

BOOK REVIEW

**Beolens Bo, Watkins Michael, and Grayson Michael (2011),
The Eponym Dictionary of Reptiles, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore**

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While we are approaching the impressive number of 10,000 non-avian reptile species described (Uetz, 2010), it is a good time to welcome this new opus which aims to provide etymologies for the reptile scientific (valid names and synonyms) and common names that were associated to person names. As the authors indicated (page XI): “The names honor 2,330 individual people, but there are also 99 that sound like people’s names but in fact are not, plus 15 indigenous peoples, 5 fictional characters, 2 biblical references, and 34 references to mythology.” Species that went extinct in pre-historical times are not included.

The paper and binding of the book are of very good quality. The hardbound cover is nicely illustrated (albeit no sources are stated), but no illustration can be found inside. The book is divided into three main parts: a three-page introduction, the dictionary itself (294 pages) and a short bibliography (two pages).

Within the dictionary section, biographies are arranged by alphabetical order. Each biography includes the name of the person honored or other nominee, a list of the common and/or scientific reptile names associated to the nominee, and biographical notes. The latter are extremely variable in type of contents and length (from a single line, such as “Katrina Hoser was the author’s mother,” to nearly half a page). One, sometimes two, publications made by the person honored were selected by Beolens et al. to be mentioned (without exact reference), but these publications often seem randomly chosen as they are rarely representative of the person’s specialties or career. Sometimes no publication is mentioned, although the person did publish. What one hopes while reading such a dictionary is to know more about the person honored than what was mentioned in the original description of a taxon. Unfortunately, the authors in most

cases did not mention where the biographical information presented originated from: the original description, or any other source. The nationality of the person honored is rarely mentioned, and years of birth and death are irregularly stated, even for modern honored persons.

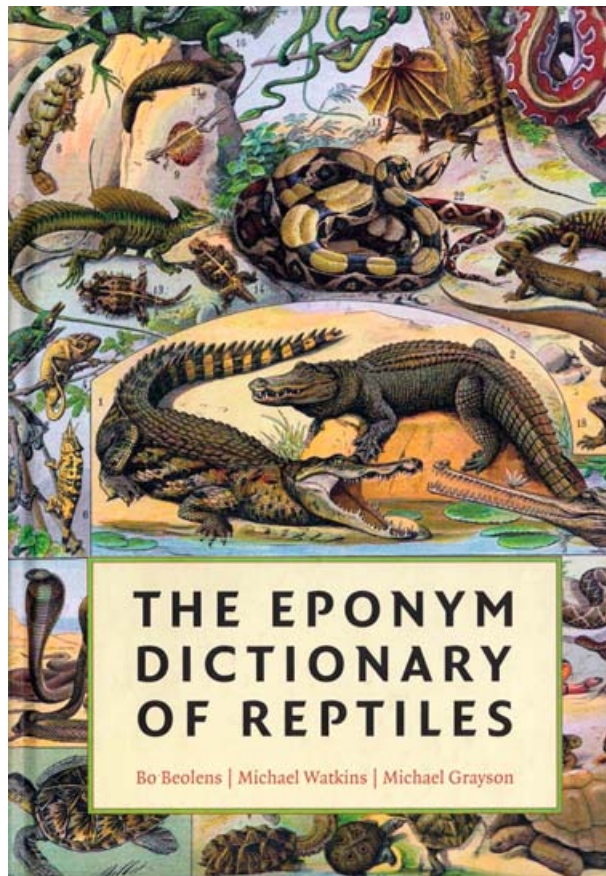
The book was published in 2011, but the authors did not specify at what date they stopped to include new species descriptions. However, a month they were still working on the manuscript can be deduced from the account on Abingdon and *Chelonoidis abingdonii* (Testudinidae) where they wrote; “Lonesome George, probably the last survivor of this taxon, is still alive at the time of writing (December 2010).” Nevertheless, the authors actually stopped including literature from January 10, 2011 (Beolens, personal communication, January 2012).

In a number of cases the person who was dedicated a taxon could not be identified with certainty, most often because the original description provided no or a vague etymology. However, information on a number of them could have been retrieved if the authors had contacted the taxa describers who are still alive. For example, *Sceloporus druckercolini* Pérez-Ramos et Saldaña-de La Riva, 2008 (Phrynosomatidae) is said to be “probably” named after Dr. René Raúl Drucker-Colín (born in 1937), a Mexican physiologist and neurobiologist, etc. (p. 75). We (OSGP) thus contacted Edmundo Pérez-Ramos, who confirmed that the taxon was indeed named after Dr. Drucker-Colín, “for two main reasons: 1) his investigations in the neuroscience area, that were given international importance in their time, 2) his outstanding work in the diffusion of Science, at the time he was the director of the Dirección General de Difusión de la Ciencia, in the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México” (personal communication, January 2012). The original description of the species provided suggested common names in Spanish and in English (“Graceful mountain tree lizard”); the latter name was not retained by Beolens et al., who only indicated “Fence lizard sp.” as common name. As Beolens et al. translated from Spanish (p. 122), the original description of *Liolaemus hernani* Sallaberry, Núñez et Yanez, 1982 (Liolaemidae) stated “This species

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was named *L. hernani*, in tribute to the father of one of the authors, who passed away while the excursion was taking place”; and Beolens et al. indicated that they still have to identify the author referred to. We (OSGP) contacted Sallaberry, who informed us that “the name was dedicated to the father of Herman Núñez, one of the authors of the paper, who passed away the same day I collected the type specimen; the reason for this decision was that Herman Núñez, a very good friend of mine and colleague herpetologist was supposed to come to the field trip, and the last day before departing, his father was not feeling well and I had to convince him to stay behind, otherwise, he would have regretted it for the rest of his life; Mr. Hernan Núñez, his father, was born in San Antonio on August 8, 1914” (personal communication, March 2012). Under the heading *Kate* about *Saltuarius kateae* Couper, Sadlier, Shea et Wilmer, 2008 (Carphodactylidae), the authors (p. 138) speculated “Kate Couper is, we assume, the senior author’s wife.” Patrick Couper confirmed to one of us, OSGP (personal communication, February 2012) that it was named for his wife “who has always encouraged and actively supported my field activities.” About *Krisalys*, from *Strophurus krisalys* Sadlier, O’Meally et Shea, 2005 (Diplodactylidae), the authors indicated “We do not know what relationship Ms. Sadlier has to Ross Sadlier, the senior describer, but we think there must be one” (p. 147). So we (OSGP) contacted Ross Sadlier, who informed us that Kristin Alys Sadlier is his 25 years old daughter (personal communication, February 2012). The etymology provided for *Phelsuma hoeschi* Berghof et Trautmann, 2009 (Gekkonidae) only states “Udo Hoesch discovered this species” (p. 124). Berghof (personal communication to OSGP, February 2012) added that Hoesch is a German amateur herpetologist specialized in *Phelsuma*, who traveled more than 20 times to Madagascar to study them. The original description of *Sphaerodactylus ladae* Thomas et Hedges, 1988 (Sphaerodactylidae) stated that the name was chosen “in honor of a reliable companion who steered us into many otherwise inaccessible areas in Hispaniola” (p. 170). Beolens et al. hypothesized that it refers to a Lada car. We (OSGP) thus asked Hedges, who confirmed it: “It had high clearance, like a jeep, which allowed us to reach the locality; we were a bit cryptic about the etymology because the car was from the Soviet Union, my funding was from the U.S. government, and it was still the Cold War” (personal communication, February 2012). Under *Shona* about *Graciliscincus shonae* Sadlier, 1987 (Scincidae), Beolens et al. wrote “Shona Sadlier, née von Sturmer, who we presume is the describer’s wife” (p. 242). Ross Sadlier informed one of us, OSGP (personal communication, February 2012) that she is indeed his former partner. Under the heading *Sons*, the



etymology of the original description of *Liolaemus filiorum* Ramirez Leyton et Pincheira-Donoso, 2005 (Liolaemidae) stated that it was dedicated to “the sons,” without further indication. The compilers suggested that they might be the sons of Ramirez Leyton (p. 248). So we (OSGP) contacted Pincheira-Donoso, who informed us that the species was indeed dedicated to Ramirez-Layton’s sons, Marcelo and Alvaro, who are now teenagers (personal communication, February 2012). The authors indicated that they have no information about Bertrand Vanmeerhaeghe (p. 272), who was dedicated *Mauremys leprosa vanmeerhaeghei* Bour et Maran, 1999 (erroneously cited as “Bour and Jerome [sic]”). Maran and Bour informed OSGP (personal communication, March 2012) that Vanmeerhaeghe was a French chemist working for the Alstom group; he was born in Tourcoing, France, on August 24, 1950 and died in Lyon, France, on May 2, 1995. He was a close friend of Roger Bour, passionate since his childhood by amphibians and reptiles, especially *Mauremys leprosa*. Under the heading *Zully* about *Liolaemus zullyae* Cei et Scolaro, 1996 (Liolaemidae), the authors wrote (p. 294) “Mrs. Zully Ortega de Scolaro is presumably the junior author’s wife (or mother).”

Scolaro informed OSGP (personal communication, February 2012) that “the species (firstly named as *L. zullyi*) was dedicated to Mrs. Zully Ortega who is actually Scolaro’s wife; she was born in 1946 and is a Welsh descendant from the first Welsh Colony that settled in Patagonia in 1865 in Chubut (Argentina); she is now retired but she graduated as a teacher from a technical school, and she is a very enthusiastic lover of field work.” We tried to help solving the mystery around the etymology of “*buleli*” in *Lepidodactylus buleli* Ineich, 2008 (Gekkonidae), but so far Ineich prefers to maintain it secret (personal communication, February 2012), as expressed in the original description! A number of other “etymological mysteries” in the Dictionary could probably be solved by contacting persons who were involved in the taxa description and name selection or their closer colleagues.

In a number of cases, the biographical information is a bit out of date. An example is the entry to the herpetologist Barry Hughes that only mentions that he “is a British herpetologist who works at the Department of Zoology, University of Ghana.” Actually, Hughes, who was by the way born in Worthing, Sussex (now West Sussex) on May 22, 1935 (Hughes, personal communication to OSGP, January 2012), left that university in 1986 and has since then become an independent researcher.

The authors largely based their list of common names on that provided in Frank and Ramus’s (1995) guide to the scientific and common names of amphibians and reptiles. That book however, as Beolens et al. rightly stressed, contains a lot of mistakes, and a number of new common names that Frank and Ramus proposed, rather than following any taxonomical or etymological logic, seem to have been freely coined, among others after friends and family of the authors, or even after themselves. The origin of many is mysterious and difficult to trace. An example is the “Anan’s Rock Agama,” a common name applied by Frank and Ramus (1995) to *Stellio sacra* (Smith, 1935). The authors could not find the origin of the name that they believed refers to the Russian herpetologist Natalia Borisovna Ananjeva. We (OSGP) contacted Ananjeva to ask if she knew more about the origin of this common name, but she had actually never heard of it (personal communication, January 2012), and, as Beolens et al. also suggested, she thinks it might be due to the fact that she and co-authors published a paper on *S. sacra* confirming this species’ validity (Ananjeva et al., 1990). It is one more of these many cases where Beolens et al., as “first revisers” of the reptile eponymic common names at a global scale, could have proposed a correct name. In our view, they should have simply ignored a number of others that were maybe more or less in use in the “para-herpetological” literature would we say, but

that were obviously wrongly coined. There are indeed too many cases in the Eponym Dictionary where the authors state that a common name is wrongly coined; an example is “Bleck’s Kukri Snake” (for *Oligodon waandersi* Bleeker, 1860), about which Beolens et al. specified “This is an apparent transcription error for Bleeker’s Kukri Snake.” Or the “Alternative common name” “Challenging Shade Skink” for *Saproscincus challengerii* Boulenger, 1887, about which the authors stated “The alternative common name seems to have been coined on the basis of a misunderstanding” (the name actually being derived from the ship Challenger). For the common name “Southern Leposoma” (*Leposoma southi* Ruthven et Gaige, 1924), Beolens et al. rightly stressed that it “apparently arises from a misunderstanding of the binomial *southi*” and, although they have provided a short biography for John Glover South, they did not propose a correct English common name to apply to the taxon. Sometimes the right common name is indicated as the “alternative” one, e.g., “Stephen’s Sticky-toed Gecko *Hoplodactylus stephensi* Robb, 1980 [Alt. Stephens Island Gecko].” Etcetera. Beolens (personal communication, January 2012) informed us (OSGP): “Our general rule is that if someone has used a name, even in error, we should include it so others who come across it can check it with the dictionary to know its origin and status.” However, they have ignored a number of common names, erroneous or not, that appeared in the literature, sometimes even in the original descriptions (see as an example the case of *Sceloporus druckercolini* above), not to mention non-English common names, and we fear that they contribute to propagate the use of many incorrect common names.

In a number of cases, the authors regretted that some distinct species share the same common name (for example “Vogel’s Pit-viper,” applied to *Trimeresurus (Cryptelytrops) venustus* Vogel, 1991 and *Trimeresurus (Viridovipera) vogeli* David, Vidal et Pauwels, 2001) (Viperidae). This is another case where adopting a common name based on the scientific name, that, according to the rules of the International Code of Zoological Nomenclature, has to be different from any other name already given, would have been useful. Beolens et al. gave as “alternative” common name for *T. (C.) venustus* “Beautiful Pit-viper” — that is indeed the right translation of its scientific name and selecting that one as the common name to be used, not as the “alternative” one, would have solved the “problem.”

While so many reptile taxa are still being discovered every year, including new genera, and while molecular phylogenetic studies are still bringing so many changes at various taxonomic levels, and as there is currently no global list of common names but that of Frank and Ramus that is both so much subject to criticisms and partly

out of date, we find it a bit premature to include common names in such a dictionary, and would have preferred to see it limited to scientific names. The situation is very different from that of birds for example, where species descriptions have reached a plateau, systematics has already more or less stabilized, and consensual updated common names lists are available for most groups and regions.

While reading the Eponym Dictionary, we thought about a number of taxa names derived from persons names, that we did not find: *Bachia* Gray, 1845, *Chelonioidis nigra darwini* (Van Denburgh, 1907), *Cnemaspis chanardi* Grismer et al., 2010, *C. kamolnorranathi* Grismer et al., 2010, *C. niyomwanae* Grismer et al., 2010, *C. vandeventeri* Grismer et al., 2010, *Cuora chriskarananarum* Ernst et McCord, 1987 (a synonym of *C. pani* Song, 1984), *Dipsadoboa duchesnii* Boulenger, 1901, *Gerrhosaurus bulsi* Laurent, 1954, *Lepidothyris hinkeli joi* (curiously, the etymology of “hinkeli” is provided, but not that of “joi,” although both taxa were described in the same revision by Wagner et al., 2009), *Melanocheilus trijuga parkeri* (Deraniyagala, 1939) and *M. t. wiroti* (Reimann in Wirot [Nutaphand], 1979), *Naja annulata stormsi* (Dollo, 1886), *Oreocryptophis porphyraceus coxi* (Schulz et Helfenberger, 1998), *Platysternon megacephalum shiui* Ernst et McCord, 1987, *Poromera haugi* Mocquard, 1897 [synonym of *P. fordii* (Hallowell, 1857)], *Siebenrockiella* Lindholm, 1929, *Trachemys gaiageae hartwegi* (Legler, 1990), *T. nebulosa hiltoni* (Carr, 1942), *T. stejnegeri malonei* (Barbour et Carr, 1938), and many, many more, especially among synonyms. All were however described before the authors stopped including literature, and most are listed in The Reptile Database, that the authors used as a taxonomic reference as they clearly have indicated.

A good addition to each taxon mentioned in the Eponym Dictionary would have been to mention the family it belongs to; if you do not know the scientific name of a species mentioned, common names such as “Kugler’s Largescale Lizard” or “Kuhl’s Galliwasp,” to choose two randomly, won’t help much to figure what the species looks like.

The extremely short bibliography (less than two pages) is mostly a list of journal titles in which the authors found information useful to their book. It is unfortunately of very limited use, since it is not referred to in the main text, and moreover very incomplete, as obviously the authors had to have recourse to many more references to write their Eponym Dictionary.

Letting aside some gaps and inconsistencies mentioned above, we really had great pleasure reading this opus. Although it contains neither figures nor photographs, not a single page was boring to read, because the

authors used an appropriate style and selection of biographical anecdotes to keep the reader happily entertained. None of the authors is a herpetologist, and they thus provided us with an external, objective view of what made the most exciting known facts of the lives of all these people who were dedicated reptile taxa, inspiring respect to many of them, especially those who dedicated their lives to making scientific collections in difficult times or extraordinarily challenging conditions. There are remarkably few mistyping, and they seem mostly concentrated in the French names and titles mentioned throughout the Eponym Dictionary, the remaining mistyping bearing mostly on authors’ names and scientific names. We regret that the high price of the book (£52, i.e., ca. €63) might discourage a lot of potential readers and libraries from buying it.

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