

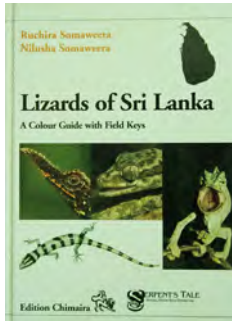
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## Book Review

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### *Lizards of Sri Lanka: A Colour Guide with Field Keys*

Somaweera, N. & Somaweera R. (2009). Edition  
Chimaira, Frankfurt am Main, Germany. 304  
pages



The island of Sri Lanka is well known for its biodiversity and its high levels of endemism, especially amongst reptiles and amphibians. My first visit to this lovely country was over a decade and a half ago and I was enthralled by the immense diversity of herpetofauna in such a small geographic space. There are lizards from tiny geckos to giant water monitor lizards everywhere in Sri Lanka! This field guide is conceivably one of the best written on reptiles of South Asia and is obviously written by field herpers and is laid out in a way that makes it very user friendly. Sri Lanka is rich in reptile diversity and some of the lizard species are truly spectacular. The first image in the book is of the hump-nosed lizard (*Lyriocephalus scutatus*) and this helps create an excitement towards this diverse group of reptiles. With seventy endemic species of the ninety-six species of lizards known from this tiny island, this book provides valuable guidance to the identification, natural history and conservation.

The introductory part of the book covers the geography of Sri Lanka, identifies the various habitats lizards are found in, cultural aspects, conservation issues and a history of herpetology in Sri Lanka. The field guide section itself is incredibly well laid out and explicit enough to appeal and be useful to people of varying experience and skill levels. Multiple pictures of each species from different angles and illustrating different aspects and taxonomic characters add to

the ease of identification. There are also multiple pictures showing colour variations, ontogenic variations and morphs of many of the species. The 'Morphology & Scalation' section on pages 39 and 40 are a good example of how the authors have removed ambiguity and subjectivity. Again, in the Key to the Families, the photographic keys enable the user to easily and confidently put most lizards into the relevant family, greatly cutting down the time taken in the process of identifying a species in the field. The table detailing the external morphological details of the seven species of Sri Lankan *Calotes*, is tremendously useful as this is one of the most visible genus around urban and rural areas. Quick identification in the field will also enable a lot of ecological work and study.

The range maps are easy to read and the topographical outlines make it easy to place a species in a particular habitat or altitude range. The text provides details on global distribution of species along with their ranges within the country. The specific diagnosis helps to establish clarity, in particular taxonomic characteristics along with details of length. The natural history notes provided are elaborate and interesting and will help the field biologist or naturalist immensely. Aside from its focus on the biology of these lizards, the book also succeeds at exciting the naturalist about the various species while also engaging him/ her in the diversity of lizard fauna on this tiny island nation. Leafing through the various species descriptions and pictures might have just inspired my next Sri Lankan visit!

All in all, this book is the perfect field guide. It will succeed in developing interest in the subject, assist in fieldwork, help budding herpetologists get a head start and set a standard for this type of book that will be hard to surpass. As a herpetologist living in India where field guides are few and far between, I would love to have people like the Somaweeras exercising the rigour to come out with a book like this one.

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