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LARRY DAVID WILSON

Department of Biology
Miami-Dade Community College
South Campus
Miami, Florida 33176, U.S.A.

BOOK REVIEWS

Japan's Schlangen (Volume 1), by Max Mori. 1982. Igaku-Schoin, Ltd., Tokoyo. 80 pp. ¥ 10,000. (approximately \$42.00).

This slim book is the first volume of a projected three-volume review of the snakes of Japan, including the Riukiu Archipelago and islands of the Yaeyama group. According to the author's foreword the completed work will be a color atlas of Japanese snakes, and also a guide for "quick, simple, and correct diagnosis" of the species covered. In my opinion, this first volume falls far short of both goals.

The species accounts (given in both Japanese and German) include information under the following general headings: classification, size, diagnostic characteristics, color, venom, and distribution. The style throughout is stilted and pedantic, and the content is not particularly informative. The sections on

diagnostic characters are especially discursive and poorly organized. In comparison with the terse, highly functional diagnoses of modern field guides, these rambling descriptions seem hardly "diagnostic." Although they may accomplish the author's stated goal of correct diagnosis, they could not be expected to work either quickly or simply.

A large portion of the volume (19 pages) is occupied by the color photographs, which for the most part are embarrassingly bad. Seven species are covered: *Rhabdophis tigrinus*, *Opheodrys semicarinatus*, *Amphiesma pryeri*, *Agkistrodon blomhoffii*, *Trimeresurus okinawensis*, *Trimeresurus flavoviridis*, and *Elaphe climacophora*. Color variants of *Rhabdophis tigrinus* and *Trimeresurus flavoviridis*, and a juvenile *Elaphe climacophora*, are thrown in for good measure.

For each species or variant a suite of three to nine photos, all of a single individual, is presented. The photographs are of living snakes, some of them showing the wear and tear of unhappy captivity. The pictures include full-body photos, and closeups from top, bottom and side of the head, midbody, and anal region or tail. There is no apparent uniformity to the style or scale of photographs presented for each species. Some of the photos were posed with the aid of fingers, which also figure prominently in the pictures, and for others the snakes were apparently anesthetized. The backgrounds are a variety of terrarium bottoms and table cloths.

Even conceding the difficulty of obtaining high-quality portraits of living, wriggling subjects (admittedly Isabelle Hunt Conant set a very high standard for such endeavours), there is no excuse for publishing photographs that are not sharply focused. Not only are many of the photographs fuzzy, but the color renditions are of extremely variable quality. I found it curious to encounter both poor photographic technique and inferior color printing in a book produced in Japan, a country that typically leads in both technologies.

It is customary to write, toward the end of an unfavorable review, "this book has little to recommend it." In this case, however, the book has nothing to recommend it, not even a reasonable price.

C. J. McCOY

Section of Amphibians and Reptiles
Carnegie Museum of Natural History
4400 Forbes Avenue
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15213, U.S.A.

Dinosaurs, Asteroids and Superstars: Why the Dinosaurs Disappeared, by Franklyn M. Branley with illustrations by Jean Zallinger. 84 pp. 1982. Thomas Y. Crowell Junior Books (NY). \$9.50 ISBN 0-690-04211-6.

While I don't expect that *HR* will be deluged with reviews of books for youngsters, it's certainly not inappropriate that we review some since the herpetological interests of many of us extend to childhood and the progeny of herpetologists sometimes share said interests.

This is a fine book, both in content and form. It will, I feel, appeal most to youngsters between 8 and 14 years old. The text is well designed with easily read fonts and adequate

line leading. The general readability and appearance of the book are further enhanced by the use of a good glossy paper. Ms. Zallinger's drawings are skillful, simple and interesting, and are nicely employed to break up passages of text. The book shows evidence of careful editing, and I did not notice any typographical or grammatical errors. The index is adequate, and a small list of further reading suggestions is provided.

The author gives very good and relatively unbiased accounts of contemporary theories regarding the great extinctions of the late Cretaceous. The major historical theories are also reviewed and evidence contradicting them is concisely presented. I found very little material to quibble over. On page 18, the author writes that "Dinosaurs were indifferent mothers." Evidence accumulated for crocodylians in the past few years documenting rather intense maternal care makes that generalization less acceptable for late Cretaceous Archosauria than it was considered 8 years ago. Similarly, I feel that the implication that the decreasing thickness of eggshells seen through the Cretaceous is a sign of reproductive decline (page 20) is somewhat premature. Paleontologists really do not know that much about the evolution of egg structure in dinosaurs, and assigning most nests accurately to genus would be an awesome accomplishment. Contemporary reptile eggs are not very thick walled.

These are really minor flaws. The author concludes with the fact that all young readers of active imagination and curiosity will find so intriguing: we do not know why the spectacular age of the great reptiles came to so precipitous a conclusion. In the long run, it is this same intrigue that most scientists find so fascinating in their professions.

GEORGE R. PISANI

Biological Sciences
The University of Kansas

Lizards of Western Australia I. Skinks, by G. M. Storr, L. A. Smith, and R. E. Johnstone. University of Western Australia Press, 1981. 200p ill. \$23.00. Obtainable from International Scholarly Book Services, PO Box 1632, Beaverton, Oregon 97075.

This is the first in the series of a projected 3-volume handbook on the lizards of Western Australia. The dragon lizards, monitors and geckos will appear in later volumes. Australia is blessed with a plethora of skinks; there are 15 genera and 130 species in western Australia alone and the purpose of this handbook is to make it possible for any interested person to identify each species. There are keys to the genera and to the species and there is a brief diagnostic description of each species, a map showing the distribution within the western portion of Australia only, and oftentimes an illustration of the head scalation. It is good to have such an excellent guide to this remarkable diversity of lizards especially when the senior author alone is responsible for the description of nearly half of the species listed. Study on the comparative ecology and behavior of these many closely related forms should be enhanced by the availability of this publica-