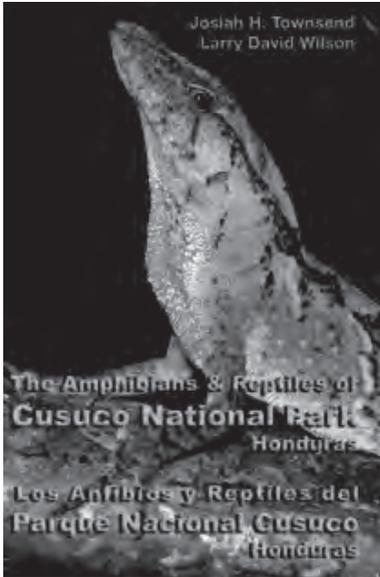

BOOK REVIEWS

The Amphibians and Reptiles of Cusuco National Park Honduras.

Josiah H. Townsend and Larry David Wilson
2008, Bibliomania! Salt Lake City, Utah, 322 p.



Herpetofauna of Cusuco National Park, Honduras is one of the first field guides dedicated solely to the herpetofauna of a single protected area. It is a bilingual treatment of the herpetofauna of the national park with left-hand pages bearing the English text, and the right bearing the Spanish translation. But this is no mere guide to herp species; it is a guide to the National Park as well. Subjects covered include a description of the various habitats found within the 234 km² of the park (from dry mesic to cloud and elfin forests), directions on how to get to the park, a guide to the six trails that spread out from the visitor centre and a description of the camping facilities at the visitor centre and more remote campsites found inside the park and how to get to them.

The majority of the book is of course taken up with the species descriptions. These are complete with the obligatory keys at the beginning of each section complete with very useful, and superbly drawn, line drawings and photos to describe various important diagnostic features, as well as

a nice colour coded diagram to the scalation of colubrid snakes.

Then the first cracks start to appear from the very first species account. Firstly, the font used for the species name was not the easiest to read. Also throughout the book the photographs are lacking legends. This was more than a little inconvenience, particularly in the species accounts. It does not matter too much if there is only one photograph included in the account as they are embedded within that species account. Having the photographs with the relevant species account is very useful as it means one does not spend lots of time flicking from the account to the photograph. However, if more than one photo appears it is not immediately clear if you are looking at different sexes, ages or colour morphs. An example of how this can get confusing is in the accounts of *Stenorrhina degenhardtii* and *Tantilla schistosa* where due to the way that the English and Spanish text run on opposing pages the photograph of the former appears in the Spanish text for that species but next to the English text for the latter.

This was a real let down for me as the information contained within the accounts is well written and inherently useful. Information included in the account includes common name, holotype locality, similar species, species description, distribution, the localities the species has been found within Cusuco National Park (this relates to the information given about the trails and gives a very good idea of where you might look for each species), natural history, conservation status, finished off with remarks and references.

After the species accounts follows a comprehensive treatment of the conservation status of Cusuco's herpetofauna covering trends such as levels of endemicity and the vulnerability of various elements of the herpetofaunal community to mention a few. All of its faults aside the detailed information contained within this book makes it an invaluable to anyone planning further research in the National Park. It will also be of interest to more casual herpetologists visiting either Honduras or the National Park itself.

ROLAND GRIFFIN

*The Snakes of Honduras –
Systematics, Distribution, and Conservation.*

James R. McCranie

2011, Society for the Study of Amphibians and Reptiles, Thomson-Shore, Michigan. 724 pages.

At first glance one gets a sense of the enormity of this project, but it is not until you read the first main chapter entitled 'Materials and Methods' that you truly get a glimpse of the effort and time gone into preparing this volume. It is not only the synthesis of all known literature on Honduran serpents, but also the cumulative data from over 6000 specimens held in collections throughout the World, most of which were examined by the author himself. This sample constitutes the vast majority of all known specimens with a Honduran origin. The next two chapters include a succinct description of the Honduran environment, climate, biomes and a history of herpetofaunal work in the country.

Once one starts reading the species accounts, which rather unsurprisingly make up the bulk of this book, it becomes immediately obvious that they have been meticulously written. The accounts start with a key to the families of snakes present in Honduras in both English and Spanish, followed by the species accounts organised taxonomically. Each new genus is started by a bilingual key. The keys are usefully illustrated to show various diagnostic features. The species descriptions are very detailed and contain information on morphology and scalation, hemipenial structure, coloration in life and in alcohol, and a list of all the specimens examined. Additional information in each account includes, but is not limited to, changes in nomenclature, distribution, similar species, illustrations contained in other literature, and natural history. Additionally, maps showing the localities of where the specimens were collected are included at the end of each description, unless more than one species is illustrated whereupon the map appears after the first species described.

Following the species accounts are the now ubiquitous chapters on conservation issues. McCranie has done superb job of summarising issues particular to Honduras, many of which, though not all, will be familiar to workers

throughout the world. These go some way in adding to the growing body of evidence showing how widespread difficulties faced by herpetofaunal communities really are. The book finishes with colour plates, glossary, gazetteer and literature sections all composed in the fashion followed in the rest of the book.

My main criticism of this book regards the small photographs in the colour plate section at the back of the book that make it quite difficult in some cases to distinguish some of the key identifying features or get a true feel for the species in question. Given the advances in digital photography this is a shame, but equally it is understandable as the inclusion of larger, and additional photos would most likely make this book unwieldy and very expensive to produce. Ultimately, given the quality of the work this down side can easily be forgiven.

McCranie and SSAR should be applauded for this magnificent volume. It is the second in a trilogy of works between *The Amphibians of Honduras* (McCranie & Wilson, 2002) and the eagerly anticipated second instalment of the reptilian fauna of Honduras (McCranie, in prep). Once completed it will be one of the most thorough treatments of the herpetofauna of a single country, currently rivalled only by Savage's 2002 epic treatment of the herpetofauna of Costa Rica (Savage, 2002).

The Snakes of Honduras is a wonderfully presented and marvellously detailed book and truly a must for anyone with an interest in the snakes of Middle America. It is definitely worth considering as a purchase by anyone with anything close to an interest in the wider subject of herpetology.

REFERENCES

- McCranie, J.R. & Wilson, L.D. (2002). *The Amphibians of Honduras*. Society for the Study of Amphibians and Reptiles, Contrib. Herpetol. 19. 625 pp.
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