

Book Reviews

Book Review Editor's Note: We are continuing to use the current currency codes. Thus Canadian dollars are CAD, U.S. dollars are USD, Euros are EUR, China Yuan Remimbi are CNY, Australian dollars AUD and so on. You will find these are the codes now used by financial institutions and internet currency converters. I will include an updated note for the next few issues as a reminder.

ZOOLOGY

Animal Life

Edited by C. Uhlenbroek. 2008. Tourmaline Editions Inc., DK Publishing Canada [American Museum of Natural History], 662 King Street West, Suite 304, Toronto, Ontario M5V 1M7. 512 pages, 55.00 CAD Cloth.

If you are looking for a book to interest a teenager in the natural world [or an older person with a renewed opportunity to study wildlife], then this is the book for you. It covers the animal kingdom from dust mites to whales, from blood to senses and intelligence to behaviour. Each page is a collage of photographs, text or art work that provides a stunning visual experience.

The book has 21 major headings and about 75 "chapters." Each of these chapters covers two or so pages, with around 50 per cent being illustration. For example, "Scales" discusses the scales on fish, butterflies, reptiles and mammals. It explains how scales grow and shows 19 examples, with comments, from various animals.

Taxonomy is covered by a series of colourful diagrams using linked circles. Each circle is colour coordinated with the group it represents. In Animal Groups, vertebrates are orange and by seeking the orange tag on the top right of the page you get to a vertebrate page. Birds are coded purple, so you can now select the purple tagged pages for birds.

The book is packed with information. Each traditional class of animal has a page displaying photographs of representatives of all the major genera. For insects, there are beetles, bugs, moths, butterflies, ants, flies, grasshoppers and so on. In the attributes section, "Movement" covers walking, running, climbing, leaping, burrowing, slithering, sliding, flying, gliding and swimming. Where appropriate there are diagrams or graphs. Under "Breathing" [through lungs, spiracles, skin or gills], there is a graph of the dives by a Cuvier's Beaked Whale, showing it reaching 1900 metres. Under "Vision" you can see diagrams of how the eye is structured, the visible spectrum of light, and the difference between monocular and binocular vision, along

with seven photographs of very different eyes. The behavioural section covers hunting, feeding, defence, reproduction, raising young, societies, communication and intelligence. It is replete with pictures of animals fighting, scratching, migrating, building and digging.

The text has been written with great efficiency. No words are wasted, yet the message is clear and understandable. Younger children may need help with words like synchronous or pugnacious, but there are few such words. In general the authors use simple terms. However, each species depicted has a little table giving its Latin name and key characteristics.

As an editor I can see minor items I have issues with. The frog pages have a disproportionate representation of the gaudy tropical frogs over the common green-brown ones — it is not easy being green! I prefer to call *Naja haje* a Spectacled Cobra rather than an Egyptian Cobra. This snake has a wide distribution and, indeed, is now rare in Egypt. There is an inconsistent use of terms from the simple "odd-toed hooved mammals" [and not the scientific term Perissodactyla] to "Ranoides" [and not the simple "Typical Frogs"]. Some information is a little dated — the Bearded Tit is now called the Bearded Parrotbill. The type is very small, making it difficult to read for older people [I used magnifying glasses]. But these are really only editorial quibbles, and are not likely to be noticed by most people.

While much of the information will be known to experienced naturalists, they will still enjoy this book, because it is so well presented. And there will be some new knowledge for everybody. I did not know there is a frog that eats berries [instead of bugs!]. So this is a super book to give to a young person or even an older one who has just developed a thirst for nature. It will be fun to share with younger children and grandchildren. It reminds us all of the fascinating, complex, fragile and colourful world of the animal kingdom.

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