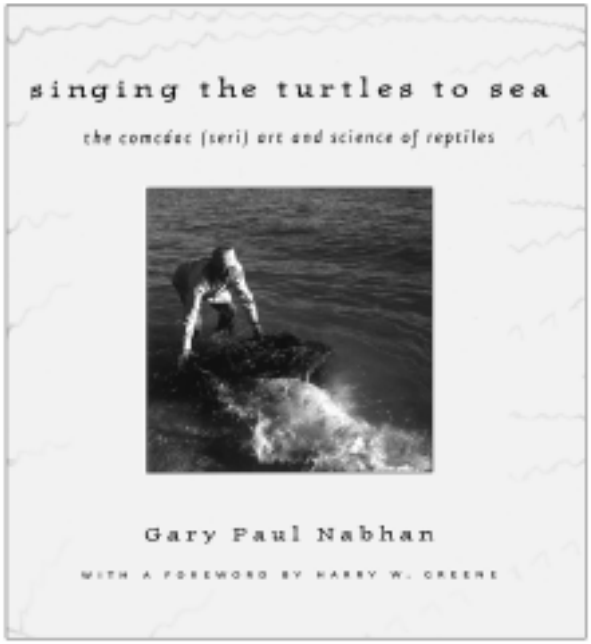
BOOK REVIEW

The Art and Science of Reptiles

Nabhan, G.P. 2003. *Singing the Turtles to Sea: The Comcáac (Seri) Art and Science of Reptiles.* University of California Press, Berkeley. xviii + 318 pp. Hardcover. $34.95.



Gary Nabhan, professor and director of the Center for Sustainable Environments at Northern Arizona University, collaborated closely with Seri Tribal Governors and the Traditional Council of Elders on this ethnoherpetological treatise. If ethnoherpetology sounds stodgy and suitable only for graybeards of academia, think again. Nabhan is an award-winning nature writer who brings both the Seri and the myriad reptiles with which they interact to life. Also, as Harry Greene notes in his foreword, lessons abound for all of us interested in conservation: "Why do reptiles, elsewhere so often reviled rather than protected, play such a central and positive role in the lives of the Seri? Can local communities sustainably harvest globally endangered organisms in a framework that encompasses both conservation and traditional beliefs? And more broadly, what can indigenous peoples teach us about managing and appreciating our surroundings? How can we as outsiders, onlookers, or even participant-observers in the life of a particular place steer between two incomplete and misleading visions: that native peoples always live in harmony with nature, and that exclusive reliance on Western science will save us from the ever more devastating impact of humans on Earth?"

Nabhan makes the case early on in his introduction that "indigenous communities' traditional ecological knowledge is a curious mix of scientific insight and artistic expression." He also suggests that this traditional knowledge "has the capacity to enrich our own views of the natural world and, accordingly, to encourage us to better protect natural diversity," but goes on to warn that, "If however, this 'folk knowledge' is categorically dismissed as unscientific and ultimately replaced by Western scientific knowledge alone, we stand to lose something of import," not just by diminishing the local culture, but possibly losing knowledge that could "help protect, restore, and recover threatened reptiles."

Following a key to the pronunciation of words in the Cmique Iitom language of the Comcáac[1], the foreword by Harry Greene, and his introduction, Nabhan organized this volume in two parts: eight chapters that collectively provide a narrative account of traditional ecological knowledge that uses the Seri people's voices to raises issues and offer general answers and a second part, consisting of a single "chapter" that provides "in essence a status report on what is known of the herpetofauna of the Comcáac homelands from both indigenous and Western scientific perspectives." Following part 2 is an appendix listing specimens of reptiles from the Sonoran Coast of the Sea of Cortés and nearby islands, an extensive literature cited (testament that, despite the volume's narrative format in part 1, this is, in fact, a rigorous study), and an index that is both complete and utilitarian.

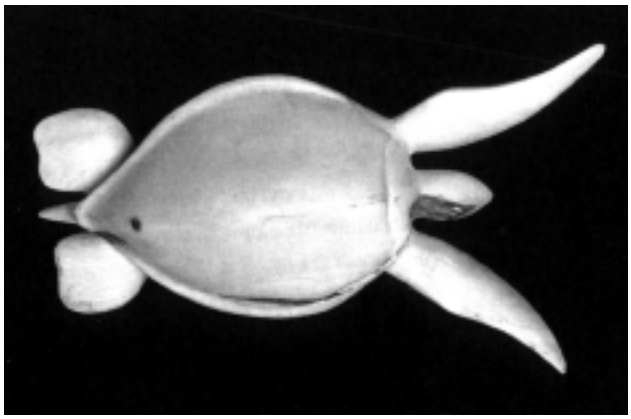
Typographical errors are very few and both editorial and production standards are high. On a minor note, I did not like the use of different fonts to distinguish stories from analysis or (instead of italics) to emphasize certain terms. I found that affectation distracting, although I thoroughly, like most readers, I suspect, enjoyed the stories, which brought a vibrancy to the narrative that might otherwise have drifted, at least occasionally, into the drier prose of traditional academia. I particularly liked those anecdotes that addressed cultural conflicts, many of which mirror those I've experienced myself in other places. More importantly, as a biologist, but not an ethnobiologist, I very much appreciated the excerpts from the notes and literature of the latter discipline that were used to highlight specific points and introduce individual chapters. They lent insights into perspectives of both the Comcáac and ethnobiologists that I, to my detriment, would otherwise have missed.

The color plates (25 plates on 16 pages) and the black and white figures are of consistently high quality, especially considering that many are historical and would normally reveal the ravages of age. However, I wanted desperately to see more images — especially of the phenomenally realistic portrayals of many reptiles by Seri artisans. I also believe that the book would have benefited greatly from portraits of the animals themselves (only a few species are illustrated), as many readers will not be famil-

[1] Nabhan uses "Comcáac" to refer collectively to the people and their culture and "Seri" to refer to activities peculiar to one or a few individuals within the community, as well as to products advertised to the outside world as "Seri Indian."

iar with the many peculiar forms native to the region. The latter concern could be addressed by keeping close at hand a copy of Lee Grismer's excellent *Amphibians and Reptiles of Baja California, Including Its Pacific Islands and the Islands in the Sea of Cortés* (2002. University of California Press, Berkeley — both it and the volume at hand are parts of the University of California Press's series on "organisms and environment," which also includes *Lizards: Windows to the Evolution of Diversity* by Eric Pianka and Laurie Vitt, 2003; reviewed in *IGUANA* 11:183–184). Although Grismer's volume does not address specifically the Sonoran fauna, it does portray and discuss the many endemics of the islands in the Sea of Cortés, plus many of the Sonoran species have close counterparts on the Baja California Peninsula.

A Sidewinder (*Crotalus cerastes*) carved out of ironwood by José Luis Blanco. *Photograph by Helga Teiwes* (from Nabhan 2003).



A Green Sea Turtle (*Chelonia mydas*) carved from Elephant Tree wood by Armando Torres. *Photograph by Helga Teiwes* (from Nabhan 2003).

To best illustrate the colorful range of cultural perspectives regarding Comcáac responses to reptiles — which include the naturalistic, aesthetic, mythic, and utilitarian — I have chosen to excerpt quotations (some rather extensive) from each chapter, mostly from the stories, which, as I mentioned previously, lend so much life to the narrative. Better than any summary I could provide, the use of the author's words dramatizes both the scope of this volume and much of its appeal.

Chapter 1: Islands of Uniqueness. Endangered Cultural Knowledge of Endemic Creatures. "It dawned on me that we were participating in a sacrament, one that has been performed ever since the Comcáac first became seafaring people. By blessing this yound woman's rite of passage with the meat and blood of *moosni cooyam* [Green Sea Turtle], they were linking her life to the very creature that swims through their culture's stories, songs, dreams, and diet.

"I felt honored and humbled to be part of the communion. But as I looked up again into the face of the sea turtle shining in the firelight, another wave of emotion washed over me. Because I once shared quarters with a marine biologist who worked tirelessly to protect the nesting beaches of sea turtles, I had for twenty years boycotted any restaurants that featured sea turtle meat, eggs, or soup.

"Caught up in the moment, perhaps flattered by the invitation to share sea turtle with Seri friends, had I suffered some ethical lapse, somehow forgetting that sea turtles are endangered? Or had I not let my ethics slip, but instead accepted a tenuous balance between how I express my concern for an endangered people and how I express my concern for an endangered animal?"

Chapter 2: Mapping the Comcáac Sense of Place. Seri Homelands and Reptilian Habitats. "I remembered what Amalia Astorga said to me when she learned a month ago that I would be going to the island she called Coftécöl, 'Giant Chuckwalla': 'Don't go out there unless you are with someone who knows the song to placate Coimaj Caacoj. He's the giant serpent who lives underwater between Islas Tiburón and San Esteban. By writhing along on the ocean bottom there, he churns up the water between the two islands much of the time. If you try to cross his place between the islands without paying him respect, he'll smash your boat to bits.…'

"Alfredo was in his late fifties and had harvested fish and turtles from the waters between the islands for decades. He had always maneuvered these waters in boats equipped with less than optimal equipment — old engines, cracked or bent props, leaking hulls. And yet, by following the routes he had been taught and remembering certain sacred petitions, he had been spared the difficulties to which other, more reckless, *pangueros* had succumbed."

Chapter 3: The Shape of Reptilian Worlds. Island Biogeography and the Herpetofauna of the Sea of Cortés Region. "I quietly crawled toward the resting chuckwalla, then advanced upslope from it,

Sauromalus varius is found on islas San Esteban and Roca Lobos and may have hybridized with *S. ater* and/or *S. hispidus* on Isla Acatraz. This is the focal species at the Captive Breeding Exhibit at Punta Chueca. *Photograph by Brad Hollingsworth.*

where I carefully began removing cobbles on either side of the ledge it was hidden under. As I dislodged one cobble, the partially exposed chuckwalla stirred, revelaing another, smaller, chuck tucked in safely behind it.

"After taking a deep, quiet breath, I made my move. My right hand clasped the bigger chuckwalla, a male, just in front of his back legs. He tried to dig further in under the ledge, but I lifted his lumpy black-and-buff body up into the air before he could lodge himself deeper into the crevice. He flailed his chubby legs for a moment, but then, as I stroked his underbelly, he grew calm and tame.

"He was the size of a Sunday newspaper rolled up and thrown onto your porch. That made him far larger than any I had seen on the mainland, and he had many more black blotches than those I recalled from my earlier trip to Isla San Esteban with two Seri men from Punta Chueca. I remembered how Alfredo López had held one of the Piebald Chuckwallas there, looking at its buttonlike femoral pores on the back legs, which he likened to poker chips.

"'Yes, this one is a male,' he said, laughing and pointing to the swollen hormone-charged pores lining the crease of its back leg. 'He's muy macho; see his winnings?' He told a story about chuckwallas being good gamblers and winning their femoral-pore 'poker chips' from other inhabitants of San Esteban.

"I held my own chuckwalla up in the dusky light and saw that five or six large pores were oozing goo out along the ridges of each back leg. This confirmed that the chuck was indeed a male, but I was not sure what species he was. He looked as though he had gathered traits from several different species, like the melting-pot descendants of immigrants who had passed through Ellis Island off New York. [See also Hollingsworth. 2004. *IGUANA* 11:78–85].

"Whatever his species, this giant was *my* 'winnings' for the night. Catching him was no big deal, but spending time in the hunt had helped me better understand a creature whose history is intimately linked to that of the Comcáac. I sensed that the Comcáac had created a distinctive 'breed' of chuckwallas, just as much as the Navajo had shaped their own breed of Churro sheep, and Australian aborigines had shaped the course of dingo evolution.

"My friends hollered for me to get back to the boat, and I placed the chuckwalla on a flat rock still warm from the day, released it, and watched as it lumbered off into the darkness. Once I and my party headed home, vacating the island, the chuckwalla once again became the largest flightless land animal on Isla Alcatraz, the 1,800-gram king of the mountain."

"To say that there are Seri individuals intimately familiar with the locations of reptile nest sites is to understate the matter. Between 1978 and 1982 biologists S. Reyes-Osorio and R. B. Bury conducted Desert Tortoise surveys of Isla Tiburón, working together with Seri field assistants, and in so doing they claimed to have recorded one of the highest densities of Desert Tortoises ever found. One of their Seri fieldhands, Alfonso Méndez, later told me that he worked as their "finder" of Desert Tortoise congregating places. He recalled finding several hibernating groups — one numbering no less than seventy-five individuals holed up in a single cave — that the biologists told him were much larger than any they had ever found on their own.

Whether this Seri hunter simply had a knack for tracking down hibernating colonies, or whether he had a good recall of places where other Seri had formerly found them, I do not know. However, in spring 2001, Méndez joined me and my students on Isla Tiburón and relocated several tortoise caves he had seen previously. Historically, both Comcáac women and men would seek out these *iime* shelters with the aid of dogs, which could smell the hibernating Desert Tortoises long before humans could see them. (The exact location of some *iime* for chuckwallas, tortoises, and rattlesnakes could also be deduced by tracing the tracks and tail draggings left on sand- or silt-covered beaches back into the rocks where these animals were sequestered.) Since any given area has only a few suitable shelters, these *iime* were likely used by generations of tortoises over many centuries. The Comcáac community has consequently kept in its collective memory a living record of where particularly large congregations of Desert Tortoises can be encountered during extended periods of cold or drought."

"… herpetologist Lee Grismer has concluded that the presence of spiny-tailed iguana populations on Islas San Esteban and Cholludo 'is probably the result of aboriginal introduction by Seri Indians who once inhabited the island. The coastal distribution of *C*[*tenosaura*]. *hemilopha* on mainland Sonora only extends as far north as near Guaymas, approximately 115 km south of the nearest coastal mainland locality opposite Isla San Esteban.'

This distributional anomaly is matched by an ecological anomaly: San Esteban is the only island out of more than one hundred in the Sea of Cortés where both spiny-tailed iguanas and gigantic chuckwallas occur together. Contrary to predictions from ecological niche theory, they successfully coexist there, foraging for largely the same plants in the very same habitat, at the same time of day, over the same season." (See also Grismer. 2002. *IGUANA* 9:3–8).

"Preliminary results illustrate the obvious: (1) children more easily catch lizards than adults do; and (2) contemporary Comcáac villages serve as artificial oases for some native species, but they repel others. Despite the fact that villages offer permanent sources of water, structural heterogeneity for roosts, and plenty of artificial crevices for nesting or escape, they also pose significant threats to reptilian well-being: fast cars, carnivorous pets, parasites, and microbes. Only Western Whiptails and Side-blotched Lizards seem to thrive in the presence of such perils, while Tree Lizards, banded geckos, and Zebra-tailed Lizards find these new habitats to be both a blessing and a curse. The risks of Comcáac villages today are vastly different from those of the historic encampments, where a small number of families stayed for only a few weeks and so had a relatively short-term impact on lizards' and snakes' habitat."

Chapter 4: Naming the Menagerie. How to Sort One Snake from Another. "During a time when the Comcáac knew just one kind of chuckwalla within their prehistoric territory, it was apparently called simply *coof*, polysemous with a verb, 'to hiss' or 'to blow air.' Later, when they encountered a second kind of chuckwalla on Isla San Lorenzo or Ángel de la Guarda, they called this large, dark-colored species *coof coopol*, or 'chuckwalla blackish.'

However, when they came upon another kind of reptile in the mountains that reminded them of chuckwallas, they fashioned a name for it using a modifier in front of the generic term for chuckwalla: *hast coof*, for instance, a name that means something like 'chuckwalla-like mountain dweller' and is now used for collared lizards."

Chapter 5: Reptiles as Resources, Curses, and Cures. How the Comcáac Recognize Beauty, Utility, and Danger. "While the mere sight of certain animals would terrify my own aunts or my O'odham neighbors, the same sickening feeling came to my Comcáac friends not with rattlesnakes but with geckos. Not with seasnakes but with night lizards. Not with coralsnakes but with Desert Iguanas. And not with Gila Monsters but with collared lizards.

"To the Comcáac, it does not matter that the former creatures deliver toxic bites while the latter are known to be nonvenomous. Their fear of particular reptiles is rooted in the notion that considerable psychosomatic harm can come to anyone who does not behave appropriately around geckoes, night lizards, Desert Iguanas, collared lizards, and even their usually benign friends horned lizards, Desert Tortoises, and Leatherback Turtles.

The Desert Tortoise (*Gopherus agassizii*) features prominently in Seri traditions. *Photograph by Thomas Wiewandt.*

"Danger, like beauty and utility, is in the eye of the beholder."

"It is remarkable how many men, women, and children in the Comcáac community handle venomous and nonvenomous snakes, dead or alive, without the flinching of their non-Seri neighbors. They have often had to evict rattlesnakes from their camps or kill them with stones or sticks or process the skins, meat, oil, and bones for practical uses. … Children grow up among elders who carry, skin, butcher, and roast or boil snakes, iguanas, and turtles without blinking an eye, and boys acquire these skills themselves at an early age. They learn stories and songs about serpents, some of them mythical giants who live high in the mountains or deep within the ocean. They see rattlesnake designs elaborated in basketry and carvings, and women wearing rings made from Gila Monster and Western Coralsnake skins. Clearly, one cannot consider the Comcáac as ophidiophobic, or snake-aversive, as many of the other cultures surrounding them."

"The capture or use of Desert Iguanas is simply not an option for the Comcáac. In general, it appears that some of the taboos associated with Desert Iguanas, Regal Horned Lizards, Leatherback Turtles, and Desert Tortoises are associated with ancient stories referring to the time when animals could understand Cmique Iitom and could themselves speak and argue. Seri individuals who fail to heed the message of these stories put themselves at risk, becoming susceptible to illness or even death. …, Seri who break a taboo and realize it often experience great anxiety and psychosomatic trauma that can be relieved only through a shamanistic purification ritual that restores healthy relationships with particular animals."

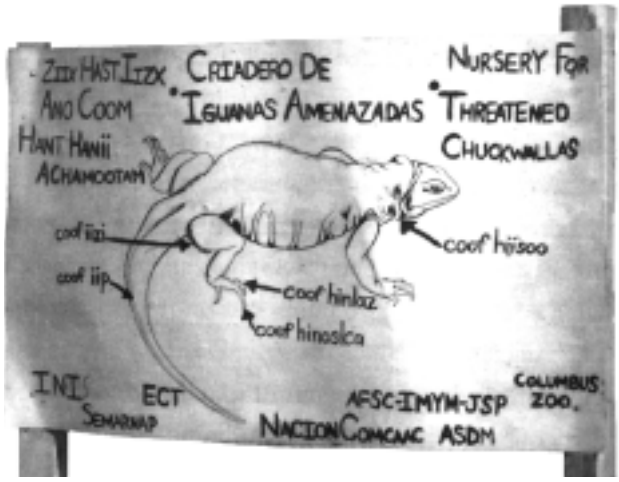
Chapter 6: What Eats from the Turtle's Shell, What the Turtle Eats. Comcáac Perceptions of Local Ecological Interactions. "…, *hamísj catójoj*, the name for what English speakers know as the Brown Vinesnake (*Oxybelis aeneus*), refers to this snake's mimicry of the stems of Ashy Limberbush (*Jatropha cinerea*), on which it hides. This name makes perfect sense (and is therefore quite memorable) in a hyperarid land where few true vines even grow."

"Some ecological processes may simply be more fascinating to the human mind than others, regardless of their practical value. I have been struck at the number of times a Seri ecotourist guide and foreign naturalists have stood together watching ecological interactions in utter delight: those between whipsnake and rattler, horned lizard and ant, or tortoise and cactus. Academic scientists may ask different questions and answer them using different tools than do local naturalists, but the same sense of biophilia holds when they witness a female sea turtle lumber onto a beach to lay her eggs or a spiny-tailed iguana climb high into the arms of a Cardón cactus."

Chapter 7: The Comcáac as Conservationists. Practicing What They Preach, and Benefiting from Alliances. Responding to a proposal by "several agencies in the federal and state governments … jointly proposing that the Comcáac community assume complete management authority over the natural resources of the islands" (Islas Tiburón and San Esteban), "Tribal Governor Pedro Romero took over the microphone. He reminded the entire congregation that his people had been the legitimate managers and stewards of the two islands all along. In an eloquent philosophical tone, he posed a series of rhetorical questions to the audience: Why, he asked, were there so many animals still on these two islands that scientists could not find anywhere else? Perhaps because the Comcáac did not deplete their populations as some of their neighbors had done elsewhere. Why were animals like the Desert Tortoise more abundant in Comcáac territory than nearly anwhere else scientists had studied them? Perhaps because Comcáac spiritual traditions taught respect for these animals, and so they had reasons to refrain from hunting tortoises at certain times, or under certain conditions. Why should the Comcáac be the managers of this land and not the state or the federal government? Perhaps because the Comcáac had detailed local knowledge of the resources unique to the area, and had shared this knowledge down through the generations over centuries. Their ancestors had lived and died there. For that reason alone, it would be hard for them to ever let this land be destroyed or developed."

Chapter 8: The Historic Decline and Recent Revival of Traditional Ecological Knowledge. "During the fall of 2000, a traditional school was inaugurated in Punta Chueca by elder Antonio Robles as one more means of providing young Seri individuals with training in the native flora and fauna and their curative powers. The opening of the school was celebrated with a feast of traditional foods, including fish, reptile meat, prickly pear, mesquite, and agave.

"Perhaps the children attending this school will be more prone to heed the words of their former tribal governor, Pedro Romero, when he said that 'Islas Tiburón and San Esteban and the midriff of the Sea of Cortés have great economic and cultural significance for us, the Comcáac. It is from here that our people obtained an important part of our nutritional and spiritual sustenance, and received the strength to survive times of great social or natural adversity."



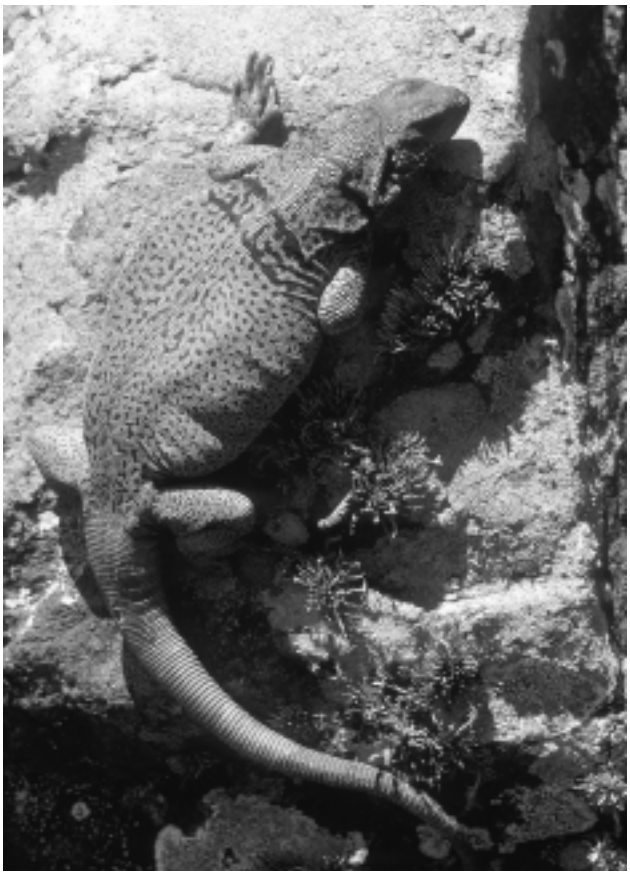
Sign at the Chuckwalla (*Sauromalus varius*) Captive Breeding Exhibit at Punta Chueca. *Photograph by Karen Krebbs* (from Nabhan 2003).

Part 2, Chapter 9: Accounts of Reptiles Known by the Comcáac. "Part 2 (chapter 9) is perhaps a more 'standard' ethnobiolgoical monograph in that it offers a species-by-species account of the herpetofauna of the central Sonoran coast and its adjacent islands." I use two entries in their entirety as examples to illustrate the combination of traditional and practical Seri lore with "Western" science. Cited references are listed at the end of this review.

Sauromalus hispidus, *S. obesus* (*S. ater*[2]), *S. varius*, and hybrids
English common names: Spiny (Black) Chuckwalla, Northern Chuckwalla, and Piebald (Isla San Esteban) Chuckwalla, respectively
Spanish name: *iguana*
Comcáac names: *coof coopol*, *ziix hast iizx ano coom*, and *coof*, respectively

Coof is related to the verb *coof*, meaning "to hiss, snort, or puff" like a chuckwalla. *Ziix hast iizx ano coom* loosely means "living thing that wedges itself into a rock crevice." Becky Moser informs me that *iizx* is from the verb *cazx*, "to tear or to split," which describes the sound heard when one tries to remove an inflated chuckwalla from its crevice. These three chuckwallas are distinguished from one another by color and size, with the *coof coopol* of Islas San Lorenzo, Ángel de la Guarda, and nearby islets being the darkest and least blotchy in coloration. The shrubs, caves, and crevices that these species frequent are well known to contemporary Comcáac hunters, who formerly scared the animals out of hiding by whirring wandlike branches of *Asclepias* milkweeds overhead to make a windlike noise (Felger and Moser 1985). The bloated animals were also deflated with pointed sticks and removed by hand. Although the San Esteban people had few land animals available as food, it is said that they did not particularly like the taste of chuckwallas so did not overexploit them (Bowen 2000). In one cave near the mouth of Arroyo Limantur, says Ernesto Molina, during the winter they stacked themselves atop one another clear to the ceiling, in a behavior which he called *ano yasnan*, "blanketing" or "stacking"; here they would have been particularly vulnerable to overharvesting.

Tom Bowen and the Mosers have recorded an oral history which suggests supernatural punishment for those who senselessly kill or drown chuckwallas. As Bowen (2000) puts it, "*Hast Cmique* said it is wrong to kill animals without reason…. A person who mistreats a chuckwalla by throwing it into the sea will



Sauromalus ater is the species found on the mainland surrounding the Gulf of California. *Photograph by Brad Hollingsworth.*

[2] Actually, the proper scientific name is *Sauromalus ater*; see Hollingsworth (2004. *IGUANA* 11:78–85) and the transcript of the ICZN Opinion 2072 (case 3143), *IGUANA* 11:86.

be punished when he is at sea, perhaps by being subjected to strong winds."

The chuckwallas themselves are known to relish ironwood leaves and cholla cactus flower buds. A song composed by Jesús Félix tells of a chuckwalla waiting for the sun to break through the fog before it goes to eat its favorite things. When José Juan Moreno went foraging with me on Isla San Esteban, he found a female chuckwalla on a ridge covered by cacti and agaves, and caught it with little trouble. At first I throught her snout had blood on it from biting José Juan's finger, but he laughed and said that her reddish mouth was from subsisting on *Pitahaya agria*, "sour cactus fruit" (*Stenocereus gummosus*), over the previous weeks. Moreno disabled his catch by twisting her legs, and kept the animal alive until he was back home in Punta Chueca. He savored the meat, including the fat-laden tail, the next morning.

Zooarcheologist Richard White (pers. comm.) informs me that the Comcáac have occasionally brought island chuckwallas to the mainland for release. Only recently have they formally initiated translocation for the purpose of wildlife conservation. Several Comcáac reported to me that their ancestors released chuckwallas from San Esteban onto Tiburón and Punto Sargento, and I was able to confirm the latter. In September 1998, the Comcáac community in Punta Chueca launched a chuckwalla captive breeding program with one male and three females from Isla San Esteban. By September 1999, the weakest female had died, but three other males had been recruited from the island. The Seri then discussed plans to shift the sex ratio of the group and expand their foraging area and native plant diet. The project, which they named *Ziix Hast Iizx Ano Coom Hant An Ihacámot*, meaning "Chuckwalla Nursery Grounds Refuge," remains successful as of the date of this publication.

Chilomeniscus stramineus may be banded or uniformly colored and common names reflect that difference, although both pattern phases represent the same species. *Photograph by Robert Powell.*

Chilomeniscus stramineus (*C. cinctus*[3])
English common name: Bandless Sandsnake
Spanish names: *culebra de los médanos, coralillo falso*
Comcáac name: *hapéquet camízj*

Hapéquet camízj means something akin to "causing a pregnant woman to have a well-formed child." The bandless morph of this sand-loving snake is treated with great affection by the Comcáac. They know that it burrows effortlessly through sand, and if they encounter one while digging, they will hold it in their hands and stroke it, then release it. It will not bite them; for their part, the Comcáac felt that they must protect this friendly snake from predatory coralsnakes and uncaring humans.

To ensure that a baby will be born with lovely skin, this snake is captured and passed across the belly or the small of the back of the expectant mother. This ritual, performed less and less frequently, is also intended to give pregnant women hopeful feelings and help them give birth to good-looking children.

Did I enjoy this book? Immensely. Why? I'm less sure. Part of its allure may have been pleasant memories of fieldtrips to the region around the Sea of Cortés and part of it may be a general fascination with desert landscapes and their reptilian faunas, but I think most of my favorable response can be attributed to a combination of an appreciation for new insights into favorite topics and getting caught up in the author's enthusiasm for his subject. Because I believe strongly in a conservation ethic, I also benefited from a better understanding of relationships between aboriginal peoples and the nature on which they depend.

Will other readers be equally enthralled? Maybe. Despite a broad interest in etymology and the generally utilitarian key to pronunciation of words in Cmique Iitom, I often became frustrated with my inability to translate the strangely spelled words into anything pronounceable. Others may find this even more daunting. Also, without a familiarity with the animals of the region prior to reading the book, many of the references and insights make sense only in retrospect. Although this is a common trait in academic monographs, casual readers should be fully aware that this is inevitable — or make sure to have the aforementioned copy of Grismer's guide to the Baja California herpetofauna readily at hand. If, however, one can cope with those two issues, the author's ability as a science writer as well as a scientist will inevitably make reading this volume eminently enjoyable. Nabhan's prose is down-to-earth and resorts to discipline-specific jargon much less frequently than almost any book that is comparably authoritative. He has invested much of his life in getting to know the human subjects of this narrative, and his obvious like of them, as well as of the animals who share the limelight, carries over to the printed page. His formal training as an ethnobotanist lends insights that introduce new dimensions for consideration by those of us whose expertise and interests have largely been limited to animals. Ultimately, however, what makes this book a winner is its unique ability to provide perspectives on animals in which we share an interest and which we could otherwise acquire only by spending years in the Comcáac territories.

References

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Felger, R.S. and M.B. Moser. 1985. *People of the Desert and Sea: Ethnobotany of the Seri Indians.* University of Arizona Press, Tucson.

[3] The name *Chilomeniscus cinctus* is no longer considered valid; see Powell (2004. *IGUANA* 11:7) and references cited therein.