

Book Review

KÖHLER, GUNTHER (2003): Reptiles of Central America. – Offenbach (Herpeton-Verlag), 367 pp., 644 colour photographs, 103 drawings and diagrams, 210 distribution maps. ISBN 3-936180-02-4.

Beginning four years ago and following up two years later, the herpetologist at the Forschungsinstitut und Naturmuseum Senckenberg in Frankfurt made his intentions clear when his two volumes on the reptile fauna of Central America appeared. In doing so he clearly carried on the laudable research tradition of his two famous predecessors, OSKAR BOETTGER and ROBERT MERTENS. Excellently illustrated and furnished with an attractive layout by his wife and publisher, it was certainly a good decision to open up these volumes to an international audience by publishing it in English as well. This has been accomplished through the present volume that unites the two German individual volumes in one impressive book. At the same time it brought about a raised scientific standard which has been taken care of by a competent panel of anglophonous editorial advisors/herpetologists, one of whom, LARRY DAVID WILSON, now also exalted this volume with a preface.

The book itself starts off with a preface and instructions for its use, followed by an attractive, tabulated and illustrated classification of the reptiles. Some of the illustrations of the German edition have been replaced with new and better ones here. Thereafter come chapters on types of natural habitats and the geological history and zoogeography of the reptiles of Central America which, forming a land bridge between North and South America that opened and closed repeatedly through time, has an extremely dynamic history. Instructive relief and vegetation maps, climatic diagrams and sketches of possible dispersion routes illustrate the respective text.

Following this there is a systematic section in which the individual systematic units of reptiles are dealt with. Each starts with an overview of the order, followed by an enumeration in alphabetical order of the genera and species included in each family. Identification keys for the species with numerous drawings of relevant traits and bibliographical references conclude each account.

Particularly valuable distribution maps are present for each species or species group (in which case different symbols are used). But the really outstanding feature is the colour photographs. Its generous illustration makes the book also a field guide and gives the herpetologist who is not particularly familiar with the herpetofauna of Central America (like myself) the courage and a chance to try and solve taxonomic problems through his own effort. And Heaven knows, but this fauna is fraught with problems. I just have to refer to the anoles (which are progressively split into four genera here) which to identify I have always considered a heavenly punishment. They are but one of GUNTHER KÖHLER'S specialities, and this is notable throughout the respective texts. In general it must be said that everything has been summarized here which is otherwise widely scattered in the existing literature, two examples being the fantastically diverse anguids of the genera *Abronia* and *Celestus*. While the snake fauna may appear extremely confusing at first, this book permits one to soon "get a handle" on them as well.

Additional chapters on snakebites, their prevention and treatment, and on the mimicry of snakes complement the informative contents of the book. In the last mentioned chapter one also finds a critical review of the so-called MERTENS' mimicry that is discussed in the light of recent American works on the subject. The volume ends with a comprehensive bibliography. This book is certain to remain the standard work on the reptile fauna of Central America for many years to come.

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Book Review

MAXIMILIAN, PRINZ ZU WIED (2004): Verzeichniss der Reptilien, welche auf einer Reise im nördlichen America beobachtet wurden (reprint edition) – Breck Bartholomew, Bibliomania!, Salt Lake City, 152 p., 7 hand colored plates (4 folding). ISBN 1-932871-04-7 (bound), ISBN 1-932871-03-9 (unbound).

This book reprints a classic herpetological work by PRINCE MAXIMILIAN ZU WIED (1782-1867), which was initially published in 1865 in volume XXXII of the *Nova Acta Leopoldina*. It details the amphibians and reptiles encountered by MAXIMILIAN on a journey through North America undertaken 1832-1834 in the company of his illustrator, CARL BODMER. The two men traveled up the Missouri River as far north and west as present day Montana, visiting areas that had first been explored by LEWIS and CLARK, less than three decades earlier. The report of the trip was published in a series of beautifully illustrated parts over the period 1838-1841 and is especially important as a source of early ethnographic information. Although the PRINCE'S expedition predated Holbrook's North American Herpetology (1836-1840), his herpetological results were not published until much later, diminishing somewhat their scientific impact.

MAXIMILIAN treats 49 species in his monograph. Most accounts include detailed descriptions of dimensions, morphology, and colour, and, especially for chelonians, ontogenetic, sexual, and geographic variation are considered in some detail. For many taxa field observations are noted and distributions and ecological details are provided. Illustrations were drawn from life or fresh material by Bodmer, resulting in excellent color renderings of *Cistudo carolina* (*Terrapene carolina*), *Emys pileata* (*Malaclemys terrapin pileata*), *Emys ortho-*

nyx (*Pseudemys concinna*), *Emys elegans* (*Pseudemys scripta elegans*), *Gymnopus olivaceus* (*Apalone spinifera*), *Menopoma alleghaniensis* (*Cryptobranchus alleghaniensis*), and *Menobranchus lateralis* (*Necturus maculosus*), as well as line drawings of *Crotalus durissus* (*Crotalus horridus*) and *Coronella doliata* (*Lampropeltis triangulum*). MAXIMILIAN was justifiably proud of the accuracy of these illustrations, noting, for example of *Menobranchus lateralis* that "Holbrooks Figur ist nur mittelmässig, aber sehr treu ist die des Herrn Bodmer, welche ich beifüge".

MAXIMILIAN'S monograph was reprinted in 1978, but at reduced size, with marginal printing quality and uncoloured plates. The new reprint, prepared by BRECK BARTHOLOMEW with hand-colouring by LARA CARROLL, not only provides access to MAXIMILIAN'S text, but recreates the look and feel of fine craftsmanship that went into the illustrated books of the early to mid-19th century. The book is printed by hand-lithography on acid free 100% cotton stock and the seven plates have all been hand coloured. The work is available in unbound condition or hand-bound in ¼ leather with raised bands, gilt lettering and marbled boards. Given the effort put into the book's production, neither its small print run (100 numbered copies) nor its price (US \$875.00 bound, \$675.00 unbound) are surprising. Nonetheless, the book still costs less than one half the current price of the rare original work, which is often in poor condition or lacking one or more of the plates. Although this sumptuous reprint is out of the price range of most herpetologists, true bibliophiles will appreciate the tremendous effort that has gone into it and those with an interest in the herpetological exploration of America, or in the life and works of PRINCE MAXIMILIAN, will find the book particularly desirable.

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