

A Photographic Guide to Snakes and other Reptiles of Peninsular Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand, by Merel J. Cox, Peter Paul van Dijk, Jarujin Nabhitabhata and Kumthorn Thirakhupt. 1998. New Holland Publishers, London, and Ralph Curtis Publishing, Sanibel Island, Florida. 144 pp. Paperback, \$15.95.

This is a handsome, pocket-sized (9.5 x 19 cm) field guide to the reptiles of Thailand and the Malay Peninsula. It is printed on high quality glossy paper and has a good binding with a stiff cover. It begins with short introductory sections on how to use this book, the habits of reptiles, finding and identifying reptiles, conservation of reptiles, and snake-bite first-aid. The main section of the volume consists of individual species accounts that concentrate on the "common, large, conspicuous, dangerous or biologically significant species." Of the 320 recognized species of the region, they have packed into their book information on 120 species of snakes, 72 lizards, 3 crocodylians, and 26 turtles. The species accounts are accompanied by 290 high quality color photographs illustrating each species and, in many cases, special aspects of the species. For example, illustrations of color varieties or juvenile stages add value to this handbook. The account of each species begins with the common English name, the scientific name, and information on adult size. The organization of the species accounts is consistent within the orders. Descriptions emphasize general coloration, distinctive color patterns, head and body shapes, and various aspects of scalation. These descriptions coupled with the excellent photographs make it possible for interested naturalists to identify many of the most frequently encountered reptiles of this region. In addition, facts on food habits, clutch size, and the ecological and geographic distribution of each species are provided when known. In the introduction the authors note that international tourism has "discovered" Southeast Asia, and many foreign visitors to the area have strong interests in natural history. It is in this context, I believe, that they understandably discourage needless collecting and preserving of specimens. Unfortunately they do not go on to distinguish between such collecting and the importance of scientific collecting for research purposes by professional scientists whose work is the source of the knowledge transmitted in this volume. In addition, this reviewer was disappointed in the section on conservation and protection of reptiles because although the authors correctly state that, "Yet the greatest cause of declining reptile populations is the loss of natural habitats as ever more land is settled and cultivated," they say no more on this momentous subject that dwarfs other concerns. Overall this is an excellent field guide, and every naturalist interested in Southeast Asian reptiles will find it exceedingly useful. It is moderately priced, especially considering the number of photographs, and is sure to be popular.

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