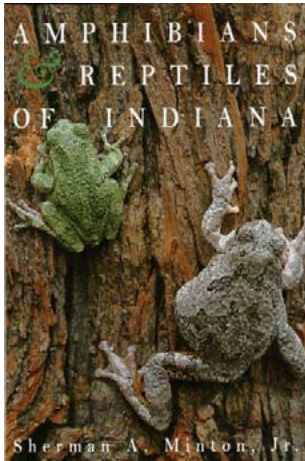


Amphibians & Reptiles of Indiana

Sherman A. Minton, Jr. (2001)

Indiana University Press, IN, 404pp, 2nd Revised edition. ISBN: 1883362105



My first thought when the book arrived was of the sheer thickness of it. Being asked to do a review on a book that concerns the reptiles and amphibians of just one state within the United States brings one to think of a thinner volume. However, this book holds information on 38 amphibian and 58 reptile species, making it an impressive book indeed. The information on the sheath and the foreword provides a

lovely insight into the late Sherman A. Minton, Jr's life and his dedication in the study of herpetology. This lifelong commitment shines through on every page, with his personally gathered information and extensive catalogue of pictures included within the book.

Amphibians & Reptiles of Indiana provides a concise but varied introduction that highlights the extent of the author's research, which has gone into creating this superb book. The author has compiled a vast amount of information with tantalizing snippets on Indiana's topography and climate, endangered/special concern species, herpetological research history and much more. By far the most useful section within the introduction is the detailed explanation of the 'dots and stars' map system (found with the majority of species accounts). This mapping system coupled with the detailed Map 2 (Counties of Indiana, p12), Map 3 (Drainage Systems of Indiana p14) and the information on species distribution, gives the reader a rough guide on the locality and identification to at least the group level. For accurate identification the author highly accentuates the need to use species keys and to seek professional advice, rather than relying solely on species pictures. He explains further that misleading identification by the use of pictures is due to the variation of colour or patternation found in many species.

The bulk of the book is separated into two main sections, 'Amphibians' and 'Reptiles' of Indiana. These are subsequently divided even further; 'Salamanders', 'Toads and Frogs' for the amphibians and 'Turtles', 'Lizards', and 'Snakes' for the reptiles. The beginnings of the amphibian and reptile sections are superbly done, with a singular detailed key for the amphibians and similar keys for each of the three subdivided sections on turtles, lizards and snakes. I have always been rather daunted by species

keys, due to their lengthy and complicated nature; however, the keys in this book are simplified and are only detailing the step by step anatomical features for the species present within Indiana. The larval key in the amphibian section is a pleasant addition, which would test the reader's skills even further. Even with the handy glossary (pages 368 to 373); the reader would need to have decent anatomical knowledge of herpetofauna to make full use of the keys. Furthermore, the author emphasises that even with the help of this guide, many species can only be identified to the group level in the field.

The book is systematic in its layout and all of the sections go into great detail on each species from salamanders to toads and turtles to snakes; all species are subdivided under their family designation. The author provides information on:

Identification: a brief but distinctive account on morphological information to identify each species. If similarities occur with other species, the author provides the reader with the characteristics to differentiate between them. For example the Ravine Salamander (*Plethodon richmondi*) is noted to be difficult to distinguish from the unstriped morph of the Redback Salamander (*Plethodon cinereus*); however, they differ in body length and width. Further details on the variations that can occur within the state itself are discussed.

Description: this provides a more in-depth account on each species general appearance and expands on the specific identification (above). The primary information focuses on measurements of males and females of each species including, tail length, head length/width, limb length, carapace/plastron length and scale numbers. This is a generalised list and does not account for all of what is found, due to the sheer amount of information given per species throughout the book. The author shares his personal accounts on mean body length of adult male and female from caught specimens. This area truly portrays the amount of knowledge gained by Sherman A. Minton, Jr over his many years of research.

Range: short but to the point, the author pinpoints the locations on a map of Indiana incorporating the 'dots and stars' map system and a map of their range within the eastern United States.

Habitat and Habits: this is by far the most interesting area for each species, Sherman A. Minton, Jr provides the reader with detailed information on the specific habitat preferences of each species, for instance the crayfish frog *Rana areolata circumlosa* that make their home within the large chimney-building crayfish burrows of open, grassy,

damp areas. Interesting facts on feeding habits, such as the switch in juvenile and adult Western fox snake *Elaphe vulpine vulpine*, where the young feed on snakes, lizards, and invertebrates and the adults largely on small mammals. Also covered are species breeding habits (including mating/egg laying/maturity times and the authors personal accounts on specific dates), period of activity throughout the year, species specific habits when being captured or pursued and much more.

The species descriptions are finished with really nice but small sections on, species excluded or doubtfully recorded from Indiana, species possibly occurring in Indiana and exotic, introduced and extralimital species. Throughout this book the late Sherman A. Minton, Jr continually gives his personal accounts, making Amphibians & Reptiles of Indiana more interesting and diverse. Some herpetological books just give general accounts for species, but due to the author's great efforts, his personal accounts add a great

connection to his work and accuracy to the descriptions. It is, however, a rather specialist book, aimed at the enthusiast who is interested in the herpetofauna of Indiana or the eastern United States.

All in all I cannot give this book the justice it deserves but I found it to be a very good enlightening read, with lots of detail and a useful field guide. I do, however, think that it would be more suited as two separate books. The amphibian and reptile sections are substantial enough on their own and with a durable outer finish to combat most weather conditions, would improve their usefulness in the field.

STEVEN PIGGOTT

1 Mere Drive, Clifton, Manchester, M27 8SD
Email: stevepiggott@hotmail.co.uk