



BOOK REVIEW

A New Volume in the Series on Amphibian Biology

Amphibian Biology. Volume 11. Status of the Conservation and Decline of Amphibians: Eastern Hemisphere. Part 4. Southern Europe and Turkey. 2015. Harold Heatwole and John W. Wilkinson (eds.). Pelagic Publishing, Exeter, UK. 158 pp. Paperback — ISBN-13: 978-1-907807-53-4 (also available as an ePub, pdf, and for the Mobi reader). £ 69.99 (\$116.99).

This new volume in the series extends coverage of the status of amphibians to southern Europe and Turkey. As I mentioned in my review of Part 3 (on western Europe; R&A 20:155–157), I, like many North American herpetologists who focus their attention solely on the Americas, found much to learn from biologists in the Eastern Hemisphere who have been dealing with conservation issues in a part of the world densely settled by humans for millennia.

This volume, like its predecessors, is a compilation of technical reports aimed at professional herpetologists and conservation biologists. The style is quite technical and production values emphasize the conveyance of information rather than any effort to entertain with glossy pictures. In fact, once one opens the book, figures are limited to maps and graphs instead of photographs of animals or habitats.

The volume consists of 15 independently authored chapters numbered 39 to 53, reflecting their place in this series. Each chapter addresses the status, conservation concerns, and population declines in various nations (Italy, Malta, Croatia, Slovenia, Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Albania, Greece, Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria, Turkey, and Cyprus). As is often the case in multi-authored volumes, despite admirable editorial efforts, the book suffers from an almost inevitable unevenness that reflects the many authors, varying degrees of detail, different styles, and the unavoidable redundancies emanating from the reality that multiple nations often share the same species and many of the same problems affect the amphibians in different nations (after all, amphibians do not recognize political boundaries). The redundancies in the chapters also precluded any in-depth coverage of issues or an inclusion of case studies demonstrating what has and has not been successful. In fact, those same redundancies raise the question why these chapters were not synthesized into a synopsis of what is happening in the region



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VOLUME 11 Status of Conservation and Decline of Amphibians:
Eastern Hemisphere
PART 4 Southern Europe and Turkey



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(and I suspect what is happening elsewhere in much of the Eastern Hemisphere and particularly in Europe). Such a synthesis would allow for considerably more detailed coverage of issues (such as common causes of population declines) or species-specific concerns that transcend political boundaries. What they all share beyond a certain superficiality (only five of the 15 chapters exceed 10 pages in length) is a dry tone and an extensive use of jargon that effectively exclude most non-professionals regardless of their commitment to conservation.

Nevertheless, I found the book to be interesting and useful, if only because it emphasized the unfortunate reality that many amphibians in southern Europe are vulnerable to the

very same threats as those elsewhere in the world. Habitat destruction, invasive species, and chytrid were common themes. I also appreciated the efforts to monitor amphibian populations that were detailed in most chapters, thoroughly enjoyed the few instances in which specific conservation efforts (e.g., tunnels under roads) were described, and took a bit of perverse pleasure in how frequently taxonomic uncertainties were mentioned (these certainly transcend the region and are the bane of conservation biologists throughout the world). However, what I really wanted was considerably more information regarding effective legislation and conservation measures that could be transferred to other regions. The editors certainly are capable of synthesizing the disparate reports and maybe that is planned for future volumes in the series. If so, despite some degree of utility in presenting these reports in this fashion, I question the decision to publish accounts in such small, very highly priced increments instead of in

fewer volumes in which more extensive case studies could be included and successful solutions explored more thoroughly.

Production quality is high, especially for a paperback, but the list price is substantial, which is frequently the case for European books sold in the US. I can only hope that steep discounts from volume sellers will render this book and others in the series a bit more affordable. If you cannot wait, the publisher does provide a 20% discount on any purchase of two or more books from their website (www.pelagicpublishing.com).

In summary, I am less than enamored with this little book. The high cost, the limited coverage, the lack of syntheses, and the overt redundancies lead me to recommend that you wait until a synoptic overview is published.

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