
Book reviews

***Historical Incidence of the Larger Land Mammals in the Broader Eastern Cape*, 2nd edn, by C.J. Skead; edited by A.F. Boshoff, G.I.H Kerley and P.H. Lloyd. Centre for African Conservation Ecology, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University Port Elizabeth. 2007. Price R490. ISBN 1 920176 08 X.**

The second edition of the voluminous (1121 pp) *Historical Mammal Incidence in the Cape Province Volume 2: The Eastern Half of the Cape Province, Including the Ciskei, Transkei and East Griqualand*, by Jack Skead, written in the 1970s, but published in 1987, is now presented in a concise (570 pp), more attractive format, interspersed with appropriate historical photographs. The review consolidates the original 11 chapters into a more streamlined eight chapters constituting a historical review by geographical area (referred to as sectors), followed by detailed species accounts, abundance and movements of game animals, human influence, interesting gaps in mammalian distribution patterns, trends in mammalian species status and, finally, species anomalies (black leopards and the Cape lion). The editors, in conjunction with Jack Skead, have made some subtle, but important, additions and alterations. These include introduction of modern conservation thinking into the text, reorganization of the distribution maps (an important aspect of the original Volume 2) to reflect the quality and reliability of the original information, inclusion of the latest taxonomic descriptions, inclusion of additional information from early travellers and historians like Robert Gordon and Hendrick Swellengrebel Jr., and removal of descriptions of non-mammalian species.

This work, like other similar historical zoogeographical texts, is proving invaluable to conservationists attempting to restore representative species within their former ranges, and ecologists wanting to understand species–habitat relationships. In this regard, the Eastern Cape is an ecological tension zone and zoological paradise, where numerous species are at their distributional limits, or where subtle breaks in distribution occur, such as for black and blue wildebeest, blesbok, gemsbok, black rhinoceros, kudu, southern reedbeek, quagga

and Cape Mountain zebra, serval and wild dogs, to name a few. A closer scrutiny in the review of distributional information of species, such as the black rhino, further exposes the ecological reality of the ‘Transkei gap’. Other pleasant additions to the review include a description of the demise of the Cape warthog (*Phacochoerus aethiopicus aethiopicus*) and the success of the common warthog (*P. africanus*) in the Eastern Cape.

The editors are to be congratulated in making this South African biological classic available to scientists and the public. It is only a pity that Jack Skead did not see the finished product, following his death in 2006. It is also noted that Jack’s last statement in the first edition of ‘End of this bloody index’ does not appear in the review, a lasting symbol of his dry wit.

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***Atlas des Reptiles du Cameroun*, by L. Chirio & M. LeBreton. Muséum National d’Histoire Naturelle & IRD Editions, Paris. 2007. Price €58. ISBN 978 2 85653 603 2.**

Although Cameroon is the Central African country discussed in perhaps the greatest number of herpetological publications, no prior research effort has been comparable to the extensive surveys made by the authors of *Atlas des Reptiles du Cameroun*. Their collaboration with six local herpetologists and 150 villagers has resulted in the first national reptile atlas for any Central or West African country. More than 8500 specimen records from about 1000 localities (only 15 of 176, 50 × 50 km grid squares, all inaccessible by road, lack reptile records) yielded new distribution data for 244 of the 274 species confirmed for the country. Included are five species (two geckos and three skinks) recently described by Chirio and LeBreton. An additional 17 species (eight lizards and nine snakes) are regarded as undescribed by the authors; seven of these seem endemic to Cameroon and seven are montane taxa. The

authors highlight taxonomic groups requiring further study and likely to lead to the description of new species or resurrection of synonyms (e.g. *Leptosiaphos aloysiisabaudiae* and *Causus resimus*).

Printed on good quality glossy paper, the core of the book is its 620 pages of species accounts, each spanning two pages and including sections on type locality, distribution, identification (a few diagnostic characters), natural history (very brief), altitudinal range, indications about where to search for the species, one or two main literature references, a distribution map, and a photograph. The photographs are of variable quality, although most are acceptable. The distribution maps show three categories of records, each using a different symbol: specimens vouchered in the Paris Museum, specimens observed but not collected, and literature records, all plotted on a base map illustrating the subdivision of Cameroon into 10 vegetation zones. A short, but well-written and illustrated chapter on Cameroonian biotopes explains the relationship between vegetational diversity and herpetofaunal distribution patterns. A concluding section offers an interesting zoogeographical analysis of the Cameroon herpetofauna and remarks on its conservation status. The literature cited is not exhaustive but references the most important sources. Taxonomic indices to scientific and French names, and a one page English summary complete the book, although the latter is hardly required, given that the formulaic text of the species accounts and the clearly interpretable maps and photographs obviate the need for French fluency in users of the *Atlas*.

As in any pioneering work, there are some errors and inconsistencies. Identification keys (not illustrated except for the Testudinidae and Typhlopidae) are provided for each order and family, down to the species level. Most are workable, but those for the Trionychidae, Typhlopidae, Colubridae (*sensu lato*) and Atractaspididae contain errors in couplet numbering and/or character

state descriptions. The global distribution section sometimes repeats mistakes from the literature and in one instance the provenance of a photographed specimen is confused (a *Polemon fulvicollis* is indicated as deriving from 'France ville, Congo Braz.', but Franceville is situated in the Haut-Ogooué Province of Gabon). One of the 'new' species, *Grayia* sp., is actually a colour variety of *G. ornata* well known since the species' description from Angola (see Boulenger 1909), and is widely distributed (Schmidt 1923). Based on the photographs, it seems that there may be some confusion in the specific allocation of specimens in the problematic *Hemidactylus muriceus* group. Likewise, possible misidentifications of photographs or contradictory diagnostic statements suggest that the Cameroonian distributions of *Chamaeleo quilensis*/*C. dilepis*, *C. wiedersheimi*, and *Bothrophthalmus* spp. have to be reevaluated.

Given that 285 species (those confirmed for Cameroon plus 11 whose presence is highly probable given their extralimital distribution) are treated in this book, the number of errors is minimal. This new atlas is an essential reference for African reptiles. We strongly recommend it to every herpetological and natural history library.

REFERENCES

- BOULENGER, G.A. 1909. On the ophidian genus *Grayia*. *Proceedings of the Zoological Society of London* **1909**: 944–952.
- SCHMIDT, K.P. 1923. Contributions to the herpetology of the Belgian Congo based on the collection of the American Museum Congo Expedition, 1909–1915. *Bulletin of the American Museum of Natural History* **59**: 1–146 + pl. I–XXII.

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