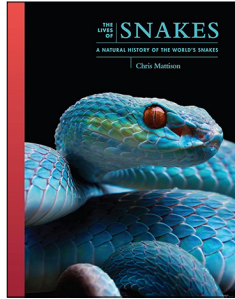


## HERPETOLOGY

**The Lives of Snakes: a Natural History of the World's Snakes**

By Chris Mattison. 2025. Princeton University Press. 288 pages and 150 colour illustrations, 48.00 CAD, Hardcover, 39.99 CAD, E-book.

First of all, *The Lives of Snakes* is a beautiful book, artfully designed and filled with photographs that range in quality from very good to amazing. While not a coffee-table book, it is still a book that one can flip through casually to enjoy the photos and short species accounts.



*The Lives of Snakes* consists of an introduction and six chapters, each dealing with a specific topic along with some species accounts that highlight aspects of that chapter. The introduction covers subjects such as taxonomy, species diversity, and the global distribution of snakes. The chapters are: Form and Function, Dealing with the Environment, Reproduction, Diet and Feeding, Enemies and Defense, and Snakes and Humans. Each chapter consists of a variety of topics; most topics are laid out in two-page spreads, but a few are longer. Each topic has a title in large font, a single paragraph in bold, several paragraphs in regular print, and a few photos to illustrate its point. For example, in the chapter Dealing with the Environment, topics include temperature and water balance, thermoregulation, and snakes in deserts. These sections are usually a basic introduction to the subject matter given there is not much room in a two-page spread to provide in-depth information, especially with photos taking up almost half the space.

The species accounts within each chapter are a highlight of the book. Each account is presented as a two-page spread with one page consisting of a photo of the snake. In addition, each account includes a world map showing the distribution of each species, a text box with some basic information (scientific name,

family, typical length, egg-laying or not, and habitat), and a few paragraphs that take up roughly half a page and highlight a feature or two of the species.

Overall, this is a wonderful book for anyone interested in snakes. Many of the accounts profiled species I am familiar with, but others profiled unusual species I had not heard of before. The text is somewhat basic, so those with a fair amount of snake knowledge will already be familiar with much of the information in the book.

I have a few minor critiques. As mentioned before, each species account features a world map showing its global distribution. Yet, even for wide-ranging species, over half of the world map is unoccupied. For species with limited distributions, the reader has to look closely to see where the snake occurs. It would have been better to provide more detailed maps of particular regions in this case. The book has almost nothing on hibernation/brumation aside from a brief mention that in some areas snakes may be “inactive during the winter” (p. 90). In many parts of the world, including Canada, the winter environment can limit the range of species and affect survival of individual snakes. A section on overwintering conditions and the stresses these conditions place on snakes should have been included. Occasionally, the author makes a broad statement that is not always correct, e.g., “Lizards occur everywhere that snakes do” (p. 167). Such a statement is true in many places, but it is certainly not true in Canada. There are no native lizard species east of Ontario, but native snakes occur in Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island. Despite these minor issues, I would still recommend this book for any naturalist interested in snakes.

DAVID SEBURN  
Ottawa, ON, Canada