

HERPETOLOGY

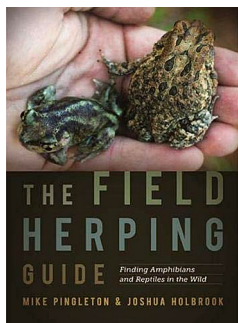
The Field Herping Guide: Finding Amphibians and Reptiles in the Wild

By Mike Pingleton and Joshua Holbrook. 2019. University of Georgia Press. 264 pages, 26.95 USD, Paper.

An increasing number of people are interested in amphibians and reptiles, or 'herps', and this interest includes wanting to see them in nature. Many of these species can be somewhat challenging to find and a guide to finding herps is a good idea. *The Field Herping Guide* does just this as well as discussing issues one should keep in mind to keep the herpers and the herps safe. It should be stressed that this is not a book about how to conduct scientific surveys of amphibians or reptiles or how to design field ecology studies, this is a guide to finding herps for fun.

The book consists of nine chapters with lots of colour photographs. The chapter titles are a good indication of the topics the book covers: Getting Started; Understanding Herp Behavior; Finding Herps; Catching and Handling Herps; Safety in the Field; Ethics and Etiquette, Rights and Responsibilities; Classification, Taxonomy, and Species Identification; Citizen Science and Data Collection; and Herp Photography. Several appendices on topics such as diseases, various kinds of public lands (mainly from an American point of view), internationally known herp hotspots, herp education, and the history of field herping round out the book.

Is this a valuable book? The book is easy reading, but still contains a lot of information. Much of the advice seems very general, such as sometimes it is too hot for herps to be active, or often herps are active during or after it rains. Given the wide range of species covered, from salamanders to snakes, it is hard to generalize about herps. The authors do a good job of tackling each group of species, but even here the diversity is greater than many people realize. Salamanders can be completely aquatic and never leave the water, live along and in streams, depend upon temporary wetlands for breeding, or live in forests with no need of aquatic habitats. Overall, the



authors provide useful advice on the diversity of lifestyles and guidance for how and when to survey for different sub-groups of species.

Unfortunately, the book also has many problems. A book that covers searching for venomous snakes should emphasize safety. The authors discourage people from catching venomous snakes and provide cautions about getting too close when photographing them, but then include a photo of someone in shorts and sandals with a snake hook and a venomous snake (p. 11). This is not the kind of lax safety precautions the authors should be encouraging. And despite urging people not to catch venomous snakes the authors provide several methods for capturing venomous snakes (pp. 113–116).

I also caught a surprising number of factual errors in the book. In the section on crocodylians, the authors give the distribution of Morelet's Crocodile (*Crocodylus moreletii*) as being limited to Mexico and Guatemala but omit Belize (p. 89). In the section on frogs, it is incorrectly stated that cricket frogs (*Acris* spp.) are ranids or true frogs, when, in fact, they are hylids or treefrogs (p. 93). The authors state that Wood Frog (*Lithobates sylvaticus*) is the only herp in Alaska (p. 94), but this is not even remotely accurate as there are five other native amphibians.

There are also a few things the authors could have stressed more. Near the beginning of the book the authors mention that insect repellent can be toxic to amphibians (p. 18) but this fact is not mentioned again in the section on catching frogs (p. 126). Nor is there any mention of sunscreen on hands which can also be toxic to amphibians.

I hope the authors prepare a second edition which corrects these things. While this book is not going to teach experienced herpetologists much about searching for herps, it is a great introduction to field herping for those who are keen about herps but don't have much experience. Even with the errors in this book it could still be a valuable resource at school libraries where it could kindle passion in a young reader.

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