

ANANJEVA, N.B., ORLOV, N.L., KHALIKOV, R.G., DAREVSKY, I.S., RYABOV, S.A. & A.V. BARABANOV (2006): The Reptiles of Northern Eurasia. Taxonomic Diversity, Distribution, Conservation Status. – Sofia (PENSOFT Publishers), 245 pp., numerous distribution map sketches, colour photos and double-sided colour plates. ISBN-10: 954-642-269-X, ISBN-13: 978-954-642-269-9. – Pensoft Series faunistica No. 47, ISSN 1312-0147.

The large-sized and richly illustrated book to be dealt with here is the English version of a predecessor edition published in Russian by the Zoological Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences, St. Petersburg, in 2004. It is very meritorious that the active Pensoft Publishing Company in Sofia undertook the publication of this book in English, making it thus accessible to a much broader readership. As indicated in the (sub-)title, the book of the six prominent, Russian authors – among them the famous nestor of Russian herpetology, ILYA SERGEJEVITCH DAREVSKY – deals with three issues of northern Eurasian reptiles, viz. taxonomic diversity, distribution and conservation status. First: What is northern Eurasia? According to the brief introduction, it is the area of the former Soviet Union and of Mongolia. And as this huge area covers nearly the entire northern Palearctic realm, and as there are no reptile species in northern Europe west of Russia (i.e. non-Mediterranean species) that would not also occur within the former Soviet Union, it is justified to speak of the entire northern Eurasian reptile fauna treated in this book.

Taxonomic diversity: This is in fact the first herpetological monograph on the countries of this particular area which provides the current knowledge of modern taxonomy and nomenclature which has in fact made great achievements in the last years. This concerns both the generic classification of various species and the rank of described subspecies which may have subsequently been elevated to species rank. However, the authors did not always apply the most recent concepts but were progressive in some cases and conservative in others which makes the nomenclature a bit inconsistent. For instance, they accepted the partition of *Cyrtopodion* into *Cyrtopodion* s. str. and *Mediodactylus*, and that of *Eumeces* into *Eumeces* s. str., *Euryplepis* and *Plestiodon*; they accepted the partition of *Mabuya* and applied *Trachylepis* for the only northern Eurasian species. In the case of the former collective genus *Lacerta*, they accepted *Darevskia* and *Zootoca* as own genera, but not *Par-*

*vilacerta* (for *L. parva*). In snakes, they still used *Coluber* for species now called *Platyceps* and *Hemorrhois*, but accepted *Hierophis* for the *jugulariscaspicus-schmidti* group (which should, however, become *Dolichophis*, because *Eirenis* would render their concept of *Hierophis* paraphyletic). In the case of the collective genus *Elaphe*, they accepted only *Oocatochus* for the Far East species *rufodorsata* but retained *Elaphe* for the entire (and largely polyphyletic) rest. But new systematic insights will always further proceed and form new challenges for forthcoming editions of books like this one.

Distribution: The distribution areas of each species are indicated on a standardized sketch map showing the northern part of the globe viewed on the palearctic side. As no political borders are drawn, it is not always easy to associate a specific species range to a specific (GUS) country that followed the former USSR. Because the map sketches are rather small, and the corresponding text rather short and compact, it seems a bit optimistic to use these informations as a basis for future Global Reptile Assessments (GRA) by IUCN as claimed by the authors in their introduction. Nonetheless, they allow a fast, rough orientation about where the respective taxon is generally distributed.

Conservation Status: Each species in this book is characterized as to its conservation status in regard of the IUCN Red data Book and the presence on the appendices of CITES. This is of course a most important and valuable information.

As mentioned above, the present book is a translated version of a Russian original, so that a brief comparison of both editions may be useful. There are some new additional photographs included into the English version. These are – next to portraits of the six authors on the protective cover sheet – live photographs of *Cyrtopodion longipes*, *Mediodactylus narynensis*, *Phrynocephalus raddei*, *Ophiomorus chernovi*, the striped morph of “*Coluber*” *rhodorhachis*, a second picture of *Coronella austriaca*, then *Eirenis modestus*, *Natrix megaloccephala*, *Psammophis schokari*, and *Telescopus rhinopoma*. The original photographs of *Ablepharus bivittatus*, *Elaphe schrencki* and *Lytorhynchus ridgewayi* were exchanged here against better ones. *Eremias buechneri*, however, was completely deleted from the English version, whereas “*Coluber*” *spinalis* was transferred to *Hierophis*. *Natrix megaloccephala*, however, persisted in this book although its existence is doubtful and its synonymy with *N. natrix scutata* is likely. Some nice double-page colour photographs of impressive landscapes are found dispersed throughout the book,

their number was augmented by seven additional such photographs which also increased the total number of pages from 230 in the Russian to 245 pages in the English edition. The translation into English was done by OKSANA TISHENKO and is generally good. Only in a few cases several minor linguistic/stylistic faults (e.g. “most rare” instead of rarest, lack of the article “the”: “In present book we consider...”) or inconsistencies (e.g. “Monotypic genus distributed in ...”, followed by “One species occurs in North Eurasia”: How many else!) can be detected which do, however, not hinder the perfect comprehension of the text. A last point: In the References section, the paper by MAYER & BÖHME (2000) is wrongly cited by having a first part of the given title which refers to a series of notes by W. BISCHOFF (who is otherwise not cited in this book), but the remaining part of the citation is correct.

Apart from these very few and absolutely minor points of criticism which are more than nor-

mal in a voluminous book like this, senior author NATALIA ANAJEVA and her five colleagues have done a very good job with this valuable oversight over the northern Palearctic reptiles. By this summarizing book, the numerous published literature which exists since long on the herpetology of the former Soviet Union becomes at last accessible for all those who were unable to read Russian. But in addition, the book forms also a bright, coloured atlas of northern Eurasian reptiles with generally good and partly magnificent colour photographs of the great majority of the species covered. In some cases, e.g. the green lizards and the vipers of the subgenus *Pelias*, even examples of colour morphs and colouration variability is demonstrated. In conclusion, this book is a remarkable contribution to the literature on the temperate zone Old World reptile fauna and can be appreciated for both its scientific content and its aesthetic value derived from the rich, colourful illustration.

WOLFGANG BÖHME, Bonn

PICKERSGILL, M. (2007): Frog Search. Results of Expeditions to Southern and Eastern Africa from 1993-1999. – Frankfurt am Main, Edition Chimaira (Frankfurter Beiträge zur Naturkunde/Frankfurt Contributions to Natural History, vol. 28), 574 pp., 159 colour plates, 295 black & white figures (photos, drawings, sonagrams). ISSN 1613-2327, ISBN 10: 3-930612-80-1, ISBN 13: 978-3-930612-80-2.

This compact book on southern and eastern African frogs has been written by a true enthusiast, a “froggist” as he calls himself and similar people. From the preface written by the “chameleonist” LYNN RAW we learn that MARTIN PICKERSGILL is a self-taught zoologist who started to publish on his herpetological observations already three decades ago and finally was acknowledged with an MSc degree by the University of Leeds, England, in 2000. This is insofar relevant for reviewing the present book as in one of his extensive introduc-

tory chapters, he also deals with the role of amateur scientists and the meaning of these “hobbyists” where he stresses the necessity of some scientific training for hobbyists on the one side, and the willingness of professional scientists to cooperate and to exchange ideas and knowledge with them on the other. This claim, more than justified in many countries including many European ones, was the basic idea for founding DGHT in Germany four decades ago, and we should try not to lose this tradition despite the ongoing decrease of the percentage of scientists in this mutualistic relationship.

PICKERSGILL’s book is divided in a general (introductory) part, and in a special part which contains the 169 species treated. One of them has already been described by PICKERSGILL as a coauthor, and no less than 9 new species are described and named in this book for the first time. It is often criticised when new species are described

within books and not in scientific, peer-reviewed journals because by this, a critical evaluation of data by external reviewers is avoided. Three further new, but still undescribed species listed in the book still await their description – hopefully in international journals rather than in a next edition. The only species mentioned in the book named after him (viz. in the preface: *Hyperolius pickersgilli* RAW) does not figure in the content and consequently seems to be invalid.

The introductory chapters of the general part are written in a vivid style that is really enjoying to read. Here, the author informs on taxonomy, descriptive terms, nomenclature, pronunciation and common names, on duties and responsibilities of collectors (!), and on “the frogs’ revenge” which means the many dangers and uncalculable misfortunes when being in the field, particularly in politically unstable countries etc. I agree with the author in nearly all aspects raised by him in these chapters, except of some details in the pronunciation paragraph where he tries to free Latin terms and names from an anglicised pronunciation, but is, in my eyes, not yet completely successful.

A likewise rewarding reading are the chapters on evolution, and the prehistory of Africa, on frog voices and tadpoles, and finally on the future where MARTIN PICKERSGILL formulated his concern on amphibian decline. It is this chapter where he appeals to hobbyists, conservationists and scientists to cooperate for a common goal. This integrative approach (which fits the spirit of DGHT!) cannot be estimated high enough.

The main part of the book is devoted to the description, identification and characterisation of the single species. The taxonomy used by the author is based on the recent work by SCOTT (2005: Cladistics 21) and comments on the big, unorthodox work by FROST et al. (2006: Bull. Amer. Mus.

Nat. Hist. 297) only in a note that has been added during the printing process. This is why genera such as *Afrana*, *Ammirana*, *Bufo* and others are still retained, and the same concerns aspects of the (sub)familial classification – not necessarily a disadvantage at the time being. The single species chapters are all subdivided according to the same scheme: Name, author, original citation, list of specimens collected (with the catalogue numbers of the M. PICKERSGILL collection (MP)), description of these specimens, information on voice, breeding & development, remarks (if any), and range. In case of largely distributed forms (such as members of superspecies), information is given sorted after different localities. The chapters are illustrated by black & white photographs of preserved specimens which are not always very informative, due to flaw contours in some cases, or to too sharp, black shadows in others. The drawings of tadpoles and their mouthparts are well-done, but one may ask why the scale bars have been lettered by hand. Nearly each species has also a hint to the colour plate where a live specimen is figured. These plates are generally nice and stem from various photographers. They contribute to the usefulness of this book as a manual for identifying East and South African anurans.

This book is certainly a valuable contribution to its field. Its general part is written in a refreshing way, and the information is sound and carefully documented with an extensive list of references. A next edition will be recommendable shortly in view of the rate of new frog discoveries also in Africa, but the remaining or newly emerging frog species to be discovered on MARTIN PICKERSGILL’s next frog searches and expeditions should, as said above, not be described and named in such a new edition.

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