

Short notes and reviews

Amphibians of France, Belgium and Luxemburg

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Review of: **Les Amphibiens de France, Belgique et Luxemburg**. By Rémi Duguet und Frédéric Melki (editors). Collection Parthénope, éditions Biotope, Mèze (France), 2003. 480 pp. In French. ISBN: 2-9510379-9-6. Paperback.

As a general trend, accounts on regional and local herpetofaunas tend to become more and more colourful and extensive, and the classical borders between fieldguide, distribution atlas and handbook are fading. The book reviewed here is a good example for this trend. Edited by Rémi Duguet und Frédéric Melki for the "Association pour la Connaissance et l'Etude du Monde Animal et Végétal" (ACEMAV), it summarizes the state of knowledge on the amphibians of France, Luxembourg and Belgium. Thereby it bridges a very important gap, because no comprehensive account on this region was so far available – despite its "batrachophilic" character, expressed in the yearly import of over 2970 tons of frog limbs to France, 2100 t to Belgium and 34 t to Luxembourg for consumption.

These detailed figures (referring to 1999) exemplify the high density of detailed and original data that are woven into the text by the 18 authors who contributed to the book. The first 200 pages are devoted to introduce amphibians and place them into the context of the animal kingdom (chapter 1) and to discuss the basic patterns of their biology (chapter 2), biogeography and ecology (chapter 3) as well as their relationships to human culture and society (chapter 4). These chapters have an ample perspective, illustrating, for instance, representatives of many tropical amphibian families to be able

to sort the European taxa into a world-wide context. Many aspects of the biology and behaviour of European amphibian species are documented photographically, and the same is true for many of the regionally typical habitats. All species are allocated to different biogeographic clusters depending on their distribution pattern, and much effort is devoted to discussing the possible geological and climatic explanations of these patterns. Amphibian conservation is another focus, and the many detailed reports of regional conservation measures are especially interesting. Precise instructions are given to carry out successful amphibian conservation measures, and state-of-the-art methods for inventorization, mapping and monitoring of these animals are described. The latter bears relevance because previous efforts of herpetofaunal mapping in France have heavily been criticized by part of the scientific community because of their presumably too uncritical approach.

The more general chapters 1-4 are followed by a "Cahier d'Identification" which, however, strongly deviates from the usual dichotomic determination keys. Each genus occurring in the geographic area is shortly characterized on about half a page each, followed by similar accounts of all species of that genus. These characterizations are richly illustrated, including an original-sized photo of a typical representative of the genus or species and close-ups of the diagnostic characters. Clutches and larvae are satisfyingly presented as well, although drawings or photos of the oral disks of frog tadpoles are lacking.

The second half of the book contains monographic

accounts of all amphibian species occurring in the region, including introduced species such as *Rana catesbeiana* or *Xenopus laevis*. Each species is shown in several colour photos. Distribution maps document their occurrence per “département” or province. Advertisement calls of all frog species are visualized by sonagrams, and the book is accompanied (for a small supplementary fee) by a CD with call recordings.

The book heavily relies on the many excellent colour photos. There are more than 400 major photos, to which many small ones (for instance, in the identification chapter), as well as numerous line art and colour graphs must be added. Sometimes there even is a bit too much colour, and the many different formats of the photos (square, rounded, contoured) are confusing. But the amount and quality of the information does not stand back for the rich illustrations. In addition to the excellent summary of the current state of knowledge the book even contains – well hidden – some scientific novelties, such as the first detailed description of the advertisement call of *Rana pyrenaica*. The high scientific

level is also apparent from the consistency of terminology – for example, the unusual but very useful term “imago” is applied throughout, to refer to metamorphosed anurans in their first year. The editors are to be congratulated for their ability to achieve this consistency of terms and structure among the contributions from many different authors.

One shortcoming is that most of the colour pictures are not accompanied by information on the locality of the pictured specimens. Considering the otherwise quite scientific character of the book, it would also have been useful to include citations in the text, to allow readers to distinguish between data taken from the literature and original, previously unpublished information. Altogether, however, these criticisms are not relevant considering the overall high quality of this book, which is excellent in scientific, editorial and technical aspects and constitutes a landmark for future regional accounts of the European herpetofauna.

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