

LES LÉZARDS DE L'INDOCHINE

by René Bourret

2009. Edition Chimaira, Frankfurt am Main and Reptiles et Amphibiens,
Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, Paris.

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The manuscript of a remarkable book (Fig. 1) was deposited approximately over the war years (1937–1947) at the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, Paris. Its author, René Bourret (Fig. 2), had previously gained attention for his masterful tomes on turtles (1941), amphibians (1942), marine snakes (1935) and land snakes (in two volumes, 1936a, 1936b) of Indo-China and adjacent areas of mainland south-east Asia. This particular volume on lizards, to be the last of his major herpetological publications on a complex fauna, was to be nearly relegated to obscurity, had it not been for the industry of the Curator of Reptiles of the Paris Museum (Roger Bour) and the willingness of the publishing house (Chimaira Buchhandelsgesellschaft mbH), to make the manuscript see the light of day.

Half a century may seem an awful lot of time, and indeed, much of what's written on tropical biodiversity has the tendency to appear dated in much less time. Bourret's newly published work, printed on good quality paper and strongly bound, however, will last awhile longer, simply for lack of anything comparable to the saurofaunas of mainland Asia (Taylor's, 1963, lizards of Thailand and de Rooij's, 1915, lizards of the Indo-Malayan archipelago come closest, but there are little faunal overlap between these regions), and the wealth of detail contained in the individual species accounts.

Réne Léon Bourret (1884–1957) was born in Nérac, France, and was sent on military mission to Indo-China, then part of France's overseas territory. Subsequently, he became a surveyor, and joined the Mining and Geological Survey after World War I, when he published on local geology, and also obtained his doctorate on the

subject. Despite his training and background, it was herpetology that was Bourret's main interest, and starting from 1933, he authored no less than 25 papers on the topic, including descrip-

RENÉ BOURRET
Docteur es Sciences naturelles

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Figure 1. Front cover of 'Les Lézards de l'Indochine' by René Bourret (2009).

tions of new taxa and new distributional records. Bourret returned to France in 1947, along with his herpetological specimens, photographs and notes, the former, through donation, ending up in the museums at Paris and Toulouse.