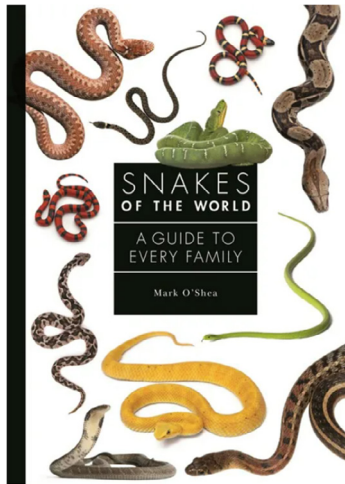


Snakes of the World: A Guide to Every Family

Mark O'Shea

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There are over 4,000 species of snakes in the world, present on every continent except Antarctica, and found in most habitat types. This remarkable success has not, alas, been matched in their appreciation by humans with snakes typically feared and disliked. This relationship prompted in part by the fact that some are highly venomous, results in large numbers of human

injuries every year. But much of this fear is due to a lack of understanding, as most snakes are harmless, shy and rarely encountered. Education about their behaviour and the wider availability of cheap antivenoms would be important developments allowing these creatures to co-exist with humans, and continue to contribute to the ecosystems in which they exist.

Thus the publication of 'Snakes of the World', describing the wide range of species of snakes is timely and significant. An important development following the invention of digital cameras and modern publishing methods is that the quality of presentation in books has made huge advances. This book, published by Princeton University Press and produced by the Bright Press, is an excellent example of this. The volume contains many high quality photographic images of a wide range of snakes species and is beautifully presented, making it attractive and accessible to not just snake converts (*mea culpa*), but to the wider and more general audience who might be interested to learn more about these wonderful creatures.

'Snakes of the World' is well laid out, with a useful introduction containing sections on evolution and origins, taxonomy, anatomy, sense organs, locomotion, reproduction and conservation. The main section of the book is a comprehensive description of the world's species following the taxonomic ordering of the two infraorders Scolecophidia and Alethinophidia, with these containing various clades, superfamilies and families. The current taxonomic structure is nicely explained allowing the subsequent ordering and presentation of the various snake taxa. For each taxonomic unit a number of species are described with particular characteristics explained, along with more general

information on distribution (including maps), habitat, size, reproduction and diet. And for many species, excellent photographic images are presented to illustrate the snake's appearance, often those specifically described in the text.

As there are many snake species, this descriptive section of 'Snakes of the World' is extensive. Hence I suspect it will not be read cover to cover, but will instead be dipped into by most as a resource, though this will reveal much fascinating information, especially important for the some of the less well known species, of which there many. 'Snakes of the World' finishes with a glossary, resource list and index. The glossary was useful but, as the resource list only describes various field guides, I felt it limited and superficial. As an academic I like to know the source of information presented in the text, and in almost all cases I was unable to do this; but I accept that perhaps this was beyond the intended audience and remit of the book.

My inference is that 'Snakes of the World' was intended instead to be a bridge between more scholarly volumes, with more detail and cited sources, and a 'coffee table' type book, containing limited text and information, but with many images. If this was the case I feel that that it has been largely successful. I learnt much from the text, and appreciated seeing many beautiful images of snake species I had not seen before. That this was all brought together in one relatively small volume is a credit to the author and publishers, and so I strongly recommend 'Snakes of the World'. Finally, I very much hope that this book increases understanding and appreciation of these wonderful creatures.

CHRISTOPHER J. MCINERNY

School of Molecular Biosciences, College of Medical,
Veterinary and Life Sciences, University of Glasgow, Glasgow
G12 8QQ, Scotland, UK

E-mail: Chris.McInerny@glasgow.ac.uk