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## Biology Curators Group Newsletter

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# Book Reviews

AMPHIBIAN SPECIES OF THE WORLD - A  
TAXONOMIC AND GEOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE  
edited by DARREL R. FROST

Published by Allen Press Ltd and Association  
of Systematics Collections, Lawrence, Kansas,  
USA.

The book sets out to provide an up-to-date  
and complete checklist of all known amphibian  
species. For each of the 4014 species  
recognised by the book, the following data are  
provided:

1. Current name, authority, citation
2. Original name
3. Current location and museum collection  
number of type specimens (where known)
4. Type locality
5. Distribution
6. Comments

Whilst most of this information is standard  
for checklists, I found the comments in  
particular most interesting. These include  
information on synonymy, sub-generic  
affinities, further references to distribution  
records, and where relevant, protected status.

Similar details are supplied at generic,  
sub-family and family levels throughout the  
text. At these higher taxonomic levels, names  
of all contributors and reviewers for that  
particular section are given. A full list of  
contributors and reviewers and their addresses  
is given before the main text, thus allowing a  
source of contact for those requiring extra  
information. This list reads like a  
herpetological "WHO'S WHO" of amphibian  
researchers - as the publishers justifiably  
boast, the publication involves 59  
professional herpetologists from 21 countries.

AMPHIBIAN SPECIES OF THE WORLD additionally  
includes two useful appendices:

- (i) Full titles for all the  
abbreviation of book and journal  
titles included in text.
- (ii) Full titles and addresses for all  
abbreviations of museums referred  
to in the text.

There is also a complete alphabetical index to  
all species listed in the text. I found this  
useful, because one can approach at either  
generic or specific level and still be  
successful, e.g. Bufo calamita is listed under  
both Bufo calamita and calamita, Bufo. Thus  
if one is working with a superceded name one  
has a reasonable chance of success.

It is easy to be critical of checklists - we  
all know they are out of date before they are  
published (nearly 33% of the 4000 species  
referenced have been discovered in the last 25  
years), and I found it very annoying that the  
notes on protected status referred only to

species listed by CITES and the United States  
of America Endangered Species Act. Surely  
when so many international authorities were  
involved, it would have been relatively easy  
to include major legislative measures on a  
world-wide basis.

The original intention to include synonyms,  
subspecies and their citations proved  
impractical in terms of sheer bulk, but this  
is no great drawback since much of this  
information is available in more manageable  
chunks elsewhere, e.g. in DAS TIERRICH.  
The nomenclature used in AMPHIBIAN SPECIES  
OF THE WORLD is that which has been adopted  
by CITES, and without doubt will be  
(deservedly) the standard world checklist  
until well into the next century.

The publication is certainly not cheap -  
current \$85 - and unlikely to be the sort of  
thing that the majority of museums will rush  
out and buy. However, those undertaking  
research on Amphibia will certainly be well  
advised to obtain a copy.

As one currently actively (?) engaged in  
producing a similar checklist for oriental  
lizards, I can wholeheartedly vouch for the  
colossal amount of work involved in  
publications of this nature, and thus the  
price (to me at least!) seems fair.

If it's good enough for CITES ....

Adam Wright  
Herbert Art Gallery and Museum, Coventry

BRITISH PYRALID MOTHS - A GUIDE TO  
THEIR IDENTIFICATION  
by BARRY GOATER.

Published by Harley Books. Price £18.95.  
ISBN 0 946589 08 9

The Pyralidae is one of the larger families of  
British Lepidoptera; the current total being  
208 species. This new book will certainly  
stimulate interest in them by providing an  
up-to-date identification guide. It is the  
first guide to this family to be published  
since BRITISH PYRALID AND PLUME MOTHS'  
by B.P. Beirne in 1952 and has far superior  
text and colour plates. Each species is  
illustrated with photographs of set specimens  
by Geoffrey Senior and a frontispiece  
illustrates the various subfamilies in resting  
poses; a very valuable plate for beginners.  
The availability (or rather, non-availability)  
of Beirne's work has always been a problem, as  
reflected in this work by the often vague  
distributional information. This will  
certainly be rectified in future years.

For the museum natural scientist the book has  
the added advantage in that it includes many  
regular enquiries. There are the big 'micros'  
such as the Garden Pebble and Mother of Pearl  
which "I can't find in South (or Skinner), but  
they must be in it 'cos they're very big!";  
the pest species of the genus Ephestia (flour

moths) and the subfamily Galleriinae (wax moths) and finally the alien China Mark moths now established in numerous water-garden centres throughout Britain.

If you think the price is high, it is a very well-produced book, and secondhand copies of Beirne currently sell for over £30!

S.P. Garland  
Bolton Museum

THE DRAGONFLIES OF GREAT BRITAIN  
AND IRELAND by C.O. HAMMOND,  
revised by R. MERRIT.

2nd edition, 2nd impression, 1985. Published  
by Harley Books. Price £9.75 (paperback).

I expect that in fifteen years time someone will write an article for THE BIOLOGY CURATOR (as BCG newsletter will be known by then), reviewing the century's significant or most influential natural history books. Cyril Hammond's book surely will be among them. The impetus given to the Odonata Recording Scheme and the formation of a British Dragonfly Society are two major expressions of this book's influence. More remarkable than these, however, is the astonishing distraction which has afflicted such a large and single-minded body as British bird-watchers. Seldom has such a large shift in taxonomic attention been wrought by a single book. Long may it continue!

Yet this increased popularity might prohibit improvements in this book. I confess to feeling more at home with a dichotomous key than a field guide, and I suspect many entomologists would appreciate a key to species, not just genera. Space on the text pages could be used for hints on separating species in the field, rather than leaving the novice to decide from text characters and plates how to tell one from another. I still fail to see why Sympetrum nigrescens should enjoy side views which are denied to the other species in this genus.

I also regret the absence of synonyms from the check-list. A statement to the effect that first edition Agrion are now Calopteryx and S. scoticum is now S. danae would be welcome. Of course these synonymies are of no consequence to those who use English names, but I resent the need to employ contrived, 'vernacular' labels in order to understand nomenclatural changes.

The second edition added text and figures for Coenagrion lunulatum as well as updating the maps for all species. Several corrections and additions to text and captions were made. The second impression of this edition includes a short account of further important records up to 1985.

Those of you who have access to the 1977, 1983 and 1985 printings might care to compare the colour plates. Anax imperator and Aeshna isosceles demonstrate colour variation beyond that found in life. Clearly experience must temper our interpretation of these paintings.

In 1986 we are promised three further books covering the British dragonflies. I doubt that any of them will replace this classic which, thanks to its less expensive paperback format, will remain first choice for anyone working on this group. Because it is a classic, there may be a temptation not to alter the text. Hopefully a third edition will acknowledge the present faults and make an effort to correct them.

A.G. Irwin  
Norfolk Museums Service

WHERE THE CRANE DANCED  
by C.H. KEELING

Available from Clam Publications, 13 Pound  
Place, Shalford, Guildford, Surrey GU4 8HH.  
Price £5.85 post paid. Optional extra - a set  
of 14 photographs, price £1.70.

This booklet is a follow-up to Mr. Keeling's WHERE THE LION TROD and continues the theme, which is basically a foray into the history of British zoological collections and menageries. Establishments from as wide an area as Aberdeen to Exmouth are discussed as well as estate menageries and travelling menageries. Museum curators may find that a high percentage of their foreign vertebrate material actually originated from fallen stock at these early zoological collections.

Mr. Keeling obviously has a passionate interest in the subject and has very strong views, which surface regularly. These are that a zoological collection is a special and powerful educational tool and that many early owners and keepers learned much valuable information about their charges, much of which is now lost or disregarded.

This is a very enjoyable read, and is absolutely bursting with facts. The only thing lacking is an index to help find references to places in the text.

I look forward to his third publication which will deal with Ashover Zoological Garden in Derbyshire, which Mr. and Mrs. Keeling founded in 1955; now sadly closed.

S.P. Garland  
Bolton Museum