

Book Review

TURTLES OF THE WORLD. Franck Bonin, Bernard Devaux, and Alain Dupré. Translated by Peter C. H. Pritchard. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006. ISBN 0-8018-8496-9, 416 pp.

Annette C. Broderick
Centre for Ecology and Conservation
University of Exeter, UK

This weighty and colourful book was originally written in French and has been translated by Peter C. H. Pritchard. As a scientist, the temptation to edit during translation must have been great, and in his introduction to the book, Pritchard admits to updating a few facts—and he is indeed extremely well-qualified to do so. That he has been through this book in great detail lends credibility, although he does point out that it was impossible for him to have checked out all the facts.

The book begins with a “General Biology” section, covering the topics of skeleton, organs, senses, sexual dimorphism, metabolism, ethology, threats, and protection and includes excellent diagrams of the lineage and anatomy of turtles. The bulk of the book is dedicated to detailed descriptions of all extant turtle species, which, depending on where you are in the world, includes tortoises, terrapins, and turtles. Or simply all Chelonians!

Divided into the two infraorders—the ancient Pleurodira and more recent Cryptodira—this book examines all species within the following families: Chelidae, Pelomedusidae, Chelydridae, Platysternidae, Trionychidae, Carretochelyidae, Dermatemydidae, Kinosternidae, Cheloniidae, Dermochelyidae, Testudinidae, Geoemydidae, and Emydidae.

For each species there is a colour photograph and map of its distribution with subsections on distribution, description, natural history, and protection. The authors also provide information on the date of description and the original describers of each species, which is a nice detail to include.

The reference section to this book is only two pages long and is perhaps my one criticism. Many facts are not substantiated with a reference to the source of the information, which would have provided authentication and allowed the avid reader to dig deeper into the literature.

If you would like an illustrated guide to the turtles of the world, this is the book for you! If turtles are your passion, it will be a book that you frequently pull from your shelf. This is a valuable reference book, not just for the coffee table.