



BOOK REVIEW

Conserving Amphibians & Reptiles: What Kids (and Every Adult) Should Know

Amphibians and Reptiles: An Introduction to Their Natural History and Conservation. 2011. Marty Crump. The McDonald & Woodward Publishing Co., Granville, Ohio (www.mwpubco.com/titles/amphibiansandreptiles.htm). 252 pp., 16-page color insert with 47 color photos, 150 b/w photos/illustrations, glossary, appendices, resources, index. Paperback — ISBN: 978-1-935778-20-2. \$29.95.

This volume is basically an expanded update of the author's 2002 book, *Amphibians, Reptiles and Their Conservation* (by Linnett Press). The new book is a substantial improvement. In her "author's note," Crump lists a few of the major changes: (1) A new chapter on the roles of amphibians and reptiles in aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems, (2) a chapter dealing with the chytrid fungus that is devastating amphibian populations around the world, (3) additional information geared to key science concepts taught in grades 5–8, (4) updated IUCN Red List data, and (5) color plates and other additional figures.

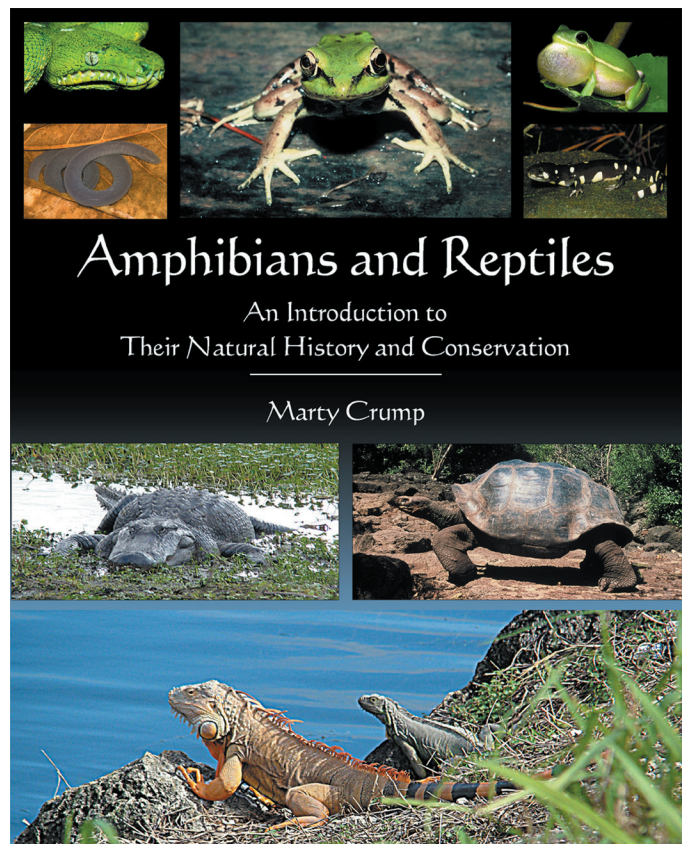
Technically, the intended audience is young people, and apparently Crump does a fine job of reaching out to them. One review for educators by Pam Spencer Holley stated that: "This book will be useful in science classes and for reports." Another by Hazel Rochman does an even better job of selling the product: "The style is informal without being cute." "The science is focused and rigorous." "[The author] speaks with the authority of a noted herpetologist ... who is still dazzled by the wonder of animal behavior." However, all that said and done, I suggest that this is also an excellent read for many adults who have or are just developing a passion for amphibians and reptiles.

Years ago, when I maintained a rather large menagerie of amphibians and reptiles in my office at the university, students frequently took many of the animals to schools, libraries, summer camps, and even teacher workshops. The intent was to educate. I frequently told students who were concerned about how to most effectively make their points to both preschoolers and senior citizens that you say exactly the same things, you just use different words — and sometimes, when you think you might not be getting through to the adults, you say: "When I teach children, I tell them" In effect,

that's exactly what Crump is doing. By packaging the content in a manner suitable for young people, she makes it clearly understandable for adults who might not yet be familiar with the jargon of herpetology. Read and learn. Even experts will benefit.

After an attention-getting opening chapter titled "Too weird to be true" (does that grab you or what?), the next three chapters offer basic information about amphibians and reptiles. Chapter six, the new chapter on the roles of these taxa in ecosystems, leads into six chapters that document worldwide declines in populations (including those affected by the chytrid fungus).

Chapter 13 talks about how humans from different cultures view animals. Much is historical, which in no way detracts from its interest, but I would have liked more about



current views. For example, I would like to know if the fact that frogs and turtles in particular tend to elicit positive responses from folks might be having some effect on improving perceptions of those herps often considered less appealing. Are well-publicized concerns about amphibians making it easier to promote the conservation of reptiles? I guess that in a classroom such issues might be discussed after reading this book — but if it serves only as a source of data for reports, we might be missing an opportunity to influence the next generation in a positive way.

The young conservationist (or even the jaded professional) will benefit from the final four chapters that focus on actions that could help sustain these animals and their habitats into the future. Heeding the almost iconic advice of the environmental movement (“think globally, act locally”), the final chapter lists nine specific ways in which individuals and families can help conserve amphibians and reptiles.

I fear that this book won’t get the attention it deserves simply because it fails the “bling” test. With so many books packed with glossy photographs, 16 plates with 47 color images and black-and-white photos on most facing pages might not cut it. However, if you can get past the lack of sparkle, the true value shines through: Solid information presented in a straight-forward manner and supplemented with additional resources. Among these is a list of websites that I suppose will direct the reader to more current issues and

concerns than the listed books. The most current of those was published in 2008 and many predate the turn of the century, which raises the question: Are we not reaching out to young people as effectively today as we did a decade or two ago? If not, maybe we should get busy.

Other addenda include a list of conservation organizations (that mysteriously omits AmphibianArk and PARC, although both are listed under websites), a fascinating list of amphibian and reptilian place names (I particularly liked Toad Hop, Indiana) and a challenge to find more, a reasonably inclusive glossary, a list of references (“main sources consulted” consisting of 15 book titles “in addition to more than 100 scientific papers” apparently too challenging to list), and an index.

If you can get past the idea that you’re reading a children’s book, you’ll quickly appreciate how effectively Crump makes her case for why our favorite animals are so fascinating — and why they deserve our attention. Like canaries in coalmines, populations of amphibians and reptiles in nature are facing a plethora of threats, the vast majority attributable to human activities. The author’s final sentence says it all: “You and I together can make a difference. Please help.”

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