

BOOKREVIEW

Snakes of the World, Volume 1: Synopsis of Snake Generic Names, by Kenneth L. Williams & Van Wallach. Original Edition, 1989. Pp. i-viii, 1-234. I.S.B.N.: 0-89464-215-4. Price: cloth bound \$ 31.50.

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When I was a boy of 15 years old and became interested in the idea of keeping snakes as pets, I was soon interested in the Latin names and the systematics of snakes. I kept a record of every snake name I found in a card system: on every card writing the Latin name, the author and the journal or book in which the snake was described originally. On the cards I also wrote synonyms I read about.

One day, when I laid my hands on a copy of the book 'Osteology of the reptiles' by A.S. Romer (1956) I was enthusiastic as it contained a complete list of the living and extinct genera of snakes. In 1978 H.G. Dowling & W.E. Duellman published their loose leaf 'Systematic Herpetology: a synopsis of families and higher categories'. In this publication all snake genera were listed per family and subfamily also listing the number of species that each genus contained. I think the biggest failure of this second publication was that it did not contain any synonyms, but it did give a good idea of the systematic relationship of the genera by grouping them in families, subfamilies, and even tribes.

The book of Williams & Wallach, that I now have in front of me, is more or less the opposite of the work of Dowling & Duellman: it gives no detailed information on the systematic relationship of the genera, but is probably complete in listing all known names and synonyms of genera and subgenera of living and extinct snakes. The names are ranked alphabetically and the list fills 162 pages. The valid names are written in upper case, the invalid names and junior synonyms in lower case. Examples of invalid names are '*Goniosoma*' and '*Ancistrodon*', the correct spellings being '*Gonyosoma*' and '*Agkistrodon*'.

After each name the author is listed or (in case of a misspelled name) the first person who used that name, and the year of publication. In case of an invalid genus the name is followed by the correct name or by the name of which it is a junior synonym, and in case of a valid name by the family to which it belongs. With all names, except for the misspelled ones, the type species is given. For genera whose validity is under discussion, several references are given, representing the different opinions. In the book the opinion of the most recent researcher is followed.

The book closes with 72 pages of references, in which all the literature, important for the systematics of snake genera, is listed.

During the last few months I have had the opportunity to test the book while working on the cumulative index of the first ten volumes of '*Litteratura Serpentina*'. During that time this book has been of great value, because authors of some articles vary the spelling of the Latin names. I used this book as a reference in order to use the correct spelling in the index. I did not come across any mistakes in the book and also all names I looked up were listed. I can only say this book is an important one: a real 'must' for everybody, professional or amateur, interested in snake systematics.

I eagerly look forward to part II of this series: 'Synopsis of living and extinct species', scheduled for publication in spring 1992.