

BOOKREVIEW

Handbook on the maintenance of reptiles in captivity.

By K.R.G. Welch, published by Robert E. Krieger Publishing Company Inc., P.O. Box 9542, Melbourne, Florida 32902, U.S.A.

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By Raymond Hoser.

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As soon as I heard about a book with a title even vaguely to do with keeping of reptiles, I usually think, 'here comes another one of those quickly put together books about keeping reptiles that is of little use to the more experienced reptile keeper who has graduated beyond keeping their first snake or lizard'. However this time I am pleased to say that this book is head and shoulders above most other readily available books covering keeping reptiles for several important reasons, which becomes apparent after even a cursory perusal of the pages of the book.

The book lacks illustrations, which although may be a disappointment to some, actually serves to divert the reader's attention to the real role of the book, which is the more successful keeping of reptiles in captivity.

The text is jam packed with the essential information necessary to maintain and breed most types of reptile in captivity. The text is as concise as is possible without the omission of important information. Where specific information is not given within the pages of this book, for example in relation to the treatment of ill health the reader is directed to where the information may be found.

The contents of the book speak for themselves in terms of what is covered in the book. The first section covers all the essential points about maintenance of reptiles in captivity. The fact that the author was able to so comprehensively cover this information within 20 pages is surely to his credit as it makes it far easier for the reader to digest the most important points.

Following is a section entitled supplementary notes, which covers a number of important topics essential to keeping of reptiles. Each of the seven broad topics covered are dealt with separately. They are as follows: 1. Record keeping, 2. Maintenance of a food supply: mealworms, fruit flies, and crickets, 3. Signs of ill health, 4. The isolation of newly purchased reptiles, 5. Mite infestations in snakes and lizards, 6. A note on aquatic reptiles, 7. Desert reptiles.

I was particularly pleased to read Oliphant Jackson's notes on record keeping. His thoughts on the subject and noting the huge importance of keeping good records in order to have long term success in keeping records are what I have been preaching for years. Jackson's noting that 'they (the records) may seem of little consequence at the time, but when things go wrong, that is when records are worth their weight in gold', was simple and very much to the point.

The third section of the book covers specific notes on a variety of reptile species, all written by people with expertise on the cross section of species covered. It is a pity that there are too many reptiles in the world for encyclopedic notes on every family's idiosyncrasies to be covered in a book of this size.

Section four, commences with an excellent species reference list which when cross referenced with the very comprehensive bibliography (well over a thousand entries), enables the reader to locate detailed information on almost any reptile group one would care to name.

The first appendix lists venomous colubrids. The second appendix lists known statistics relating to incubation of reptile eggs, temperature and duration of incubation in days, for a large number of species. Such information is extremely useful for readers attempting to breed a given type of reptile for the first time.

Appendix three lists Herpetological Journals and Societies from all parts of the globe. Following the bibliography is the index of scientific names.

In summary this book should be had by both beginner and expert alike. The book serves to put the beginner on the right track to keep and breed reptiles successfully and similarly keep the more experienced keeper following the right pathway to success. Before readers of this journal contemplate increasing their collection of reptiles or even building new facilities for their existing reptiles, I would strongly recommend their purchase of this book if they do not already have a copy.