

Squirrels of the World

By R. W. Thorington, J. L. Koprowski, M. A. Steele and J. F. Whatton. 2012. The John Hopkins University Press, 2715 North Charles Street, Baltimore, Maryland 21218-4363 USA. 472 pages. 75.00 USD. Cloth.

Squirrels have been characterized as heroes (as in *Rocky and Bullwinkle*) but are more frequently seen as villains, pilfering a disproportionate share of seed from our bird feeders and making homes in our attics. Across most of Canada, the squirrel is the Red Squirrel, though many of our urban areas host the Eastern Gray (either as a native or introduced) as well. However, there are almost 300 species worldwide, from ground squirrels to marmots. And *Squirrels of the World* does a wonderful job at surveying this charismatic group of mammals. The book is well-written and I think largely consumable by most readers.

The photographs in this book are worth the cost of the book by themselves. Some, like the flight sequence of the Red Giant Flying Squirrel, are stunning; others represent photographic captures arising from great skill (or perhaps luck). The few pictures which are not striking are there, I suspect, because no suitable pictures of the species exist; sadly, a few species are without photos.

This book is organized similar to many "...of the world" books, with several introductory chapters followed by the species accounts. The taxonomy is brief, and could have benefited from the addition of the actual characteristics which split or lump different groups of squirrels with or from each other. Sadly, as is *de rigueur* for the times, the only phylogenetic tree presented is that representing molecular data...not that DNA isn't important, just that it's too frequently taken as the last or (gasp!) only word on phylogeny. There are brief chapters on palaeontology and anatomy, and an appendix showing three views of squirrel skulls from each

genus. Had there been text associated with the appendix, especially a key, I would have said the anatomy was represented well. As it is, the anatomical material is adequate, and will be likely enough for most readers.

The accounts, as expected, are more information-packed for well-known squirrels, and deficient for remote species of limited distribution. Where possible, descriptions (with subspecific variation), habitat, natural history and conservation status are given ample space. Each squirrel's distribution is given by a section in the text, and a distribution map. It is the latter which holds the annoying technical flaw in the book. For species with a small distribution, a locator map is appended in the bottom left corner of the main map. Since there is no border surrounding the locator map, and since waters are both the same shade of blue in both, and lands the same shade of yellow in both, the main map and locator map sometimes appear as one confusing map. Annoying to interpret at times, but not enough (by far) to be a detriment in acquiring the book.

As an indicator of the thoroughness with which this book was researched, the reference section contains an amazing 1400-odd papers; I almost hate to quibble here, but including the references to the original species descriptions would have made this section fantastic, not just the unparalleled literature resource that it is.

Overall, this is an enjoyable read worthwhile to nature enthusiast and biologist alike.

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