



BOOK REVIEW

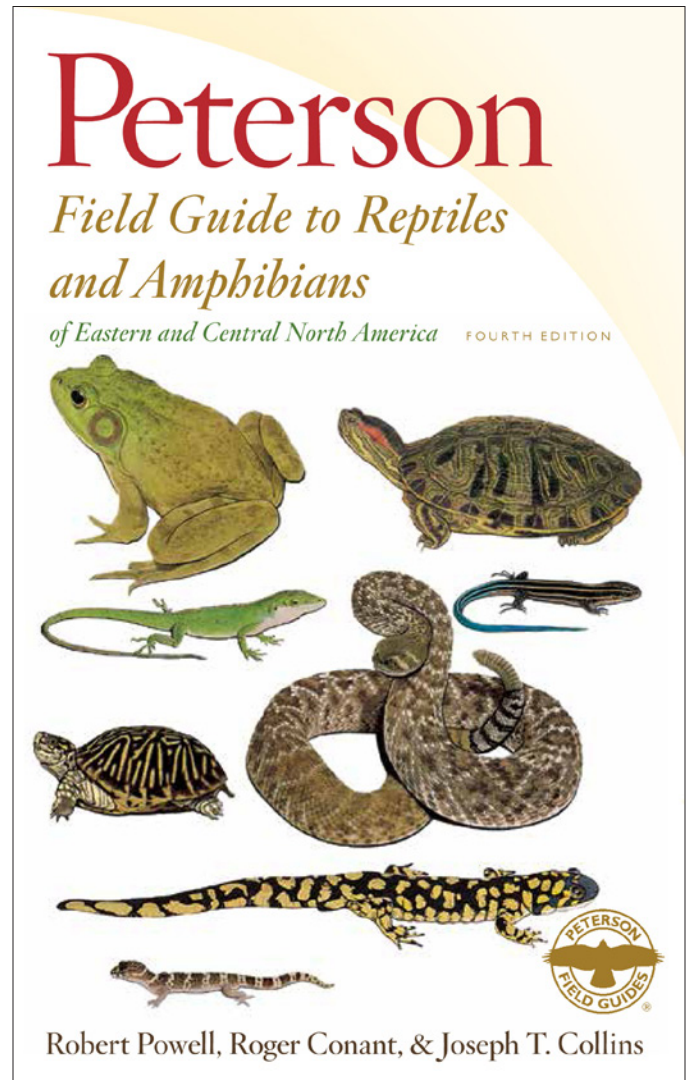
A Classic Updated

Peterson Field Guide to Reptiles and Amphibians of Eastern and Central North America. Fourth edition. 2016. Robert Powell, Roger Conant, and Joseph T. Collins. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, New York. xiv + 494 pp. Softcover — ISBN-13: 978-0544129979. ISBN-10: 0544129970. \$21.00.

Peterson field guides have been the gold standard for many years. Nature lovers first became familiar with them in 1949 when Roger Tory Peterson introduced the first bird guide. About a decade later, Roger Conant (1958) published the first field guide to reptiles and amphibians in this series, and updated editions appeared at irregular intervals (Conant 1975; Conant and Collins 1991, 1998). The first author of the fourth edition (Powell et al. 2016) is one of the preeminent herpetologists in North America. His many publications include several excellent field guides, mostly to Caribbean herpetofaunas, in addition to other books, book chapters, and journal articles. Powell is well qualified to join his distinguished coauthors, to whom he dedicated this book.

The 508 numbered pages of the fourth edition are divided into an opening section (27 pages) that includes the title page, a dedication, a preface, contents, a useful introduction, and instructions on how to use the guide. Species accounts compose the bulk of the book (432 pages). These are organized by taxonomic group and include color plates, photographs (which first appeared in the expanded third edition but are much more abundant here), or line drawings illustrating all species; descriptions with comparisons to similar taxa, short notes on habitats, and sometimes additional remarks on recent taxonomic changes or other pertinent information; and range maps. Venomous and non-native species are clearly identified throughout. A closing section (49 pages) includes acknowledgments, a glossary, a short list of references, photo credits, photo captions to images used as headers or to introduce new sections (unique among Peterson guides), and an index.

The introduction, glossary, and many line drawings help introduce novice readers to concepts and terminology that further enrich the use of the field guide. Accounts include 122 newly discovered or recognized species and recently established non-native species (most illustrated with photographs) for a total of 501 species — compared to 379 in the third edition. Many recent revisions in taxonomy are presented,



although the ever-changing and somewhat contentious nature of that field means that some name choices will not please every reader.

Conspicuously missing from this edition is advice on how to capture and keep wild animals, the section in earlier editions that triggered an interest in these animals in many budding herpetologists. Instead readers are referred to relevant materials available online. Largely new to this edition, however, is an emphasis on conservation, with comments on how to fight the effects of human-induced habitat loss, climate change, and pollution.

As in previous editions, crisp and eye-catching color illustrations facilitate identification. However, unlike previous editions, the plates are dispersed instead of being clustered into a separate section. Arrows draw attention to subtle characteristics that distinguish similar species. Although images on each plate or section of plate are to the same scale, those on different plates are not. For example, Pickerel Frogs appear to be the same size as chorus frogs, although fully-grown adults of the former are approximately three times the size of the latter. Although drawing sea turtles and crocodilians to the same scale as chorus frogs is impractical, we would like to have seen a scale provided for each plate or section thereof. In addition, some of us found it odd that range maps were located near each species description rather than with the plates or even grouped together to facilitate comparisons of ranges. The location of maps is an ongoing issue, and we are told the change to this format in the expanded third edition (1998) occurred in response to feedback from readers.

The font and graphics appear larger, bolder, and easier to read compared to previous editions, especially in low light. A nice addition, the color-coded edges of the plates at the beginning of each section of species accounts (salamanders, frogs, crocodilians, turtles, lizards, and snakes), are particularly helpful, and the contrast makes them accessible to color-blind individuals. The first printing, which we examined, had a few typos and minor issues. We are told that many of these have been fixed in the second printing and others will be corrected in an upcoming third printing. Unfortunately, the book does not tell you which printing you have — perhaps something that could be corrected in the future?

The guide targets readers with a wide range of experience, and it generally engages this broad audience admirably. However, the book may be more appropriate for readers familiar with basic terminology or identification techniques. A true beginner may struggle with some of the more complex terminology, and definitions for terms such as “carapace” are not provided in the glossary (though the term is explained in the introduction to the turtle section). The size of the book allows it to fit in a daypack, and although it is shorter and lighter than the expanded third edition, it is a little heavy to carry all day in the field unless herping is your primary goal. Guides with narrower geographical or taxonomic foci, such as the Natural History Guides for our home-state of Texas (*Texas Snakes*, Dixon and Werler 2005; *Texas Amphibians*, Tipton et al. 2012; *Texas Lizards*, Hibbitts and Hibbitts 2015; *Texas Turtles and Crocodilians*, Hibbitts and Hibbitts 2016), provide more information on fewer species, but are too narrow in taxonomic or geographic coverage and collectively

too heavy to carry into the field. We hope that the Peterson series will eventually develop a mobile app or online companion to this guide (ideally one that is as effective as the Peterson bird app). The search capability and mobility of such an app would attract more customers and increase an interest in herpetology especially among younger nature lovers.

Overall, this new edition has important updates, and many owners of previous editions will likely consider those significant enough to justify the upgrade. The guide’s cover images are cleaner and more attractive than those of previous editions. The thicker-feeling pages also give the impression of improved quality. The colorfulness, improved organization, and thorough descriptions make this guide a superb choice for herpetologists ranging from enthusiastic beginners to advanced professionals. Although a bit more expensive than competitors, such as the now outdated National Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Reptiles and Amphibians (Behler and King 1979), the quality and ease of use of this guide are unparalleled. Despite minor issues, this is a great addition to the field guide world and a worthy update to the iconic series.

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