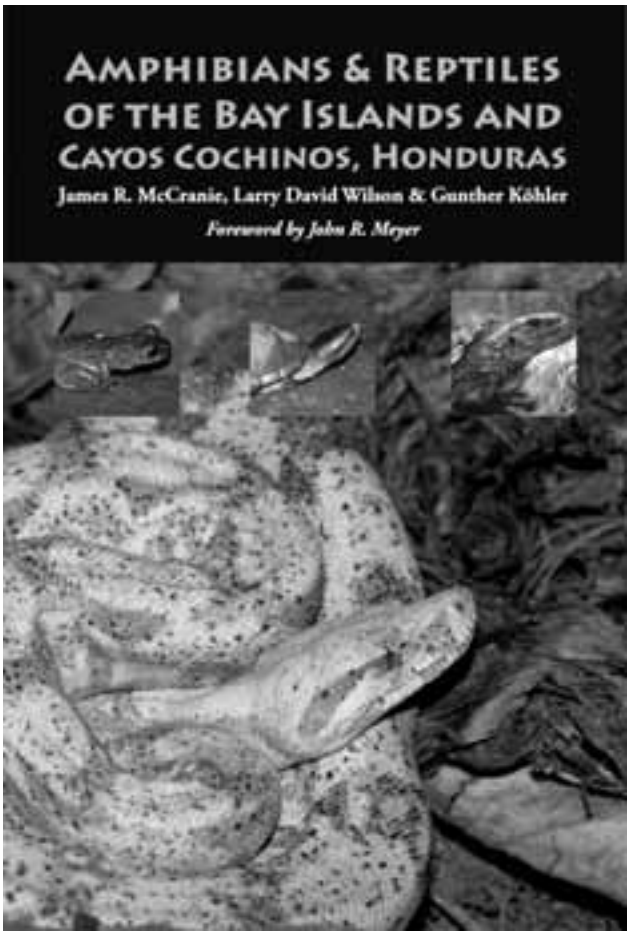
BOOK REVIEW

The Bay Island Herpetofauna Comes to Life

McCranie, J. R, L. D. Wilson, and G. Köhler. 2005. *The Amphibians & Reptiles of the Bay Islands and Cayos Cochinos, Honduras*. Bibliomania! Salt Lake City, Utah. xiv + 210 pp. Hardcover. $29.95 plus shipping (available at www.herplit.com).



Herpetology in Central America appears to be coming of age. Julian C. Lee's *The Amphibians and Reptiles of the Yucatán Peninsula* (1996) and his *Field Guide to the Amphibians and Reptiles of the Maya World* (2000) were followed in 2002 by two monumental works: *The Amphibians of Honduras* by James R. McCranie and Larry David Wilson and *The Amphibians and Reptiles of Costa Rica* by Jay M. Savage. Then, in 2003, Gunther Köhler published the English edition of his *Reptiles of Central America*, with a foreword by Larry David Wilson. After more than two centuries of scientific collecting expeditions to the region, detailed systematic studies, the description of new species, the publication of monographs devoted to species groups, single genera, and families, finding authoritative, detailed, and well-illustrated summaries of the amphibian and/or reptile faunas of entire political or geographic units is now possible. The latest addition to this burgeoning library is *The Amphibians & Reptiles of the Bay Islands and Cayos Cochinos, Honduras* by McCranie, Wilson, and Köhler.

The Bay Islands are a small archipelago of three major islands (Roatán, Guanaja, and Utila) and a couple of smaller ones, off the northern coast of Honduras. The Cayos Cochinos are a small cluster of two larger and several smaller islands nearer the coast of Honduras south of Roatán. Although they are relatively close to the mainland of Honduras (Utila is only about 32 km from the coast and the Cayos Cochinos only about half that), the islands harbor a surprisingly large number of reptilian species that occur nowhere else. The total herpetofauna consists of 55 species, seven species of amphibians, one crocodilian, five turtles (three of which are sea turtles), 23 lizards, and 19 snakes. All of the amphibians are anurans (frogs and toads), no salamanders or caecilians occur on the islands.

GUNTHER KÖHLER

Anolis (= *Norops*) *bicaorum* occurs only in hardwood and mangrove forests in the eastern half of Utila.

At first glance, this book seems to be a field guide, and at 6 x 9 in and just over 200 pages, full of species accounts, it looks like one, too — but this is more than a field guide. As for many of the more recently published field guides, the authors follow a brief introduction with a section on Materials and Methods that explains, among other things, how to use the keys in conjunction with the detailed descriptions and photographs in the species accounts to identify the animal at hand. Next is a chapter on the physiography of the Bay Islands in general and each of the major islands individually, a brief overview of the region's climate, and of the nine habitat types found there, including aquatic and urban habitats. Then comes the first pleasant surprise: a chapter on the social history of the Bay Islands and Cayos Cochinos. Like many islands and archipelagos, the Bay Islands have a long history of human habitation. The historical

GUNTHER KÖHLER

Boa Constrictors (*Boa constrictor*) are the largest snakes in the islands. A local rumor suggests that Agoutis (large rodents in the genus *Dasyprocta*) on Cayo Cochino Grande became abundant only after 5,000 boas were collected for the pet trade over a two-year period.

background presented in this chapter is a necessary prequel to the concluding three chapters of the book.

The bulk of the book, 137 pages, is occupied by species accounts. Accounts include the common name of each species, in English, Spanish, and/or "corrupted English," a technical description and mention of similar species that might make identification difficult, a statement of the general geographic distribution and distribution in the Bay Islands and Cayos Cochinos, and a section on natural history. The authors attempted to avoid overly technical terminology, but, where it can't be avoided, the reader can refer to a very useful glossary. The natural history comments are often much more detailed than those found in most field guides. The serious "herper" will appreciate the inclusion of keys for the identification of species and the photographs. Many species are represented by several photographs, which, as noted in Materials and Methods, can be used with the keys to identify species. Although most of photographs are of specimens found in the islands, some are of animals on the mainland of Honduras or elsewhere in Central America. The pre-publication copy of the book I examined had only black and white renditions of the photographs, all of which will be in color upon publication, so I cannot comment on the quality of the photographs other than to say that they all appear in focus and aesthetically appealing. In addition to the photographs of amphibians and reptiles, the book includes an unusually large number of landscape and habitat photographs, which provide a "feel" for the environment.

GUNTHER KÖHLER

The gecko, *Phyllodactylus palmeus*, is endemic to the Bay Islands and Cayos Cochinos. Historically abundant in various habitats, including buildings, this species may be affected negatively, especially in edificarian habitats, by the presence of the House Gecko (*Hemidactylus frenatus*; see also IGUANA 11(1), p. 20).

Following the species accounts are chapters on ecological distribution and relationships and on biogeographic relationships and their significance. The final three chapters constitute the second pleasant "surprise" in the book in that the topics covered often are omitted or given short shrift in field guides. The first is on the conservation status of the herpetofauna, which is usually relegated to a sentence or two at the end of individual species accounts in other regional guides, and the second is a description of ongoing conservation efforts in the Bay Islands and the Cayos Cochinos. Special emphases in the latter chapter are on efforts to conserve the Utila Iguana (*Ctenosaura bakeri*) and on the Cayos Cochinos Biological Reserve. The text concludes with a forecast for the future of the herpetofauna of the islands, a future that is clouded by habitat destruction and pollution associated with population increases and land development. The book closes with the glossary, an eight-page Literature Cited, and an index to scientific names.

GUNTHER KÖHLER

In sharp contrast to boas, the Silver Snake (*Leptotyphlops goudotii*) is the smallest snake in the islands. These diminutive snakes are rarely encountered, mainly because they spend most of their lives under cover or under ground. Like relatives, they probably eat termites or ants.

Between them, the authors of this book probably know more about the amphibians and reptiles of Honduras than anyone, and their expertise is evident. Relatively few North Americans visit the Bay Islands and fewer still get to the Cayos Cochinos, and those who do are most often there to dive … this is one of the few places in the world where one can fairly reliably encounter Whale Sharks. I hesitate to recommend that you go, because I'd really like to keep the place a secret, but it's really a wonderful place. If you go, buy this book. Read the chapters on social history, ecology, biogeography, and conservation before you go. You'll be better prepared for what you'll see. Take the book with you, not only to help you identify the amphibians and reptiles you will surely encounter, but to learn more about their habits and habitats. Herpetology is much more than just checking off the name of a species on a life list. Even if you can't visit the Bay Islands, buy this book. Through its photographs, you can take a virtual trip. It'll be worth it and, at $30.00, a lot cheaper than the real thing.

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