
Book Review

The Eponym Dictionary of Reptiles.

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The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, i-xiii + 296 pp.

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An eponym is the name of a person, feature or thing after which a particular item, in this case a reptile, is named. This is what the book is about. The book deals with both vernacular and scientific names. To cite the authors: “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.” The dictionary is undeniably a textbook as there are no illustrations other than the cover image, which is a composite picture (actually four of them) of various unnamed, but numbered, reptiles against a natural background with a definite 19th century encyclopedia style. The source is not mentioned but we can attribute at least the *Boa constrictor* to an early German edition of Brehm’s Thierleben. The book is divided into three main parts: a three-page introduction, the dictionary itself (294 pages) and a short bibliography (two pages).

Each biography includes a list of the common and/or scientific reptile names associated to and biographical notes of the nominee. The latter are variable in type of contents, but the length of the treatment does not necessarily reflect the herpetological significance of the person portrayed. The authors even state that often the opposite is true. Biographies are arranged by alphabetical order of the eponyms, but this could be a family name, a given name, a full name, even a nickname or other reference such as a place, a ship, a tribe, etc.

When the eponym is a relative of the describer then the full name and the relationship are usually all that is said and when the eponym refers to a person who found or collected a type usually nothing more than the full name of the individual is mentioned.

The nationality of the person honored is rarely mentioned, and years of birth and death are irregularly stated for modern honored persons. One or two publications authored or coauthored by the person honored are usually listed although without exact reference. The publications are quite randomly chosen as they are rarely representative of the person’s specialties or career and there seem to be no more focus to herpetology than other biological disciplines. Sometimes no publication is mentioned, although the person did publish. The authors in most cases do not mention where the biographical information presented originated from although it is apparent that the original etymological descriptions are not the main sources. The web-supported Reptile Database is largely used for the scientific names.

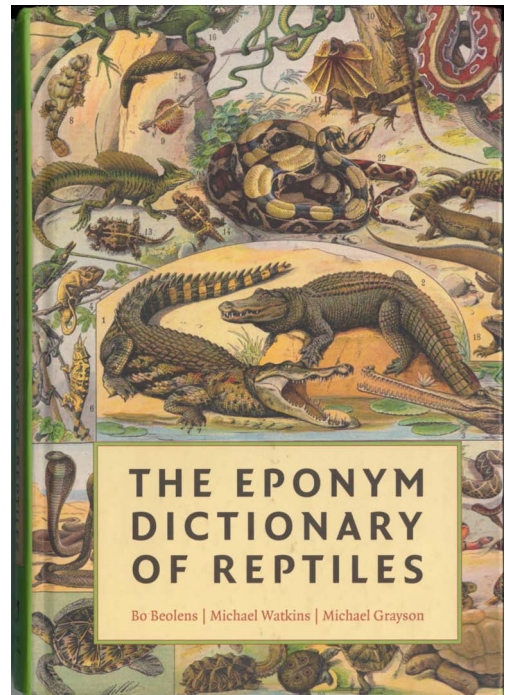
We clearly consider the authors have done both hard and good work in obtaining the information assuring its biographical, bibliographical and taxonomical accuracy. But there are imperfections. In a number of cases, the biographical information is out of date. For example, Barry Hughes is said to be “a British herpetologist who works at the Department of Zoology, University of Ghana.” Actually, Hughes (b. 1935) left that university in 1986

and has since then become an independent researcher (Hughes, pers. comm., Jan. 2012). The biography of Richard Shine, who is still an active herpetologist, stops with events in 1988.

Lars-Gabriel Andersson (1868-1951) was indeed a devoted full-time volunteer at Naturhistoriska Riksmuseet in Stockholm for two short periods and a prolific author, but his profession was not that of a Professor in the academic sense; instead, he was the Headmaster at Lidingö high school. He was not a collector and did not take part in any overseas expeditions as is stated by the authors.

Oskar Böttger (or Boettger) (1844-1910) has an eponym list consisting of an impressive 25 entries out of which he is the describer of eight taxa while “boettgeri” is used in another 16 scientific names published by various describers. The remaining entry, *Rhabdophis callistus* A. Günther, 1873, has mysteriously been allocated the vernacular name Boettger’s Keelback (also by the Reptile Database) for no apparent cause. *Anolis boettgeri* and *Stenocercus boettgeri* were both described by Boulenger in 1911 and are part of the list, but G. A. Boulenger was not honoring Oskar Böttger at all in these cases. Instead, he was referring to Mr. Enrique Böttger (1856-1944), the collector of the specimens in Huancabamba, Peru. The Reptile Database is also erroneous here.

In a number of cases the person to whom a taxon was dedicated could not be identified with certainty, most often because the original description provided no etymology, or only a vague one. However, information on a number of them could have been retrieved if the authors had contacted the taxon describers, when possible. That this was feasible is shown here as the first author of this review contacted a number of describers in order to clarify situations with ambiguous eponyms: Pérez-Ramos and Saldaña-de La Riva in 2008 definitely named *Sceloporus druckercolini* (Phrynosomatidae) after Dr. René Raúl Drucker-Colín (b. 1937),



a Mexican physiologist and neurobiologist, etc., which the authors only could assume (pers. comm., Jan. 2012). Patrick Couper confirmed to us (pers. comm., Feb. 2012) that *Saltuarius kateae* Couper, Sadlier, Shea & Wilmer, 2008 (Carphodactylidae) was named for his wife “who has always encouraged and actively supported my field activities”. About *Strophurus krisalys* Sadlier, O’Meally & Shea, 2005 (Diplodactylidae) Ross Sadlier informed us (pers. comm., Feb. 2012) that Kristin Alys Sadlier is his 25 years old daughter. He could also confirm to us that *Graciliscincus shonae* Sadlier, 1987 (Scincidae) is named after Shona Sadlier his former partner. The etymology provided for *Phelsuma hoeschi* Berghof & Trautmann, 2009 (Gekkonidae) only states “Udo Hoesch discovered this species” (copied from the Reptile Data Base). Hans-Peter Berghof (pers. comm., Feb. 2012) added that Hoesch is a German amateur herpetologist specialized in *Phelsuma*, who travelled more than 20 times to Madagascar to study them. The original description of *Sphaerodactylus ladae* Thomas & 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”. Beolens et al. hypothesized that it refers to a Lada car. Blair Hedges confirmed it to us: “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” (pers. comm., Feb. 2012). Under the heading Sons, the etymology of the original description of *Liolaemus filiorum* Ramirez Leyton & 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. Daniel Pincheira-Donoso informed us (pers. comm., Feb. 2012) that the species was indeed dedicated to Ramirez-Layton’s sons, Marcelo and Alvaro. The authors indicated that they have no information about Bertrand Vanmeerhaeghe, who was dedicated *Mauremys leprosa vanmeerhaeghei* Bour & Maran, 1999 (cited as “Bour and Jerome” [sic]) (Geoemydidae). Jérôme Maran and Roger Bour informed us (pers. comm., Mar. 2012) that Vanmeerhaeghe (1950-1995) was a French chemist. He was a close friend of Roger Bour, passionate since his childhood about amphibians and reptiles, especially *Mauremys leprosa*. Under the heading Zully about *Liolaemus zullyae* Cei & Scolaro, 1996 (Liolaemidae), the authors wrote “Mrs. Zully Ortega de Scolaro is presumably the junior author’s wife (or mother)”. Alejandro Scolaro informed us (pers. comm., Feb. 2012) that the species was indeed dedicated to his wife and that she is a very enthusiastic lover of field work. We tried also to help solve the mystery around the etymology of “*buleli*” in *Lepidodactylus buleli* Ineich, 2008 (Gekkonidae), but so far Ivan Ineich prefers to maintain it secret (pers. comm., Feb. 2012), as expressed in the original description!

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, as also the authors rightly stressed, contains a lot of mistakes and a number of new common names that Frank and Ramus seem to have freely coined, among others after friends, family members or even after themselves. The origin of many names is mysterious and difficult to trace or contain transcription errors, e.g. “Bleck’s” Kukri Snake for *Oligodon waandersi* Bleeker, 1860 (Colubridae), a too flagrant transcription error by Frank and Ramus not worth mentioning in the Eponym Dictionary. Citing an alternative common name “Challenging” Shade Skink for *Saproscincus challengerii* Boulenger, 1887 (Scincidae) when the name actually is derived from the ship Challenger is good enough as there is a funny aspect. About “Southern” Lepsoma for *Leposoma southi* Ruthven & Gaige, 1924 (Gymnophthalmidae), the authors 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. By not proposing more adequate names we fear that the authors contribute to propagate the use of many incorrect common names. Actually, we find it a bit meaningless to include common names in such a dictionary, and would have preferred to see it limited to scientific names.

While reading the Eponym Dictionary, we thought about a number of taxon names derived from persons names, that we did not find: *Bachia* Gray, 1845, *Chelonoidis nigra darwini* (Van Denburgh, 1907), *Corallus blombergi* (Rendahl & Vestergren, 1941), *Cuora chriskarannarum* Ernst & McCord, 1987 (a synonym of *C. pani* Song, 1984), *Dipsadoboa duchesnii* Boulenger, 1901, *Gerrhosaurus bulsi* Laurent, 1954, *Lepidothyris hinkeli joei* (curiously, the etymology of “*hinkeli*” is provided, but not that of “*joei*”, although both taxa were described in the same revision by Wagner et al., 2009), *Melanochelys trijuga parkeri* (Deraniyagala, 1939) and *M. t. wiroti* (Reimann in Wirot [Nutaphand], 1979), *Naja annulata stormsi* (Dollo,

1886), *Oreocryptophis porphyraceus coxi* (Schulz & Helfenberger, 1998), *Platysternon megacephalum shiui* Ernst & McCord, 1987, *Poromera haugi* Mocquard, 1897 (synonym of *P. fordii* (Hallowell, 1857)), *Siebenrockiella* Lindholm, 1929, *Trachemys gaigeae hartwegi* (Legler, 1990), *T. nebulosa hiltoni* (Carr, 1942), *T. stejnegeri malonei* (Barbour & Carr, 1938), *Walterinnesia* Lataste, 1887, and many more.

The bibliography is less than two pages and comprises 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 the book.

Setting aside some gaps and inconsistencies mentioned above, we really took great pleasure in reading this opus. Not a single page was boring to study, 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, the remaining mistyping bearing mostly on authors' names and scientific names. We regret that the high price of the book (on the Internet we found it variously priced £41, €58, and \$65) might discourage a lot of potential readers and libraries from buying it.

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