



BOOK REVIEW

***Snakes and snake hunting.* Carl Kauffeld. 1995. 266 pages illustrated with monochrome plates. ISBN 0-89464-931-0. UK price £27.50.**

and

***Snakes: the keeper and the kept.* Carl Kauffeld. 1995. 248 pages illustrated with monochrome plates. ISBN 0-89464-936-1, UK price £29.**

Both published by Krieger Publishing Company, Eurospan, 3 Henrietta Street, Covent garden, London WC2 8LU.

David Blatchford.

The autobiography "Snakes and Snake hunting" was first published in 1957 and charted the early career of one of America's most cherished reptile experts. Kauffeld grew up in Philadelphia at a time when snakes were plentiful and at a time when an interest in snakes was so unusual as to open doors in a way that no modern enthusiast could expect. There is still a hint of the pioneer in this first book as black-top roads were opened across the vast deserts of Texas and Arizona and what were once considered animals of great rarity were collected using the new technique of "night-cruising". Kauffeld shared not only his discovery of snake's love of the road surface for nocturnal bathing but also gave such detailed information to the location of hibernation dens that subsequent hunters were able to find these treasured collecting sites and strip them

bare. A naive error for which he subsequently received much criticism.

This book commences in the 1930's and covers Kauffeld's field experiences where began his fascination with snakes and continued throughout his career in the department of Herpetology at the American Museum of Natural History under the leadership of G. Kingsley Noble. Kauffeld's particular speciality was in the rattlesnakes and with H.K. Gloyd, the noted authority on *Crotalus* and *Sistrurus*, he wrote two papers. Kauffeld and his colleagues collected seemingly vast numbers of animals from the field in a way that today would be impossible not just because the habitat has shrunk and therefore the number of specimens has reduced but more fundamentally because attitudes have changed. The modern herpetologist would be considered reprehensible to continue the wholesale removal of animals from the wild in a way that was positively encouraged during the time when this book was written. Paradoxically it is due to the efforts of field naturalists like Kauffeld that the contention that snakes should be conserved is no longer deemed such an extreme aim. Kauffeld grew up an age of relative innocence with regard to habitat despoiling and the last chapter of this book is a plea for conservation of snakes, certainly a very radical idea for the time.

The second title stems from the author's forty year sojourn as the curator of reptiles at Staten Island Zoo in New York where he eventually became Director in 1963. This book originally printed in 1969, contains

three chapters dedicated to the techniques of keeping snakes and one that describes some of his zoo experiences. But the bulk of the book is given over to retelling of yet more snake collecting stories. Kauffeld is a master of the art and his wide appreciation of nature extended far beyond snakes; this enthusiasm shines through the printed page.

Snake-keeping has moved on during the intervening 50 years when it was considered an achievement just to keep a reptile alive and feeding for even a few years. Consequently some of the advice now seems dated and in some cases just plain wrong. For instance Kauffeld was very dubious of the wisdom of cooling snakes throughout the winter and yet showed a canny appreciation of the metabolic needs of the reptile egg. This is a book for the snake enthusiast who has long past the stage when the advice it contains would pass unchallenged.

The chief joy of this book is in the accounts of field trips and in particular his frustrations and joys in attempting to amass a complete collection of all of the rattlesnakes. The fact that this complete catalogue consisted in some cases, because of their great rarity, of single specimens was readily accepted. Such a collection nowadays would be considered unethical and an affront to conservation. This is a fascinating account and a wonderful insight into a period when the foundations of what we now enjoy, were patiently being lain.

Krieger should be congratulated on having the coura-

ge to re-issue these delightful books in what is essentially facsimile reprint form. It is however a missed opportunity as many newcomers to reptiles will be unaware of the seminal role Kauffeld occupies in the herpetological pantheon and a more detailed biography (than that provided in the regrettably brief introduction by Robert T. Zappalorti) would have been a valuable contribution to these editions. In addition there are no new plates nor indeed any attempt to correct nomenclature changes. Furthermore the European price is high particularly in view of the modest nature of the volumes. However, if you are a snake enthusiast and these books are not already in your collection then buy them now.