

## Book Review

FUCHS, KARLHEINZ & MANUEL FUCHS (2003): *Die Reptilhaut. The Reptile Skin.* – Frankfurt am Main (Edition Chimaira), 408 S., 353 photographs (66 in colour), one 4-page table. ISBN 3-930612-36-4.

The reptile skin, the integument of reptiles, was once – besides the shelled egg with its reservoir of amniotic fluid (amnion) – the major evolutionary acquisition that permitted these animals to quit aquatic habitats for good and conquer the dry land. Keratinized, scaly and/or scutellate skins were therefore of great advantage for crocodiles, lizards and snakes for millions of years. They were in fact one of the preconditions for their evolutionary success and ensured their survival until today.

It was only when man discovered there was money to be made with the skins of reptiles that it became a disadvantage for some species and a deadly hazard to have it. Crocodiles, large iguanas and tegus, monitors, constrictors and large colubrids, sea snakes and vipers were quite literally risking their hides until many countries eventually agreed some two and a half decades ago to ratify CITES and limit or even outlaw the trade with plants and animals that were threatened with extinction.

To be able to enforce this law, it is obviously essential to be able to reliably identify the specific origin of trade objects, i.e., in this case, the reptile leather. As a matter of fact, it was the senior author of the present book, tannery engineer KARLHEINZ FUCHS, who, together with the well-remembered German herpetologist Dr. HEINZ WERMUTH, authored the first manuals that would permit the identification of crocodile hides and crocodile leather products. In a joined effort, KARLHEINZ FUCHS and his son MANUEL now fill a still-existing gap and present a comprehensive, lushly illustrated, bilingual (English and German) book on the skin of squamate reptiles.

Publishing this book in two languages was a really sensible thing to do. Species conservation is by nature international for which reason English is a necessity. The officials trying to enforce CITES regulations in the authors' own country, on the other hand, will appreciate having a manual in their mother tongue. The bilingual text of the book is consistently realized in parallel columns throughout. It even includes the extensive preface by the head of the German Council for Species Protection in Bonn, Dr. DIETRICH JELDEN, who himself was one of WERMUTH'S students once.

Subsequent to introductory chapters on the topic as such, examination methods, histology and

the pigmentation of reptile skin, the most important sections are certainly the identification tables and the descriptive accounts (No. 6). While the former facilitate the narrowing-down and eventual determination of objects in a well-organized manner and with numerous illustrated examples, the latter characterize all species and subspecies of potential suppliers of leather in a constant and therefore clear fashion. A typical account also states trivial synonyms and trade names, conservation status and geographical distribution, maximum lengths and scale formulae, as well as the "type of skinning", that is where a hide is cut open. Additional annotations and details are provided wherever they may be of significance.

Like throughout the identification tables, the taxonomic section is lushly illustrated not only with hides and their details, but also with photographs of the respective animals in life. Here, the numbering of the illustrations does not really do the real wealth justice: while the "official" numbering runs to 176, one figure may in fact comprise up to twelve individual photographs which inflates the total number of illustrations to altogether 353, 66 of which are in colour.

Its structure actually turns the lexicon-like book into a highly functional reference of excellent quality. Together with its comprehensive bibliography, appendices of scientific and vernacular names and their lingual derivations and allocations, plus manufacturing-related information, it becomes not only a useful and informative tool for the official user, but also for the herpetologist. The nomenclature employed is largely up to date. Slight inconsistencies are hardly distracting, for example, that the subspecies of *Boa constrictor* are listed in the index, whereas those of other species (e.g., *Python curtus*) are not, even though the latter are today considered full species. This also applies to the forest form of the Nile monitor, *Varanus ornatus*. The "*V. niloticus*" figured in life is actually a typical *V. ornatus*, easily identified on the basis of its white tongue. The latest generic classification has been used for aquatic colubrids and vipers (*Sinonatrix*, *Xenochrophis*, *Daboia*); only *Euprepiophis mandarinus*, *Coelognathus radiatus* and *Orthriophis taenurus* are still referred to as *Elaphe*. Printing errors are extremely scarce (basically limited to the bibliography) for which the authors and the publisher's proof-reader must be congratulated on without reservations. There can be no doubt that HEINZ WERMUTH, who always strove to reconcile reptile leather industry and species conservation, would

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have loved this book. Besides the wives of the two authors', it is dedicated to his memory.

WOLFGANG BÖHME, Bonn

CHRISTMANN, SIEGFRIED P.: *Dendrobatidae – Baumsteigerfrösche. Die phantastische Reise durch Ecuador – Peru – Kolumbien. Volumes I-III. – Grafing (privately published), 2004, 184, 253 and 351 pp., with more than 1900 colour illustrations. ISBN 3-00-012726-7.*

This three-volume book is something extraordinary in all aspects, be it the author, how it is organized, the way it is written, and what is intended with it.

CHRISTMANN is an enthusiastic fan of poison frogs of the genera *Dendrobates*, *Epipedobates* and *Phyllobates* (each sensu lato), or, casually phrased, the usually colourful, poisonous species of the family Dendrobatidae. His interest and enthusiasm go so far that he even went and visited the natural habitats of these fascinating anurans on various occasions because he wanted to experience them where they are at home. His “fantastic” journeys undertaken during the past thirty years took him to regions where the diversity of poison frogs is enormous and in many cases unstudied. Be it “simply” for the fun of it or with the aim to augment the knowledge of the poison frogs through his expeditions, CHRISTMANN wrote down notes, and it is these notes that have now culminated in a very personal trilogy.

Volume I deals mainly with the *Epipedobates* of the western Andes of Ecuador and terrarium-related matters (husbandry, breeding, diet). Volume II attempts – freely following the motto “constant dripping wears the stone” – to shed some light on the problems surrounding the small species of the genus *Dendrobates* in the Amazons. Volume III finally is dedicated to a no less difficult chapter of the poison frog saga: *Dendrobates histrionicus* sensu lato on the Pacific coast of northwestern South America and its propagation in captivity.

The author recites his experiences with, and philosophical considerations of, “colleagues” sharing his hobby, the exploitation of nature, systematics of dendrobatids, and their keeping in terraria, all of which show his enthusiasm, but also the pains; in short he portrays all the positive and negative as-

pects “right from his heart”. The text makes for excellent reading throughout and is authentic. Although it is actually (and, what is more important, intentionally) addressed to a small community of readers, i.e., those who share the author’s passion, it is useful for people with no previous knowledge of frogs, as well as for scientists and even representatives in official capacities. You should simply read it!

Sure, there is the one or other specific or stylistic lapse to be found, and a few formatting errors or even misspellings. But considering the volume of this work and the fact that CHRISTMANN is no “professional” writer and published “*Dendrobatidae – Baumsteigerfrösche*” all by himself, it is easy to overlook these minor shortcomings.

Next to the immense wealth of photographs the text almost takes a backseat. Entire stories are told, or at least visualized, through partly spectacular photographs. The latter are a necessity simply because the subject as a whole, as CHRISTMANN approaches it, is impossible to describe in words alone: the variability of colourations within one and the same population of just one species of frog (including some morphs not illustrated before), their natural habitats and how these changed over time, “accidental catches”, terrarium-related information and so forth are best depicted in pictures. This also explains why some photographs of less than top quality were included – they just underline the author’s personal and authentic touch that makes the book so likeable. In this connection it must be mentioned that not only “pretty” frogs, new varieties and similarly exciting objects are shown in photographs, but also destroyed biotopes, just as CHRISTMANN intended it to be.

Certainly, here is somebody who has brought to paper in words and pictures and in an outright autobiographical style a subject that has been moving him for a long time. I will not call it the author’s “life’s work” as it would sound too final, and actually one would rather like to see a fourth volume of the same kind!

“*Dendrobatidae – Baumsteigerfrösche*” can be ordered through specialized book dealers or directly from the author: SIEGFRIED P. CHRISTMANN, Brunnsteinstraße 32, D-85567 Grafing, e-mail: siegfried.christmann@gmx.de.

STEFAN LÖTTERS, Mainz