The Skeleton Revealed: An Illustrated Tour of the Vertebrates

By Steve Huskey. 2017. Johns Hopkins University Press. 360 pages, 49.95 USD, Cloth or E-book.

This book features beautiful photographs of 200 cleaned, and sometimes incredibly posed, vertebrate skeletons, with the goal to show the reader some of the diversity which exists. Given the subtitle, one would expect to have either near-equal representation across the vertebrates or a selection reflective of the richness of each major group (fishes, amphibians, reptiles, mammals, birds). In other words, half the book would be fishes, then diminishing numbers through birds, reptiles, mammals, and amphibians. Huskey did get the number of illustrated fish to match their proportion of vertebrates in nature, but his bias with snakes skews everything else. And given that a snake skeleton (save for the skull) is about as simple as it gets (skull, followed by tons of vertebrae with ribs, followed by vertebrae without ribs), it's puzzling to see why so many were included, especially when amphibians, mammals, and birds (illustrated by two, ten, and six photographs, respectively), were given such short shrift.

Each photograph is accompanied by an informative species account. In most cases, a description of the animal (intact, not just the skeleton), its habitat, diet, predators, and sometimes a few other interesting topics are covered. Conservation notes are added, with comments on the pet trade and introduced species, for example. These accounts are just long enough to whet one's appetite to learn more. There is no apparent order to the presentation of the species, and this almost allows Huskey to get away with some strategic copy and paste moments in the accounts. For example, for all six chameleons, we read exactly the same thing about their "hodge-podge of anatomical novelties", their independently moving eyes, their two-thumbed feet, the prehensile tail, and ballistic tongues. Spitting cobras, triggerfish, and vipers have similarly repeated passages.

The only other text is the short introduction, and it is fine. Although Huskey mentions that dermestid beetles were used to clean the skeletons, a more detailed methodology would have been nice. For example, what treatment was used on the skeletons to make them so shiny and white? How were the cartilaginous skeletons preserved? How were the skeletons rearticulated (especially for those notorious fish skulls)? Are they on display in a museum now? Photographers may want to know how the photographs were made. Were they digitally post-processed?

This book can be compared with *Evolution* (de Panafieu and Gries 2011), a book with equally beautiful photographs of skeletons, one of which was contributed by Huskey. Of the two books, *Evolution* shows a more diverse array of skeletons (including a few invertebrates) and the specimens are organized by topic, usually with a several-page description introducing each topic, which just seems to work better. Nonetheless, *The Skeleton Revealed* is informative, and the photographs are just a pleasure to view.

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Literature Cited

de Panafieu, J.-B., and **P. Gries.** 2011. Evolution. Seven Stories Press. New York, New York, USA.