

**COX, M. J. 1991. The snakes of Thailand and their husbandry. Krieger Publishing Company, Malabar, Florida. 526 pp. Available from Krieger Publishing Company, Krieger Drive, Malabar, Florida 32950, U.S.A. Price US\$ 69.50.**

Visitors to Bangkok brave enough to venture out of the steamy life of nightclubs, massage parlors and go-go bars into the outskirts of the city will quickly realise that Thailand has been endowed with an incredible herpetological biodiversity.

Although this fauna is almost entirely Oriental in affinities, taxa from the Eastern Palaearctic are also represented. Endemicity among Thailand's snake fauna is high, the country being a mosaic of large river systems and mountain ranges that presumably have stopped or impeded the dispersal of many taxa. As in other parts of tropical Asia, the herpetofauna has been grossly understudied, although the recent description of new species, life history notes and new distributional records, mostly by local biologists, indicate that this is changing.

Not a local biologist, but someone who has lived in Thailand for many years, Merel Jack Cox teaches English at the American Language Center at Bangkok. Cox is an amateur herpetologist, and brings us this thick tome under review. Since the last word on Thai serpents has been the monograph by Taylor (1965), and as this work depicted museum specimens, Cox's book, printed on good-quality paper and with plenty of colour photographs is a useful aid for the identification of snakes in Thailand as well as in many other parts of south-east Asia.

The book is organised into two sections. The first composed of: a dedication, a commentary on Thai and other Asian beliefs about snakes (The Year of the Snake), Foreword (by Harvey B. Lillywhite), Preface (that include species added to/ excluded from the Thai fauna since the work of Taylor, and major range extensions within the country), Acknowledgements, and finally, the main body of introductory text.

Following the short (2 pages) General Introduction is the section on the geography of Thai-

land (15 pages), which described the physiological units within the country, the attitude of local people to snakes and snake bites in Thailand. What follow are longish chapters on miscellaneous aspects of the morphology, including scalation and biology (16 pages), general husbandry (16 pages) and medical aspects of husbandry (19 pages) of snakes. Section Two deals with the species accounts and the traditionally accepted scheme of classification, at least of snake families, has been followed. Each family, subfamily and genus has been described briefly, and the species accounts themselves include the current scientific name, recommended English name, the Thai name (in Thai script), a brief description of colour and scalation, a short account of the biology (if known) and distribution of the taxon. Notes on husbandry being only for the more familiar forms, it becomes apparent that we still know very little about the life histories of most species.

A substantial portion of the last section of the book is devoted to various miscellany. Included here is a listing of the herpetological societies of the world, climatic data for Thailand, a list of snakes protected in Thailand, an analysis of the Thai vernacular for various snakes (surprisingly without their scientific or standard English names, hence readers will be kept as ignorant about the identity of the snakes!) and finally, a 12 page references section and the index.

The quality of the colour photos is extremely variable, and range from excellent (e.g., *Elaphe porphyracea*, Plate 44) to appalling (e.g., the cover photograph of *Chrysopelea pelias*, whose head is partially hidden). In addition, photographs have been printed upside down (e.g., *Ahaetulla prasinus*, Plate 22; *Boiga drapiezii*, Plate 28), sideways (*Chrysopelea paradisi*, Plate 35) or are not sharp (e.g., hatchling *Python reticulata*, Plates 17 and 18; juvenile *Rhabdophis subminiatus subminiatus*, Plate 80). Many of the photographs are of posed snakes that