

新刊紹介
Book Reviews

Colour guide to the snakes of Sri Lanka.

By A. De Silva

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The herpetofauna of the Oriental Region is surely one of the least known in the world and recent consolidated accounts of this fauna are few. This is particularly true of the island of Sri Lanka, 65,584 sq km in area, with an exceptionally rich herpetofauna, especially snakes (80 species in 46 genera). The fauna has been the subject of a few earlier monographs, including those Taylor (1950) and De Silva (1980).

The present volume, however, is a straight forward field guide, designed for identification of the Sri Lankan snakes quickly and accurately using the dichotomous keys. However, a wealth of new information has been presented on the natural history of, and beliefs concerning snakes in the country, besides an upto minute nomenclatural notes, not usually seen in books such as these due to publication delays.

Ansem De Silva is a major figure in the herpetological scene in Sri Lanka and has authored some 90 scientific and popular papers and articles on the herpetology of the country. A staff officer of the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Peradeniya, De Silva has over 25 years of experience with Sri Lankan snakes, snake bites and traditional treatment.

The book is divided into five major chapters, commencing with the zoogeography of the Sri Lankan snakes, which describes the geology, climate and vegetation, besides commenting on the origin of this continental island. De Silva convinces us of the uniqueness of the Sri Lankan herpetofauna, for which he suggests the recognition of this island nation as a separate subregion within the Oriental Region. What follows after a general overview of the Indian- and Malayan-elements in the snake fauna of the country are comments on the evolution, affinities and invasion of the snakes families in Sri Lanka, the Typhlopidae, Uropeltidae, Boidae, Acrochordidae, Colubridae, Elapidae, Hydrophiidae and Viperidae.

Separate chapters deal with beliefs concerning snakes in Sri Lanka, snake bites, their treatment and the natural history of the venomous species. A dichotomous key to the valid species of Sri Lankan species, essentially for identification precedes the species accounts, containing the current scientific

name, vernacular and English names, when available, distribution and natural history notes.

The colour plates are, however, not uniform, some species depicted being clearly posed, with no contrast. However, many of the species are figured for the very first time, especially the Sri Lankan endemics such as the uropeltids.

An eleven page reference list, containing the latest works on the taxonomy and natural history of snakes dwelling in the island nation of Sri Lanka completes the book.

A useful compilation worth the price. Especially recommended for amateurs, this may be the "best" buy among similar books on the South Asian snake fauna.

References

De Silva, P. H. D. H. (1980) Snake fauna of Sri Lanka. National Museum of Sri Lanka, Colombo. ix+472 pp.

Taylor, E. H. (1950) A brief review of Ceylonese snakes. *Univ. Kansas Sci. Bull.* 33(14): 519-603.

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"The SNAKE"

The SNAKE is the journal of The Japan Snake Institute, and publishes general papers on all aspects of the biology of snakes, as well as medical papers on snake venom and snakebites.