

Frogs of the United States & Canada

C. Kenneth Dodd Jr. (2013)

Baltimore, USA: John Hopkins University Press. 982 pp. in 2 vols.
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With one-third of all amphibians now considered threatened worldwide and a further 168 amphibians having become extinct within the last two decades; clearly, these are treacherous times for many frogs, as many of the species accounts contained within the Frogs of the United States and Canada indicates.

This beautifully presented and illustrated set of books is the obvious culmination of blood, sweat and tears by C. Kenneth Dodd Jr and his long list of people who provided help with literature and information; straight away capturing why many of us got into biology and herpetology: "First, nature fascinates me. I have always been astonished at the diversity of life and how the sum total of its parts, from basic chemistry through physiology and genetics all the way to immense ecosystems, still cannot explain the essence and "why" of life." and "The second reason for becoming a biologist was the dread of working in an office building. I wanted to be outdoors, not anchored to a desk; if there were canyons and forests and wild animals "out there", why be inside?".

Frogs of the United States and Canada is a hugely informative and comprehensive desk resource that has exquisite attention to editorial detail. Encompassing such a large geographical range, it is not surprising that this book is a hard hitter amongst those describing amphibians, covering 106 species, over 1062 pages within the 2 volume set. Designed to synthesize the literature on all frogs of North America; north of the Mexican border, it collates an impressive 4,500 of the most pertinent papers, ranging from the 1700's to mid-2011 and is more targeted to researchers, students, conversationists and professionals, working within the field than amateur herpetologists and naturalists. The author does however state that no attempt has been made to cite every paper, note, thesis or dissertation ever published on North American frogs.

Instead of being split into chapters, the books are quite sensibly broken down by Family, of which there are 10: Ascaphidae (the tailed frogs), Bufonidae (true toads), Craugastoridae (the barking frog), Eleutherodactylidae (chirping frogs), Hylidae (cricket, common tree, chorus and burrowing frogs), Leptodactylus (the Mexican white-lipped frog), Microhylidae (the narrow-mouthed and sheep frog), Rhinophrynidae (the mexican burrowing toad), Ranidae, Scaphiopodidae (spadefoot's), as well as the description for a further six established non-native species. Within the description for each family (or in the case of invasive species; species), the books are split down by Genus and Species, where for each species there are a number of suitably informed sub-sections providing

species-specific details on their nomenclature, etymology, identification, distribution, fossil record, systematics and geographic variation, adult habitat, terrestrial and aquatic ecology, calling activity and mate selection, reproduction, larval ecology, diet, predation and defence, population biology, community ecology, diseases, parasites and malformations, susceptibility to potential stressors, status and conservation. Each description is nicely accompanied by images of various life-stages of the individual, its preferred habitat, distribution maps. The author explains that the identification of most species of North American frogs is relatively straight-forward, and "the verbal descriptions and photo-graphs of postmetamorphs should provide sufficient for identification", however, in some circumstances identification sketches have been provided within individual species descriptions.

There is one drawback to a book of this magnitude and size. It is anticipated that with the current level of interest in the field of herpetology, some of the research contained within these books will have already been expanded upon date before it even made it to print (August 2013). It does however provide an excellent benchmark which should be expanded upon by reader.

To sum it up; these books are quite simply a must for researchers, students, conversationists and professionals working with frogs and toads in North America and Canada and are not to be read from cover to cover. They are more specifically designed to be dipped in-and-out-of for that species information which is of the most interest as attention to detail and extensive referencing helps any reader grasp the important of the work which has been/ currently is being undertaken with the reduced distribution for a number of species provides sobering reading.

Unfortunately, it would be impossible to comment on every species within these books which provides personal interest in this single review for the Bulletin, but I hope by offering a taste of its overarching, encompassing content; it will enthuse readers to buy a copy. Its price [at £93.50] does however reflect what one would expect for its size and content.

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