Instead, the aim is to show why this field of scholarship is an important one. In reality, the why’s were relatively few, and dominantly found in the first chapter, Why study a lot of old bones? However, even this chapter barely had any of the promised why’s. I think the author could have left out this attempt at philosophy and moved right into the down and dirty of zoo-archaeology. Ironically, there were a lot of how’s: many chapters were devoted to how archaeologists sort, age, quantify, and more; most methods were treated as overviews (which is appropriate in such a short book), with ample references to the primary literature.

As one would expect in any book on animal bones, there is an early chapter introducing the reader to bone (the material), the bones themselves and the sum of all the bones, the skeletons. Sadly, the orientation diagram of a bird skeleton has two mistakes (the fibula is miss-labelled, digits of the manus are misnumbered), not a great start to a book on bones – the second printing, no less. The text of this chapter on orientation to the skeleton contains misleading statements (what is a “higher” vertebrate?) and outright mistakes (e.g., pectoral girdles do not attach the limbs to the vertebral column; caudal vertebrae are not “often reduced to a simple short rod of bone,” etc.).

The study of all the events that take a bone from the living animal through to the researcher’s bench is known as taphonomy. In addition to orienting the reader to bones, a must-have in a book such as this is an outline of taphonomic processes; without this knowledge, an archaeologist cannot correlate earlier peoples’ use of animals with the bones themselves. O’Connor gives a succinct description of these processes, with several examples (hypothetical and real) to allow the reader to understand that the bones dug up are not exactly as they were dropped by the people who used them.

Many methods used by archaeologists for dealing with animal bones are described, often with both pros and cons explained. Where appropriate, the techniques are compared with those used for working with ancient human remains. O’Connor has also done a good job of bringing in the literature from other disciplines that would clearly bear on the interpretation of, for example, diseases in animals.

This book has not been written for the specialist; my feeling is that it has been written with the interested novice or hobbyist, or perhaps even first year university students in mind. That said, it would have been a very useful addition to have, perhaps on the inside back cover, a geologic time scale; O’Connor liberally uses terms such as Holocene and Neolithic, terms that are undoubtedly quite meaningful to experts, but in and of themselves, relatively meaningless (other than “old”) to the non-specialist. I did enjoy the odd injection of humour – just like O’Connor’s descriptions of his real forays into middens, the humour gave the book personality, a thoroughly appropriate quality.

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Snakebit: Confessions of a Herpetologist

By Leslie Anthony. 2008. Greystone Books. #201–2323 Quebec Street, Vancouver, British Columbia V5T 4S7 Canada. xi + 292 pages. 29.95 CAD.

There really are two kinds of people: those that like snakes and those that get the heebie-jeebies even at the mention of snakes. Leslie Anthony is certainly in the smaller, but more enlightened, former group. With a PhD specializing in herpetology, Anthony has caught more than his fair share of snakes. In this lively volume, he mixes personal memoir and adventures in exotic locales with a healthy dose of herpetology.

Anthony sets the stage with a prologue of discovering European Adders (Viper a berus) while skiing north of the Arctic Circle in Finnish Lapland. From there Anthony takes the reader through adventures more or less chronologically, beginning with childhood hunts for snakes in the suburban wilds of Willowdale and Don Mills, Ontario. Along the way he introduces a veritable who’s who of Canadian herpetology.

Anthony completed a master’s degree with Dr. Jim Bogart of the University of Guelph, as part of the team working on the genetics of the Blue-spotted Salamander (Ambystoma laterale) and Jefferson Salamander (A. jeffersonianum) complex. He gives a detailed explanation of the current understanding of these strange unisexual hybrids, although is somewhat vague about his own work. The most vivid scene from his days in Bogart’s lab is being attacked by a two-metre Hispanic Boa (Epictus striatus). Anthony continued his work on the Blue-spotted Salamander complex in his PhD studies at the Royal Ontario Museum under the supervision of Dr. Bob Murphy, the “Punk King of Herpetology.” Along the way he participated in the world’s first phylogenetic rock opera, ROMMY, loosely based upon The Who’s rock opera Tommy.

The highlights of the book are Anthony’s stories of adventure on collecting expeditions with Dr. Bob: ambushed by bandits in Baja, Mexico, adventures with cobras and kraits along the Khe Moi River of Vietnam, and vipers in Armenia. In between, Anthony finds time to explore the Red-sided Garter Snake (Thamnophis sirtalis parietalis) dens in Manitoba and hunt for Northern Pacific Rattlesnakes (Crotalus oreganus) in British Columbia.

Anthony abandoned academia for travel and adventure writing, and his journalistic prowess is clearly evi-
dent. Scenes are vividly drawn and his writing style sharp and ironic, although Anthony sometimes becomes too glib, for example, “If continents are the earth’s skin, then deserts are a patch of eczema on its butt” (page 132). Some readers will find his fondness for four-letter words unnecessary. Canadian herpetologists will find this book on Canadian herpetology and Canadian herpetologists essential reading. And anyone with a healthy interest in snakes or herpetology will find this book from a Canadian, snake-loving Indiana Jones to be a lively, educational and enjoyable read.

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ZOOLOGY


Illustrated Keys to Free-living Invertebrates of Eurasian Arctic Seas and Deep Adjacent Waters; Volume 1. Edited by S. Vassilenko and V. Petryashov. 2009. Alaska Sea Grant College Program, University of Alaska, P.O. Box 755040, Fairbanks, Alaska 99775 USA. 192 pages. 40 USD.

