

# Book Reviews

## ZOOLOGY

### **Amphibiens et reptiles du Quebec et les maritimes**

By Jean-Francois Desroches et David Rodrigue. 2004. Editions Michel Quinton, Waterloo, Quebec JOE 2N0. 288 pages. Can \$40.00.

The eye of the reader is quickly overwhelmed by blaze of sharp, high quality colour photographs throughout virtually every page of the body of the text, pages 11 to 235. These are the combined work of 20 photographers, with the authors contributing the majority, DR credited with 97 and J-FD with 42 compared to 103 by all others. This section covers preface, forward, introduction, definitions of amphibian and reptile, a code of ethics for herpetologists, observation and conservation of amphibians and reptiles, introduction to each major grouping within the two classes and individual species accounts. The latter include description, similar species, reproduction, habitat, critical area, food, predators, status, notes. These accounts demonstrate the authors' familiarity with the varied characteristics and ecology of each species.

A map covering from the western border of Ontario to the Maritimes and the adjacent northern United States depicts each species range in a splash of red. Those for the Quebec portion are drawn from the comprehensive database of the Quebec Atlas for which Rodrigue is now the chief coordinator. This project is based at the St. Lawrence Valley Natural History Society and has financial support from la Societe de la faune et de la parcs du Quebec. The data for the Maritime maps was provided by Don McAlpine at the New Brunswick Museum. The only problem with these is that the maps are too small allow detail and disjunct populations are easily overlooked.

In all, 40 species are given detailed treatment (21 amphibians and 19 reptiles (nearly half of the species total for Canada). Two sea turtles are not recorded for Quebec and two frog species, two freshwater turtles and two snakes are absent from the Maritimes. An additional account covers the complex subject of diploid and polyploid salamanders involving hybridization between species of the genus *Ambystoma*. Three more

reptiles are either introduced (Red-eared Slider turtle, Eastern Box Turtle) or reported but not confirmed (Timber Rattlesnake).

Pages 236 to 288 conclude the book. These include diagrams of key features and identification keys to adults of both amphibians and reptiles, a standard in many guides. But in addition, there are keys to amphibian eggs, salamander larvae, tadpoles (frog larvae), and cast skins of snakes, subjects often poorly covered or omitted in other guides. Conservation is emphasized with a tables presenting the number of individuals for each of the nine common native species which can be held without permit in captivity in Quebec (two salamanders, toad, five frogs and the garter snake). Another table gives the status assigned to species whose continued survival is of most concern in Quebec, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia. Groups coordinating observations of amphibians and reptiles in each of these provinces are also listed with addresses. Additional appendices cover the etymology of all scientific names and a glossary of 100 technical terms from "aire de repartition ou de distribution" to "zooplankton". Although this, like the entire text, is in French, it facilitates the reading of the book for anyone with at least a rudimentary grasp of the language.

The bibliography is arranged by guides and books, journal articles, and technical reports. The latter is particularly valuable as it includes work not widely referenced elsewhere. The Quebec literature is particularly comprehensive but the Maritime references are more sparse due to the greater familiarity of the authors with the literature of their native Quebec.

The authors deserve the highest praise for their conception, enthusiasm, care, and toil to bring this guide to completion, as does the publisher for the superb quality of the production. It is the new benchmark for other provinces to try and match.

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### **Mammals of Australia**

By J. Turner. 2004. Pensoft Publishers. Acad. G. Bonchev Str., Bl. 6, 1113 Sofia, Bulgaria. 216 pages. Eur 38.50 Cloth.

Having a particular interest in camels at this time, the first thing I tried was to look up this species. The book is arranged alphabetically by common name. So

I tried "Camel" without success. Next I looked under D for "Dromedary", also without success. By going through page by page I found "One-humped Camel" under O. Under this system I noted that House Mouse and Humpbacked Whale shared a page – an odd com-

bination! The index is arranged in exactly the same way so is no help and is superfluous. This was not an impressive start. There is a "Quick Index" arranged in taxonomic order that is helpful if you know the scientific names and sequence of mammalian orders.

The information on the One-humped Camel (and the House Mouse, Humpbacked Whale etc.) was clear, meaningful and concise. Camels are now wild in Australia and these feral residents probably represent the most "natural" population in the world today. Certainly they seem to be extinct in their land of origin (America) and their classical home in North Africa-Arabia.

This arrangement by common name renders it difficult to make comparisons. The common kangaroos are under E, W and R (Eastern Grey Kangaroo, Western Grey Kangaroo and Red Kangaroo) You have to flip between widely separated pages to find the differences in morphology and range. There are places where you could see all three species in the same location (such as Northwestern New South Wales.) and a direct evaluation would be useful.

The range maps are a little confusing. A typical map shows the range in blue. Other maps are coloured light green. At first I thought this colour was used to show the range of the extinct species shown in the book. Later this was less clear as it was also used for subspecies and endangered species. I searched for an explanation of the range maps but did not find one. One curiosity I noted with the range maps is that only three creatures are continent-wide – the Echidna and two introduced species, the Cat and House Mouse. (Five others are al-

most continent-wide, Common Wallaroo, Gould's Wattle Bat, Red Kangaroo, Rabbit and Dingo) Many of the rest are quite localized.

The illustrations are odd. Eventually I realized they reminded me of children's tracings. The shape is mostly correct but gets smoothed out in places. The Red Fox is an odd looking creature. The accuracy of the colours varies. For example the Mountain Possum is grey not brown, but I think the pointed tail make the identification clear. The Greater gilder is depicted as grey-headed and white-tailed when it can be the reverse. The text somewhat clarifies this distinction. The oddest colour rendering of all is the silvery grey Antarctic Fur Seal. All those I have seen are rich brown. However, some of the illustrations are quite good. The Lead-beater's Opossum, the Agile Wallaby and the Banded Hare Wallaby all seem to be fairly accurate.

Despite my criticisms I do not think anyone will have a problem identifying a mammal though. Using the text, range map and the illustration should enable you to reach a clear conclusion on any of the 319 species covered. (This is a little short of the accepted total of 379 and I think those missing are some bats and marsupials, plus most of the cetaceans.) So, as there is sufficient diversity and differences in range you can still use this book as a field guide. The size (21 × 28.5 cm or 8.25 × 11 in.), however, means it is not truly portable.

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## **Birds of the Raincoast: Habitats and Habitat**

By H. Thommasen and K. Hutchings, with R. W. Campbell and M. Hume. 2004. Harbour Publishing, PO Box 219, Madeira Park, British Columbia, V0N 2H0 222 pages, Can \$44.95.

This nice book describes in very delightful terms some components of the great Canadian biodiversity heritage: birds of the fascinating raincoast. It offers more than simply a nice coffee table book of a unique location and its fauna. Instead, this book consists indeed of a very sophisticated and well-written text covering all relevant aspects about birds, including species descriptions at given habitats in the stunning Canadian province of British Columbia.

The text and the brilliant photos are presented by four writers and nine photographers. The nine chapters deal with birds across seasons in the various and complex habitat types of B.C.'s raincoast (south and central coast, but not its islands).

This book is written by some of the bird and photo experts in the province. It cannot be denied that the traditional Anglophone, if not English, culture dominates in this book, as this culture also somewhat dominates the B.C. bird scene. No wonder, the first author is a country doctor, the second author makes a living in an English Department.

The bird photos are among the best I have ever seen for B.C. Some readers might find bird photos taken at the nest old-fashioned, and in some circles they deemed to be unethical even (since disturbing birds on nests and thus not publishable).

The photo layout and arrangement of the text strikes a great balance between detail and text flow; for the bird enthusiast this book is simply a joy to read and to browse through. Popular bird names are explained, and the poetry literature link is made by citing Anglophone poets from U.S., Canada and UK, such as Archibald Langman, William Blake, John Burroughs, Duncan Campbell Scott, John Clare and others. Personally, I specifically like the raptor, owl and sparrow sections, and the photos of the wood-warblers, blackbirds, owls, flowers and plants.

The wording in this book is extremely careful. However, I do not agree with the statement made by the authors that long-distance migration is a risky business for birds. Some species actually living that life-style have the longest life span known for birds; e.g., Terns and Godwits.

Allowing for a more global context, I really like that wintering grounds for B.C. birds are named as well,