



BOOK REVIEWS

Eponyms?

The Eponym Dictionary of Reptiles. 2011. Bo Beolens, Michael Watkins, and Michael Grayson. The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, Maryland, USA. xiii + 296 pp. Hardback — ISBN-13: 978-1-4214-0135-5. ISBN-10: 1-4214-0135-5. \$100.00.

The Eponym Dictionary of Amphibians. 2013. Bo Beolens, Michael Watkins, and Michael Grayson. Pelagic Publishing, Exeter, UK. xiii + 244 pp. Hardback — ISBN-13: 978-1-907807-41-1 (also available as an ePub, pdf, and for the Mobi reader). \$49.99.

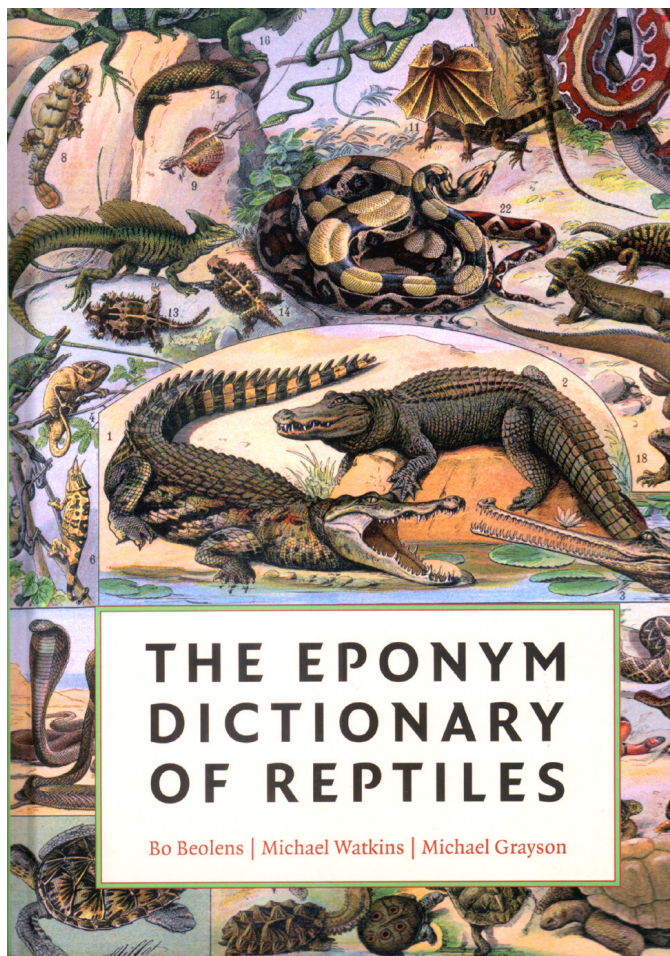
Speaking of the *Eponym Dictionary of Mammals*, George A. Feldhamer, writing for the *Quarterly Review of Biology*, said: “I suspect that there are few people interested in picking up a dictionary for ‘fun’ reading.” I suspect he was right. However, the eponym dictionaries are enjoyable — and sometimes downright fun. Although professionals will use them to solicit information about the people (and sometimes places and miscellaneous groups) for whom animals are named, these dictionaries are not so highly technical or full of jargon that a curious naturalist or anyone interested in animals won’t enjoy them, if only for trivial pursuits.

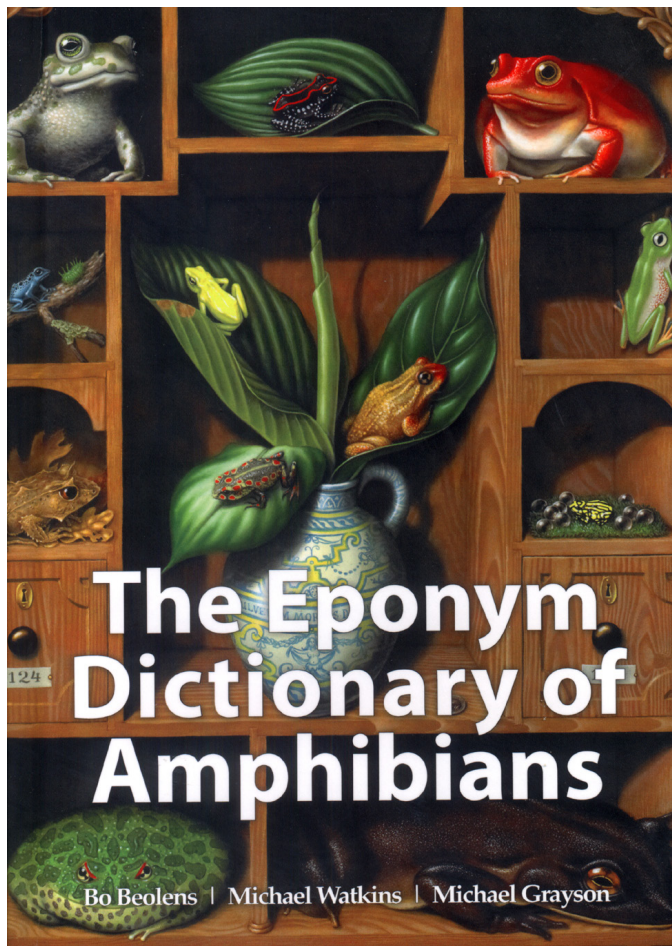
Eponyms are the proper names incorporated into many vernacular and scientific names, typically honoring a person for their contributions to science, often for a body of work of great importance (e.g., Charles Darwin) but sometimes for financial support of a particular expedition, the provision of a permit, for collecting the specimen that became the type for the species (or genus or subspecies), or simply for being a friend of the describer.

Although printed by different publishers, both books are organized in the same fashion. After short introductions in which the authors discuss the format of each book, names of the persons honored are listed alphabetically (it is a “dictionary,” after all), followed by lists of taxa named for that person, with common (or vernacular) English name(s), scientific name(s), name(s) of the person(s) who first described the taxon, and the date of the original description. Alternative common names and scientific synonyms (different names assigned to the same taxon) are included when necessary. A short biographical sketch of the honoree is then followed in the amphibian book, when applicable, by a list of other non-amphibian taxa named for the person in question. Confusion

is minimized by frequent cross-listings. Very short bibliographies complete each volume.

The authors reasonably avoid fossil species by not including any forms that became extinct before Columbus “discovered” America. Nevertheless, they list 2,668 names of amphibians and 4,130 names of reptiles honoring 1,609 and 2,330 individual people, respectively — but the process proved to be “fraught with difficulties.” Despite avoiding dubious names (impossible to identify or simply incorrect), problems abounded. A few species are named for more than one person, other names sound like those of people but are not, referring instead to places (often named for people, therefore the confusion), indigenous peoples, fictional characters, conservation groups, guerrilla armies, chartered accountants,





and biblical or mythological references, not to mention a few that the authors were unable to identify.

Famous names abound. Charles Darwin is honored with the names of three amphibians (plus one that also honors Alfred Wallace) and seven reptiles — plus two additional reptiles named for the port of Darwin in the Northern Territory of Australia and four mammals and 23 birds. Edward Drinker Cope, for whom the journal *Copeia* is named and who might be better known for his role in the 19th-century “dinosaur wars” with rival Othneil C. Marsh, is honored with the names of 19 amphibians and 59 reptiles. Most are vernacular names acknowledging him as the describer of those taxa. Doris Cochran, long-time curator of amphibians and reptiles at the National Museum of Natural History (Smithsonian Institution) is honored with the names of 11 amphibians (including one genus) and nine reptiles. German naturalist Wilhelm K. H. Peters is honored with 18 amphibians (and one honoring both him and James Peters, an American zoolo-

gist specializing in the Ecuadorian herpetofauna) and 39 reptiles (plus 23 mammals and two birds). German-born British zoologist Albert Günther is honored with 26 amphibians and 67 reptiles (plus three mammals and two birds), possibly the most for any one person, although I did not count the entries for every person listed. E.H. Taylor, of the University of Kansas and known mostly for his work in the Philippines and later in Mexico (using “marginally reliable vehicles”), is honored with 20 amphibians and 29 reptiles (plus a mammal).

Examples of oddities include *Hyla andersonii* (Anderson’s Treefrog), which is not named after a person at all, but instead for the type locality of Anderson, South Carolina; *Dendropsophus amicorum* is the name of a treefrog collectively thanking all of the describer’s friends (*amicorum* means “of the friends”); and *Pristimantis uisae* is a “robber frog” named for the Universidad Industrial de Santander in Bucaramanga, Colombia. The Bushmaster genus (*Lachesis*) is named for one of the three Fates in Greek mythology, and Stewart’s Sticky-toed Gecko (*Hoplodactylus rakiurae*) honors Rakiura National Park on Stewart Island, New Zealand.

Although an impossible task to include every possible namesake (and more are being added all the time), two omissions are notable. In 1988, Richard Thomas and S. Blair Hedges named the Martin Garcia Least Gecko (*Sphaerodactylus ladae*) after their rental car (a Russian-built Lada), and in 1972, James (“Skip”) Lazell described the Anguilla Bank Bush Anole (*Anolis pogus*). Assuming that the specific epithet was derived from the Greek *pogus* (= beard), many authorities (obviously including the authors) have used “Bearded Anole” as the vernacular name, although no evident character is suggestive of a beard. In fact, Lazell named the lizard for Pogo, Walt Kelly’s cartoon character of the long-running American comic strip and probably best known for saying: “We have met the enemy and he is us.”

Production quality is high for both books, but the list prices are substantial (especially for the reptile book). Fortunately, steep discounts available from volume sellers render them affordable — and worth the price. Do not fall prey to the inclination to set these volumes aside as dry and of use only to hardened academics. In unique fashion, they provide an overview of distinguished herpetologists and a multitude of other people who have impacted our field. So, while scholars will exploit these books, readers can simply enjoy them.

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