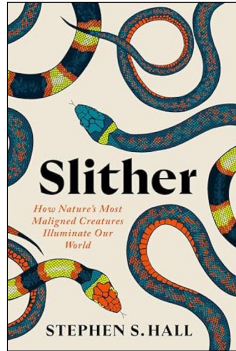


HERPETOLOGY

Slither: How Nature's Most Maligned Creatures Illuminate Our World

By Stephen S. Hall. 2025. Grand Central Publishing. 416 pages, 39.00 CAD, Hardcover. Also available as an E-book.

From sea snakes that vent nitrogen gas through their skin to avoid the bends, to female rattlesnakes ‘baby-sitting’ for one another (and being choosy about which snakes are trusted to watch the kids), *Slither* is a book about the diverse world of snakes. It is also about the people who love them, and includes explorations of the snake trade and the archetypal ‘snake guy’.



The varied cultural, medical (e.g., angiotensin-converting enzyme [ACE] inhibitor drugs), ecological, and bio-mechanical (robotics) contributions of snakes to our everyday lives are also central themes.

Slither is incredibly readable; Hall is a talented storyteller, and the writing flows beautifully. The font size (in the hardcover edition) makes for a comfortable read, unlike similar nonfiction titles that employ very small script. In addition to innumerable snake facts, there are stories from and profiles of researchers in the ‘snake fields’, such as biologists unraveling the mysteries of sensory pathways, temperature detection, and how a vertebrate can swing from an 11-month fast to digesting a meal 1.6× its body mass. (This eating habit spikes the fatty acids and triglycerides in blood plasma to a level 40× the lethal dose for humans; p. 167.)

At the end of each chapter is an entry of Snake Road, a short (~10-page) literary vignette centred around a specific place. Written in sans-serif font with grey backgrounds, these stand apart from the rest of the book and allow Hall to zero in on the specifics of one locale, tradition, or other piece of serpentine history.

Hall’s appreciation for snakes shines throughout the book. *Slither* presents readers with anecdotes, research, and escapades highlighting the incredible diversity of animals that live in treetops and oceans, lay eggs or bear live young, and have a dizzying array of sex chromosome systems—some similar to birds, others more akin to mammals. Not that all snakes reproduce sexually; at least one species bypasses sexual reproduction in favour of obligate parthenogenesis, whereas others switch between sexual and asexual reproduction to suit their needs.

There is something here for everyone, from nurturing maternal care behaviours to research on snake genitalia (hemclitores and hemipenes, anyone?). This book is for you if you like snakes. This book is for you if you don’t like snakes. It is also for you if you have a cautious respect (at a distance) for snakes. If knowledge is the cure for animosity, *Slither* is an exquisitely written, light-handed inoculation against the primeval wariness and culturally-acquired disdain for these incredible animals.

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