

LIZARDS OF THE ORIENT: A CHECKLIST by K.R.G. Welch, P.S. Cooke and A.S. Wright. Robert E. Kreiger Publishing Company, Malabar, Florida, 1990. 162 pp, hardbound, price \$21.50. Available from: Robert E. Kreiger Publishing Company, Malabar, P.O. Box 9542, Florida, 32902-9542, USA.

"Here be dragons!" It is with these chilling words that ancient western cartographers mapped the unknown edges of the Mysterious East.

Dragons, a myth in the west, can sometimes be a terrifying reality in the east. As recently as 1912, Ouwens formally described the largest living member of the Order Sauria, the Komodo dragon (*Varanus komodoensis*) from the Indonesian islands of Komodo. Known to exceed 3 m in total body length, this gigantic beast is now also known to occur in the adjacent islands of Rintja, Padar and Flores, feeding on a variety of invertebrate and vertebrate prey - which very occasionally includes man!

The lizard fauna of the Orient, comprising, as defined by the authors of the volume under review, "Pakistan east to China, south through Asia, to include Japan, the Philippine Islands, Indonesia and Papua New Guinea", is very imperfectly known. This is surprising when we have spectacular forms- some with horns on the head, others that open "wings" and glide between treetops, change colour...and there are the sand-swimmers and club-wielders.

One reason for the lack of general knowledge about lizards of our region is certainly the paucity of books, and this one fills an important gap. Taxonomists, ecologists and biogeographers will find *Lizards of the Orient* invaluable, because of the near-complete listing of valid species from all families of the region, a section on the primary descriptions and latest taxonomic descriptions, distributional data. This is Kreiger's very latest in the series on herpetology, a companion volume to the first author's "Snakes of the Orient: a checklist". Both volumes are attractive library additions, with fake reptile skin binding, embossed gold titles and beautiful illustrations.

Following a short introduction, the book starts with a family-wise listing of species and subspecies. The account of each taxon includes

the name of authority, original name, a practical reference to the type description, type locality, and distribution. Nomenclature follows the most recent reviewers of individual groups, and in the case of problematic taxa, the scheme in Smith's (1935) Fauna of British India, Volume 2 has been followed. The style is simple and species and subspecies as well as higher taxonomic categories can be located with minimum sweat. An invaluable bibliography of primary descriptions of lizards and an index to generic, specific and sub-specific names concludes this work

Omissions of taxa are to be expected in books like these which deal with the fauna of a large geographical region, with its local, often not widely distributed or abstracted, journals. The following species are unlisted in the checklist: *Mabuia nagarjuni* Sharma, *M. clivicola* Inger et al., *Hemidactylus porbandarensis* Sharma, *Lygosoma pruthi* (Sharma), *L. ashwamedhi* (Sharma), and *Cnemaspis goaensis* Sharma. Perhaps the new edition could incorporate these absentees, plus the new forms described since the publication of this checklist.

The book compares well with the other recently published, somewhat similar work, that of Sokolov (1988: Dictionary of animal names in five languages. Amphibians and reptiles. Russky Yazyk Publishers, Moscow), which does not cite primary descriptions or distributions of the species listed, although the work is broader in scope, covering all valid species of amphibians and reptiles of the world. *Lizards of the Orient*, a less ambitious but more comprehensive venture, may thus be more useful, especially to lizard systematists. It is a very worthy successor to Welch's earlier snake checklist. My review copy already looks well thumbed.

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Indraneil Das  
Madras Crocodile Bank  
Centre for Herpetology  
Post Bag 4, Mamallapuram  
Tamil Nadu 603 104

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