

BOOK REVIEWS

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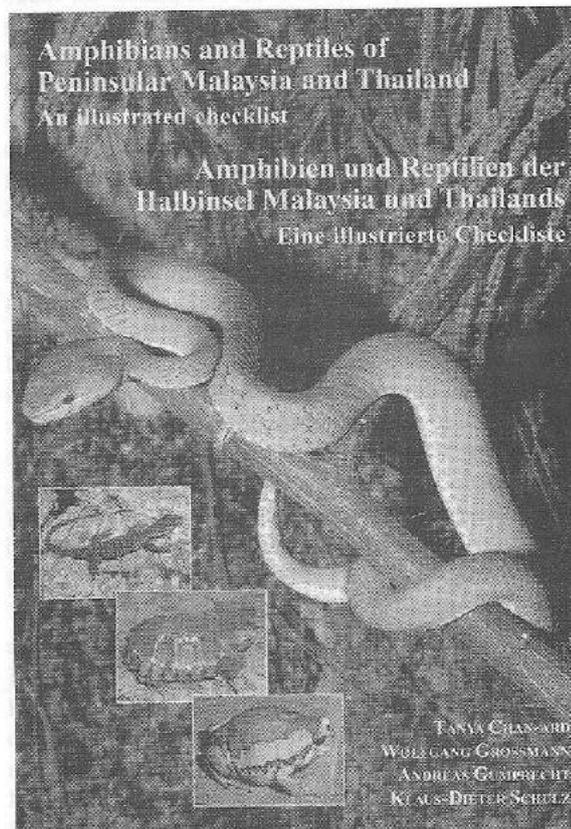
Chan-ard T., Grossmann W., Gumprecht A., and Schulz K.-D. (1999),
Amphibians and Reptiles of Peninsular Malaysia and Thailand. An Illustrated Checklist. —
Amphibien und Reptilien der Halbinsel Malaysia und Thailands. Eine illustrierte Checkliste.
Bushmaster Publications, Würselen, Germany,
240 pp., 566 color photographs; bilingual English – German.

Recent years have been marked by the publication of several general books on the herpetology of the southern portion of the Indochinese Peninsula, taken here in its geographical meaning, namely Thailand and Peninsular Malaysia (including Singapore). After a long period in the second half of this century when publications were rather scarce or limited in scope, with the notable exception of Taylor (1965) and Tweedie (1954 and its successive editions, especially the 1983 edition), a strong renewal of interest for this faunistically very rich region has arisen, with research input from both local and foreign herpetologists. Among these recent works, we may cite Cox (1991a), Lim and Lim (1992), Jintakune and Chanhome (1995, an important reference on venomous snakes which would deserve an English translation), Manthey and Grossmann (1997) and Cox et al. (1998), plus numerous papers.

To this series, we can now add the present book, issued in August 1999, co-authored by one Thai and three German herpetologists (their names appearing in alphabetical order), all with a long history of interest in the fauna of Southeast Asia and of numerous and valuable published contributions to the herpetofauna of this region. They carried out numerous trips to Thailand and Peninsular Malaysia, and a part of their experience in the field and photographs is gathered into this book.

We must say at once at the beginning of this review that they produced a superb work, although it does include a number of mistakes, which will be discussed below. The book, entirely bilingual, can be divided into four parts of unequal length, as follows: (I)

Introduction [pp. 3–11], containing chapters on methods, geography of the region, zoogeography, acknowledgments, and a colour map showing relief and a gazetteer of localities cited in the text; (II) the first main part, the checklist, divided into the checklist of Amphibians [pp. 13–20] and checklist of Reptiles [pp. 21–41]; (III) the second main part, the outstanding collection of photographs of animals in the



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wild or in a natural surrounding, usually three per page but sometimes one photograph nearly full page; the plate section is also divided into two sections, made of plates of Amphibians [pp. 43 – 88] then the plates of Reptiles [pp. 89 – 233], of which those of Snakes run from p. 149 to p. 222; (IV) Literature [pp. 234 – 239], with about 283 references).

The book, with its large size, appealing cover and high quality glossy paper, is very well produced, with a very clear and pleasant layout. The quality of the photographs is from very good to outstanding throughout, deserving a special commendation to authors and publisher. From an aesthetic point of view, this amazing book is truly a masterpiece.

In the introduction, the authors claim that "the aim of this illustrated checklist is to compile data on all known terrestrial and freshwater species of amphibians and reptiles and to supplement this by including photographs from various regions..." On the back cover, it is also stated that "this book contains some of the information... in the form of an innovative checklist." The authors clearly intended to write a checklist of the herpetofauna of the southern Indochinese peninsula, illustrating it with their numerous available photographs. This is an excellent idea, as it allows the readers to have both a complete list of the fauna of these countries, supplemented by one or more photograph(s) of the taxon which, hence, stops from being just a scientific name. The authors offer a real overview of the rich amphibian and reptile fauna of this region.

The introduction is interesting in that it gives a good summary of physical characters of the region. Data on climate are very useful, albeit lacking in detail. The discussion on zoogeography would of course have deserved a longer treatment, but it was out of the scope of the book. The authors emphasize the very rich biodiversity of this part of Asia, as their checklist and photographs show in a more clear way. We hope that this emphasis on the invaluable richness of Peninsular Indochina will contribute to a better awareness from governments and authorities to protect remnants of natural habitats.

Checklists are arranged by family, presented in alphabetical order within their class or subclass, genera being listed in alphabetical order, and species in same order within genera. Subspecies are not included nor even discussed in the checklist, but appear in photograph captions. In checklists, for all categories of taxa, the following information are given: scientific name, author(s) and date of description (au-

thor and date lacking for suprageneric taxa); English and German names; distribution, limited to the mere citation of the country of occurrence in the region dealt with (Thailand, Peninsular Malaysia, and Singapore); for some taxa, comments, mostly on systematic position but also mentioning the introduction of a species in a given country. The checklist does not contain bibliographical references of description, type localities; main synonyms, detailed range within countries or even ranges outside the region dealt with by the book, and discussion on authors' choices when systematic position of a given taxon is controversial. Therefore, it is much more appropriate to call this checklist a mere list of taxa present in the region, updating Welch (1988). It is regrettable that authors did not spend some more time to expand the scope of the list, in order to greatly increase its usefulness, especially with regard to species distribution. Comments on controversial taxa or recent synonyms, would also have helped readers unfamiliar with the herpetology of Southeastern Asia.

The second part of the book is dedicated to colour plates, which are undoubtedly the strong point of this book, both through their quality and the great number of species depicted, many of them for the first time. In the Introduction, the authors clearly state that they used pictures only of specimens from the chosen countries, and not from neighboring countries. This choice must be commended, even if some species could not be illustrated at all. Among the notable snakes of the area, one may regret the lack of picture of the so odd-looking *Xenodermus javanicus*, or of an adult *Ophiophagus hannah* (although the picture of the juvenile is highly interesting), but these are very minor regrets. The detailed and informative captions are conveniently set close to the photographs. These bilingual captions are undoubtedly a strong point of this book, as they give the scientific name, English/German names, and details on the exact locality, including elevation, of the depicted specimen, with a brief description of the biotope. Many species are illustrated by several photos, showing colour variation, including very rare morphs (see the amazing specimen of *Python reticulatus* on pp. 218 – 219).

Nevertheless, as it is, this book deserves numerous comments, as it falls somewhat short of its goal, due to weaknesses of the checklist. Ununderstandable mistakes and lapses, as well as typos, are quite numerous. This is rather surprising, considering undoubtedly very deep knowledge of authors of the subject, and the number of people cited in the ac-

knowledgments. We will limit here our comments to the section on Reptiles.

In the checklist, some species are missing, such as *Isopachys borealis* Lang and Böhme, 1991. Others are not included because authors regarded them as synonymous with other taxa, for example *Trimeresurus venustus*, considered a synonym of *T. kanburiensis*. This is a matter of opinion on systematics; after having examined the type and three other specimens of *T. kanburiensis* and many *T. venustus*, we do not regard these species as synonyms. However, as synonymies are not commented in the present book, many readers may think that, in the present case, *T. venustus* was overlooked.

The distribution of many species is incomplete; for example Thailand must be added to the distribution of *Calamaria pavimentata*, *Chrysopelea ornata* (despite the fact that the photographed specimens on p. 160 are from Thailand), *Dendrelaphis cyanochloris* and *D. striatus*, *Elaphe porphyracea* (despite the fact that the *E. p. coxi*, illustrated on p. 164, is from Thailand), *Gerarda prevostiana* (see Taylor, 1965), *Gongylosoma baliodeirum*, *Internatus laevis* and *I. malaccanus*, *Lepturophis albobfuscus*, *Lycodon butleri* (mentioned from Thailand by Cox, 1991b, 1991c), *Lycodon laoensis* (despite the fact that the specimen photographed on p. 171 is from Thailand), *Batagur baska*, and *Pelodiscus sinensis* (recently introduced species). In a similar way, Peninsular Malaysia must be added to the distribution of *Ramphotyphlops albiceps* and *Typhlops klemmeri*.

The genus *Amphiesma* is neutral in gender in the Checklist, which is correct, but feminine in the plate captions. There are typos in scientific names (such as *Hoplobatrachus rugolus* instead of *H. rugulosus* [p. 16]; *Rana adenopleaura* instead of *R. adenopleura* [p. 17]; *Limnonectes khochangae* instead of *L. kohchangae* [p. 66]; *Bronchocela christatella* instead of *B. cristatella* [p. 92]; *Oligodon purpuracens* [pp. 175–176] instead of *O. purpurascens*; *Psammophis condanarus* instead of *P. condanarus* [p. 182]; *Rhabdophis nigricinctus* instead of *R. nigrocinctus* [p. 186]; *Python curtus brogersmai* instead of *P. c. brongersmai* [p. 213], a taxon probably warranting specific status, see Shine et al., 1999), and in personal names (Günther and Mantey instead of Günther and Manthey [p. 37]; Manthey and Nabhitabata instead of Manthey and Nabhitabhata [p. 237; although correctly written on p. 22]). We would however like to point out the difficulties encountered with the transliteration of Thai names, and the importance, for Thai authors, to

both adopt a definite English transliteration of their name and to always use their last name. For example, *Chitra chitra* Wirot, 1979 [p. 41] was described by Mr. Wirot Nutphand (as spelled on his visiting card), whose name appears as Nootphand [p. 3], Nootpand [p. 237] and Nutaphand [p. 237]. In the same way, Jintakune and Lavan [pp. 3 and 236] should be cited as Jintakune and Chanhome (see for example Chanhome and Jintakune, 1997).

Species featured in photographs seem to be correctly determined in most cases. However, the "*Amphiesma inas*" from Phu Luang, northeastern Thailand, depicted on top of p. 153, is a member of the *A. sauteri*-group. We would like to emphasize that species of the *Trimeresurus*-complex are especially well identified, and the same applies to *Xenochrophis flavipunctatus* and *piscator*, which are in our opinion two clearly distinct species, contrary to the statement of Cox et al. (1998).

This book brings a good deal of new data on the herpetology of the region. Several interesting new frog records are added on the basis of unpublished data, for example *Paa bourreti* [p. 17]. Authors should also be congratulated for not having excluded undetermined or undescribed taxa, which are cited as *Genus* sp. For example, after having examined type specimens and members of many species in the course of our revision of the Indochinese members of the genus *Amphiesma*, we can identify the *Amphiesma* sp. on p. 155, as *A. bitaeniatum* (Wall, 1925), a species previously known from northern Myanmar and Yunnan, China (see Zhao and Adler, 1993). This new record for Thailand stresses the close faunistic relationships between the mountainous regions of Northern Thailand and southern China, as does the highly interesting mention of another species, *Bungarus multicinctus* (p. 209), also from Doi Inthanon, another species largely found in China. The species of *Macrocalamus* depicted on pp. 172–173, long confused with but distinct from *M. lateralis*, has recently been described by Vogel and David (1999) as a new species, *Macrocalamus schulzi*.

Our negative comments on some points cited above should not hide the fact that this book is a major contribution to the herpetology of Southeast Asia. Because of the aforementioned shortcomings of the checklists, the authors did not succeed fully in their attempt to create a new type of regional checklist. However, they fully succeeded in producing a new type of regional fauna, in which pictures and their associated captions speak for themselves to such an ex-

tent, and convey such a wealth of data. It is a must for all amateur and professional herpetologists interested in the region, and its photographs alone make it highly welcome in any herpetological library. And, last but not least, this book has another argument, namely its price: sold at 80 DM (about US\$45), it is really reasonable, particularly in view of its great pictorial quality. The publisher must be congratulated on this point, although it required the very regrettable inclusion of commercial advertisements, to which pp. 42 and 240 are totally dedicated. We would urge publishers of scientific books to refrain from this commercial practice as far as possible.

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