



BOOK REVIEW

Turtles of the World

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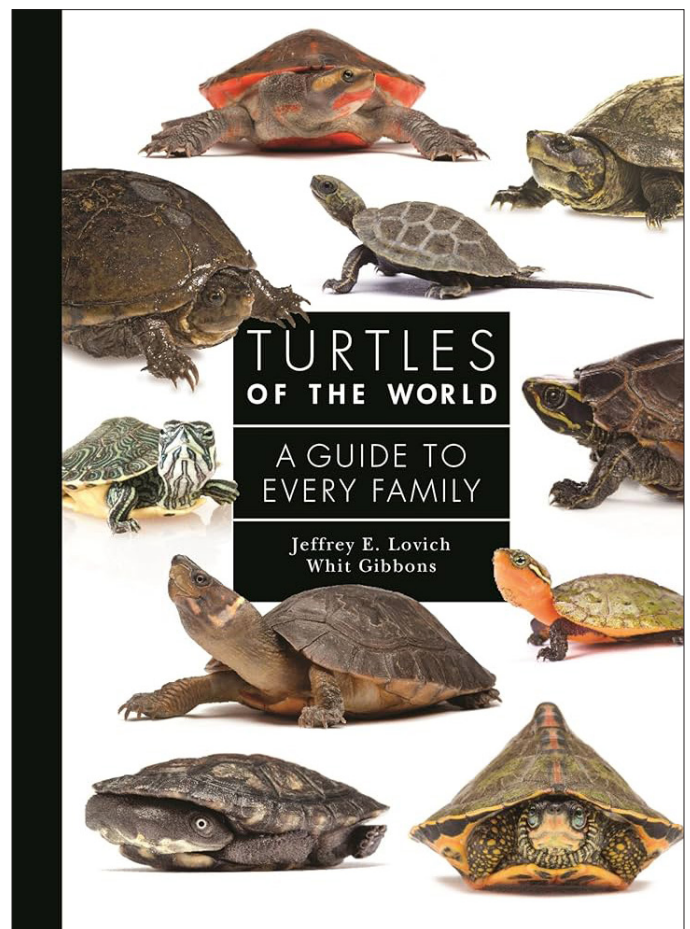
Turtles of the World: A Guide to Every Family. 2021. Jeffrey E. Lovich & Whit Gibbons. Princeton University Press, New Jersey, USA. 240 pp., 353 color photos, 93 maps. Hardback – ISBN 9780691223223. \$29.95.

Turtles are perhaps the reptiles with the best public image. People love marine turtles, and all species are instantly recognizable due to their distinctive carapace, which comes in a myriad of shapes, sizes, and colours. They are adapted to many environments including oceans, lakes, forests and deserts. I am sure that if you are of a similar age to myself, you may remember the cultural phenomenon that surrounded four of these crime-fighting animals named after four of the Renaissance greats. However, based almost entirely on the geography of where I grew up, my experience with turtles is quite limited. Unfortunately, we have no native species in the United Kingdom (except the occasional vagrant marine turtle), although I do have some experience with introduced sliders which were once a popular pet – due to the aforementioned ninjas. There are currently more than 350 species known to science and so I was looking for a book to act as a quick guide to species that I have clearly overlooked. I therefore picked up a copy of *Turtles of the World: A Guide to Every Family* to help fill in some of those large gaps in my knowledge, hoping the information would be in an accessible and user-friendly format.

The book meticulously explores the taxonomy, morphology, ecology, behavior, and conservation status of every turtle family, providing detailed descriptions and illustrations of each species. The introduction contains a large amount of general information covering every topic from what a turtle is to their anatomy and their cultural importance. There are some chapters that are a little more scientific in their approach, such as with evolution and physiology but this should be straightforward enough to follow for most readers. Then, Gibbons and Lovich employ a systematic approach, categorizing turtles into their respective families and subfamilies, thereby facilitating ease of reference for researchers, conservationists, and enthusiasts alike. The content is enriched with copious photographs, maps, and diagrams, enhancing the reader’s understanding

of turtle biology and distribution patterns. Most families and genera have a double page spread dedicated to them with multiple images, information on their distribution range, lifespan, and habitats, as well as their size. As someone that is not familiar with a number of the species within and with the photographs having no scale of reference, this additional information related to size is extremely useful. I am sure that the general reader will also enjoy this practical yet accessible approach to documenting the world’s turtle species.

The authors demonstrate a profound understanding of turtle biology, drawing from decades of collective research and field experience. The book’s content is both authoritative and



accessible, catering to a broad audience ranging from seasoned herpetologists to amateur naturalists. The authors skilfully integrate scientific rigor with engaging narrative (where appropriate), making complex concepts accessible without compromising accuracy or depth. Additional information which I found extremely interesting were whether fossil remains of different families were known, or how well represented within captivity they were. This not only helps to build a picture of the biogeography of turtles, but also their conservation too.

Turtles of the World distinguishes itself from existing literature by its comprehensive coverage of every turtle family, surpassing the scope of many regional field guides. By synthesizing vast amounts of scientific literature, Gibbons and Lovich provide a holistic understanding of turtle diversity that transcends geographic boundaries. While other works may focus on specific regions or taxonomic groups, this book offers a global perspective, enriching readers with insights into the evolutionary history and ecological adaptations of turtles worldwide. Although some species are illustrated and described in quite some detail, the authors do not purposely apply a close lens to every species as that is not the purpose of this book. However, a complete species list, which would probably be obsolete very quickly, would have been nice in the resources towards the back of the book.

The only other book like this in my collection shares the same name; however, it was authored by Carl H. Ernst and Roger W. Barbour in 1989. This earlier title not only contains far more scientific information about turtles but encompasses far fewer species (only 257). The original is a hefty tome that squeezed as much knowledge about the known turtles of the world into it, being more of a scientific compendium than a book aimed at the general reader. Fittingly however, this newer book that carries the torch 32 years later is dedicated to Ernst, who unfortunately passed away in 2018 at the age of 80.

Thinking about the audience and the utility of this book, it caters to a diverse audience including amateur naturalists, researchers, and students. Those that are just starting their career in turtle conservation or have a passing interest are likely to get the most out of *Turtles of the World*, given the rich illustrations and accessible language throughout. Researchers such as myself will appreciate its thoroughness and accuracy, while also providing invaluable insights into the biology and conservation of turtles. The book contains an extremely useful glossary, information on turtle conservation organizations, and additional reading in the form of both relevant books and peer-reviewed journal articles. These resources help to increase the accessibility to readers and signposts them to further reading where required. The only thing I did find a little confusing was the turtle classification and phylogenetic order table right before the index, I feel as though this could have been presented in a much clearer way.

The only criticism I have is that the contents page just lists the suborders of Cryptodira and Pleurodira, without any further breakdown. From the other books I own in the series, this appears to be a limitation. This means that unless you know which suborder a family belongs to, you may be aimlessly flicking through trying to find it. You could of course use the index, which has both genus and common names (which is a nice touch), this makes navigation slightly harder for the more general reader that I feel *Turtles of the World* is aimed more towards.

To conclude, *Turtles of the World: A Guide to Every Family* is an extremely reasonably priced book for the utility that the reader should get out of it. It is clear that it is following the format of the other books in the series, with a clear design and crisp photographs throughout. As someone who has neglected turtles through no fault of my own, this is the perfect addition to my bookshelf to help provide a solid foundation for the understanding of these iconic reptiles.