology in Italy, and on paleoherpetology as far as Italian territory is concerned. I found the chapter on the history of herpetology in Italy particularly remarkable because it gives an excellent overview of the long and glorious tradition of herpetological research in Italy. It highlights many famous

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historical personalities and their research which was of course not only Italian in scope but truly worldwide.

I regard this "Atlante" a milestone in its field, and the authors and editors have to be applauded for their great work. The consequent bilinguality, however, makes the information of this book

generally accessible to readers and users all over Europe and the world: a level not yet achieved by similar publications (except of Switzerland) from the German-, French- or Spanish-speaking parts of Europe.

WOLFGANG BÖHME, Bonn