
BOOK REVIEWS

Amphibians and Reptiles Status and Conservation in Florida

Walter E. Meshaka, Jr. and
Kimberly J. Babbitt (Eds.)

Hardcover: 334 pages
Krieger Publishing Company, 2005
ISBN 1-57524-251-6
Price: \$66.50

Amphibians and reptiles are prominent in Florida. It is a state where both temperate and tropical species can be found, where reptiles such as the Alligator and Gopher tortoise structure habitats and ecological communities and where amphibians and reptiles are of financial significance in trade. However, it is also a state that has experienced a dramatic growth in human population – 0.5 to 15 million over the last century – and is predicted to do so in the future. The impacts of human population growth on natural habitats are made more dramatic due to the rapidity with which they have occurred. This publication aims to assess human-mediated impacts on Florida's herpetofauna.

The book's chapters are a mixture of broad-ranging overviews and some quite specific research papers (in one case seemingly of a work in progress). However, collectively they present a fascinating account of the overwhelming problems facing Florida's herpetofauna. For example, although populations of Diamondback terrapins in Florida Bay and the Keys have made some recovery after a decline in commercial harvest – they still face threats from loss of nesting beaches to development, an increase in predation from human-associated racoons, pollution and being trapped in crab pots.

Predictably, for most species, habitat loss and fragmentation are the killer blows. Ray and Patricia Ashton gloomily predict that habitat loss could be so severe as to leave a landscape 'similar to that of...Britain'!

Although exotic species are extremely successful in Florida, consideration of their impacts on native species is disappointingly thin.

This book is nicely produced, although it would have benefited from a closer proof read. It presents

a fascinating subject area, not only for those with an interest in Florida's herpetofauna, but also for its contrasts and similarities with herpetofaunal conservation issues closer to home.

John Baker

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Venomous Snakes of the World

By Mark O'Shea

Hardcover: 160 pages
New Holland Publishers, October 2005
ISBN: 1843309726
List Price: £24.99

Venomous Snakes of the World is a magnificent contribution to herpetological and toxinological literature. Containing 160 pages and almost 200 colour pictures for species included, this book is a thorough overview of this intriguing group of venomous snakes. Mark O'Shea is qualified to produce a book of this scope. Sections include Introduction, Americas, Eurasia, Africa, Tropical Asia, Australasia and Oceans. This includes material on anatomy, venom evolution and bioactivity, sea snake adaptations, conservation and venomous lizards. The real strength of the book, and what gives it unique value, is the material dealing with lesser known snakes, including the nuances of venomous colubrids. Most readers will be unfamiliar with this information and therefore it is a tremendous opportunity for them to learn more about this special area of evolution.

The only addition I would like to have seen would have been a brief section on first-aid treatment, particularly the application of pressure-immobilisation bandages for elapid envenomations.

I cannot recommend this book strongly enough.

Bryan Grieg Fry

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