

Book Reviews

Meyer, A., Zumbach, S., Schmidt, B., Monney, J.-C. (2009): *Les amphibiens et les reptiles de Suisse*. Haupt Verlag, Bern. 336 pages. ISBN 978-3-258-07351-4 (hardcover; in French, but also available in German).

This book focuses on the amphibians and reptiles that can be encountered in Switzerland, which are representative herp species of a large part of central Europe. It goes beyond the description of local species, in providing useful data and a large set of colour pictures of species and their habitat. This was made possible by the collaboration of four authors, all well known in the herpetological community and working for KARCH (Coordination pour la protection des amphibiens et reptiles de Suisse) along with support of additional authors (A. Borgula, M. Lippuner, B. Lüscher, J. Pellet, S. Ursenbacher, C. Vorbuger) for specific sections.

After a short introduction, a specific chapter covers interesting biological characteristics, such as the life cycle, reproductive behaviour, wintering, phenology, population dynamics, orientation capacities, fighting, basking and feeding. It also presents an overview of some parasites and predators. The next chapter is very practical providing tips for observation and species identification, a good introduction to the main part of the book: the portraits of 19 amphibian and 14 reptile species. To help identification, a checklist of the main traits is presented along with comments on how to distinguish each species with those they can be confounded with. A useful description of the habitats and behavioral traits specific to each species allows the reader to understand how interesting they are. Two distribution maps are presented: one of Europe and one for Switzerland, which uses a national grid of 5×5 km and shows recent (1995-2009) and old observations (200 000 in total). In addition, an histogram

presents the altitudinal distribution in Switzerland. Those interested in distribution patterns will thus find a valuable and actualized source of data in complement of the previous atlases (*Atlas de distribution des Amphibiens de Suisse*, 1988 by K. Grossenbacher; *Les reptiles de Suisse. Répartition, habitats, protection*, 2001 by U. Hofer, J.C. Monney and G. Dusej). The phenology is very clearly apparent in the form of a chart with distinctions for adults, mating and juveniles. The regional IUCN red listing category also informs the reader on the status of each species. The fifth chapter is conservation-oriented, an important aspect in a time of global declines. It browses through the threats to natural populations, such as landscape changes, illegal captures, and emerging diseases, and provides details for conservation measures. Finally, the authors devote five pages of the book to advice on health care in case of snake bites by the native Swiss species.

In conclusion, this is an interesting book that would fit adequately in the collection of herpetologists and naturalists. It will be a good complement to classical identification books and of interest for all those going to the field and wanting to know more on the observed species, and also to those interested in distribution patterns.

Mathieu Denoël,
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