THE SNAKE  VOL. 22,  NO. 2 [1980]

Colour guide to the snakes of Sri Lanka.
By A. De Silva

Hardbound with dust jacket. 130 pp + 12 plates.
Pounds sterling 18.75 plus 1.50 for surface postage
and packaging. Available from: R & A Enterprises,

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, 63,584
sq km in area, with an exceptionally rich herpeto-
fauna, especially snakes (80 species in 46 genera).
The fauna has been the subject of a few earlier monographs, including those Taylor (1850) and De
Silva (1980).

The present volume, however, is a straightforward
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 up-to-minute nomenclatural notes,
not usually seen in books such as these due to pub-
lication delays.

Anselm De Silva is a major figure in the herpeto-
logical scene in Sri Lanka and has authored some
50 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 treat-
ment.

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 na-
tion as a separate subregion within the Oriental Re-

dition. 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 Colubridae, Uropeltidae, Boidae,
Acrantocodidae, Colubridae, Elapidae, Hydrophidae
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 avail-
able, 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 en-
dermics such as the uropelids.

An eleven page reference list, containing the la-
test 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
ix+472 pp.

(Indraneil Das. Animal Ecology Research Group,
Department of Zoology, University of Oxford,
South Parks Road, Oxford OX1 3PS, England).

"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.