

LITERATURE

This column will give information about new literature, publications, books, etc. Tips concerning new literature are welcome, and should be sent to Jan Cor Jacobs, Van Diemenstraat 6-bis, 3531 GH Utrecht, The Netherlands.

BOOKREVIEW

by

ANTON VAN WOERKOM

Reptiles - Their Latin Names Explained; A.F. Gotch, 1986. Pp. 1-176. Blanford Press Limited, Link House, West Street, Poole, Dorset, BH15 1LL, United Kingdom. ISBN 0 7137 1704 1. Price £ 12.95, hard back.

Many people who work with reptiles in one way or another know the latin names by heart, but only a few understand what they actually mean. The author goes further than just explaining these names. A number of the ideas and rules of nomenclature are discussed in the first chapter, after which chapters 2 to 6 explain the division of the Animal Kingdom into separate groups (phyla, classes, orders and families). Chapters 7 through 11 deals with the latin names of chelonians, crocodylians, the tuatara, lizards and snakes (orders, suborders, families, genera and species), explaining their meaning and what its relation is to the reptile itself. The range of each reptile's habitat is given and an explanation for its english name. The appendix which follows includes a transliteration of the greek alphabet, then a bibliography, a glossary, a general index, an index of english names and an index of latin names completes the book.

I consider this book "very interesting and worth reading", and without doubt, written by someone who knows his stuff. This book is far from being a boring list of latin names; each

species is given its own short explanation and description. For example, the description of *Lampropeltis getulus*:

Milk Snake - *Lampropeltis getulus*

Lampros (Gr) shining, beautiful; *peltē* (Gr) a small shield; in this case taken to mean the scales, skin, as in the English pelt, 'shining pelt', a reference to the bright colouring specially noticeable after shedding the skin - 'Among the most beautiful colubrid snakes in the world' (Grzimek); *getulus* (L) belonging to the Getulians, a people inhabiting north-west Africa in ancient times; this is a mistake, as the snake was thought to have been found in the Morocco area, whereas it lives in the southern part of the USA and Mexico. It acquired the name Milk Snake because of a story that it sucked milk from cows while they slept; it is unlikely to be true.

141 Species of snakes are described in this manner. Because of its many interesting descriptions, this book becomes hard to put down and is a valuable asset to every reptile keeper's book collection.