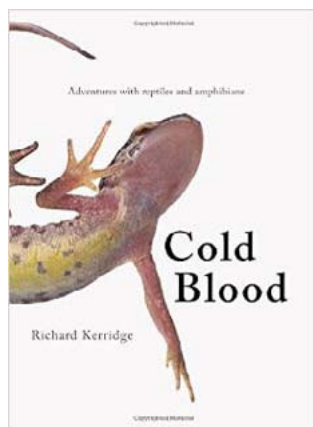


Cold Blood: Adventures with Reptiles and Amphibians

Richard Kerridge 2014

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When *Cold Blood: Adventures with Reptiles and Amphibians* arrived, I did not have any background information such as listening to Radio 4 where this book was read on air. Therefore I was expecting a species specific book with detailed information on the native herpetofauna of the United Kingdom. However, the book turned out to be 80 percent biography 20 percent species information.

This review does not cover the complexity of this book and anyone interested should be swift in their purchase and delve into Richard Kerridge's life and adventures.

Richard Kerridge begins with Chapter 1 'Palmate Newt', where he relives some of his old family holidays in Dartmoor and his first real experience with the palmate newt or 'Golden newt' as he referred to it at the time. I have to admit, the start of this chapter was difficult to read, it did not inspire me with the urge to read on, but it is well written nevertheless. I was interested to read the historical background of the palmate newt's first discovery to the modern day usage of the *Lissotriton helveticus* scientific name. The author also provides a useful description of amphibian anatomy and physiology in an easy to digest fashion. The author gives an opinion on the capturing wild species and provides information on reptile and amphibian protection within the UK indicating the rather obvious need to protect our declining species populations. Chapter 2, 'Common Toad' has a better beginning than Chapter 1, presenting useful and subtle information about the common toad through a short pleasing tale of his adult life. I particularly liked the section on anthropomorphic projection, where the author explains how human culture associates certain feelings with animals and the general misinterpretations of the common toad both in the present and in the past. The author then provides an easy to digest physical description of the colour variation of male and female toads, followed by details of their reproduction. Chapter 3, 'Common Frog, Marsh Frog, Edible Frog, Pool Frog, Smooth Newt, Slow Worm and Great Crested Newt'. The author once again starts this chapter with a quick insight into his youthful adventures, but also describes the common frog, marsh frog, edible frog and pool frog providing information on their habitats and their behaviour, for example, comparing the common frog to the other three green frogs. Information is also provided on the hybridisation of the pool and marsh frog to produce the edible frog. This gives the reader a good indication on possible

identification between the common frog and its counterparts.

I did enjoy the author's enthusiasm for nature that shines through on each page. Controversially, he indicates he would love to have more amphibians and reptiles in this country, whether they are native or not. However, he also makes clear alien species can impact negatively on ecosystems. I feel that he could have gone into a little more depth with the great crested newt section, however he does emphasise the protection of this rare species. I can relate to his strong feelings on the downsides to this protection, which minimises exposure to this species and may hinder peoples perception of it.

Chapter 4 'Common Lizard, Slow Worm and Sand Lizard', begins with morphological description and habitat specifications for the common lizard, which is the most detailed of any species in the book. The author then discusses the sand lizard and describes the major differences between dune and heath sand lizards. On Page 165 there is a useful description of general lizard behaviour including basking and breathing mechanisms. At the conclusion of this chapter there is the story off the campaign to re-establish sand lizard population with the north west led by Chris Davis, who was spurred on by the efforts of Keith Corbett. Davis used captured specimens for a breeding program and released their hatchlings into suitable locations where the species had a great chance of survival. It brings hope of having these beautiful animals around Britain to show to my children. The opening paragraphs to chapter 5 'Grass Snake, Smooth Snake, Adder', encapsulates the unique movements of snakes in a fluid and rhythmic way, which is emphasised by the authors travels in Italy with the Western Whip Snake, *Coluber vividiflavus*, (now of course *Hierophis viridiflavus*) and his more recent visits to view captive snakes in museums. I think he puts together a very good argument that we only get real excitement from wild specimens due to their unpredictability and their free movement, while captive animals do not exhibit their true and thrilling nature. The morphological characters of all three species, including length and general colouration, are described including their eating habits (prey species), their historical significance and their old British names. Moving on, the author gives a snippet on the general teeth morphology and eating mechanisms of snakes but I would have liked to have seen some annotated diagrams to go with it. I felt that the section starting on page 230 on the physiological aspects, concepts on human evolution, prehistoric behavioural interaction and religious provenance that snakes may have induced was extremely interesting. For myself, this may possibly be the most interesting part of the book since I was not aware of much of this. Chapter 6 'Natterjack toad, Aesculapian Snake', begins with the explanation of very limited distribution of the natterjack toad in Britain, and its specialised habitat in sandy

landscapes. This is followed its life cycle the need to breed in ponds with no competitors like the common frog and toad, so their young will grow appropriately. He further explains their preferred habitat type and their general morphological appearance. The author then discusses the possible origins of the natterjack's name and the common names such as the 'Running toad' originating from its scuttling movements. The author briefly describes the presence of the Aesculapian Snake in the UK and also the theories on their original occurrence and their invasive status in the UK. The book is concluded with a brief but insightful section for further reading, which provides a good grounding for any reader to expand their interests in UK herpetofauna.

Cold Blood: Adventures with Reptiles and Amphibians emphasises Richard Kerridge's passion for wildlife, but links it with his turbulent but exciting life. It is a delight to read from the first page until the last, however, it has some bad language and situations in the story line that would only be

intended for the older reader. I am still confused with the book as a whole, and I would not be able to place it on a specific shelf in a book store. I am not sure what sort of reader the book would appeal to; there is good detail on each species but it lacks any annotated pictures/diagrams alongside, therefore a novice may find it hard to follow completely without further reading being involved. The book is more of a novel with species information provided along the way. A herpetologist may find the information interesting but would have to sift through the life story of the author to get to it.

STEVEN PIGGOTT

1 Mere Drive, Clifton, Manchester, M27 8SD

Email: stevepiggott@hotmail.co.uk