

BAIER, F., D. J. SPARROW & H.-J. WIEDL (2009): The amphibians and reptiles of Cyprus. – Frankfurt Contributions of Natural History, Frankfurt / Main (Edition Chimaira), 364 pp., 303 figures, line drawings, maps and mostly colour plates. ISSN 1613-2327, ISBN 978-89973-476-8.

This book is the result of the efforts of three people. HANS-JÖRG WIEDL, a born Austrian, is a long-standing amateur researcher and dedicated conservationist of Cypriote reptiles (in particular snakes) who is resident in Cyprus since many years. His dedication comprised also his conviction that just in a Mediterranean site such as Cyprus the education of the human population in regard to amphibians and reptiles must be an unrenounceable part of conservation activities. To this end, he founded several open air displays (snake parks) which made him popular on the island as “Snake George”. The book profits much from his long term experience and knowledge of the Cypriote fauna and their habitats, and that’s why among the three authors he obviously ranges at what we call the “supervisor position”. The second author’s, DAVID J. SPARROW’s contribution to this volume seems to have been mainly photographic, and the first author, FELIX BAIER, is a young and ambitious student of herpetology who accumulated an impressive knowledge of the relevant literature and provided most of the more general scientific background of this book in terms of bibliographic sources etc.

The book produced by these three people is an impressive compilation of the knowledge of the herpetofauna of Cyprus, enriched with numerous new, original data. The distribution maps for each species are equipped with isohypses which makes eventual altitudinal adaptations or distributional constraints of the respective species obvious. Each species chapter is organized after the same scheme: Scientific name, author and year of first description; English, Greek and Turkish vernacular names; taxonomy, diagnosis, description; distribution and biogeographic classification; ecology and behaviour. This information is accompanied by the above-mentioned dot map and several colour photographs showing habitats as well as various specimens of the respective species in order to give an impression on individual, ontogenetic and/or sexually dimorphic variation. Moreover, interesting photographs of unusual behavioural traits or predation are also included. The taxonomy and nomenclature used is on the current state, with a few exceptions: *Ommatotriton* from Anatolia is still called *Triturus*, and *Pelophylax bedriagae* is still classified with *Rana*. However, in the case of *Bufo* (not *Pseudepidalea*!) *viridis* the authors were wise to maintain a more conservative view. Few minor mistakes are: In North Africa, *Eumeces schneiderii* does not occur “west of Algier”, but east of Algier. *Zamenis “situlus”* stays as *situla* because the species name is a noun in apposition and not an adjective. And *Trionyx triunguis* is not an exclusive freshwater turtle. Its ability to enter also seawater is important for paleobiogeographical considerations.

Apart from this main systematic part of the book, there are introductory chapters on the study area and the study groups, i.e. on Cyprus with its geological and geographic peculiarities, and on amphibians and reptiles in general, covering a wide array of aspects from evolutionary histories to the reproductive and behavioural strategies. There

are also concluding chapters providing a zoogeographic analysis, a chapter on anthropogenic influence on the herpetofauna and on threats and conservation efforts. These chapters are particularly interesting because of the zoogeographic situation of Cyprus as one of the big Mediterranean islands which had a rich endemic megafauna in the Pleistocene which is mostly extinct, so that only few endemic survivors are to be found today. The major part of the Cypriote fauna, as it is also the case in other Mediterranean islands, might have reached the island by rafting and in some cases also by early human transport.

The long and rich cultural history of Cyprus dates back to the Neolithic age and the island was subsequently conquered by many different empires which had also considerable impact on the fauna. Particularly interesting is the relation between earlier cultural concepts and snakes which is also impressively visualized in this book. And this leads also to the last chapter on threats and conservation because, in contrast to most of Europe today, one reason of threats to the herpetofauna is still direct persecution by man, and it is the snakes which have to suffer most. That is why the long-lasting engagement of “Snake George” has been and still is of so much importance.

Together with an exhaustive literature reference section this book offers rich information on this insular Mediterranean herpetofauna, suits as field guide but also as a general handbook on the herpetology of Cyprus and even as a good manual for specific island biogeography. It fits very well into Chimaira’s “white series” and is highly recommended to anyone interested in Mediterranean herpetology.

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