

## Glenn M. Shea, *Herpetofauna, Sidney, 28 (1998): 53*

### BOOK REVIEW

Patrick David & Gernot Vogel *The Snakes of Sumatra*.

An annotated checklist and key. Edition Chimaira, Frankfurt am Main.

260pp. Glenn M. Shea, Department of Veterinary Anatomy & Pathology University of Sydney NSW 2006.

The fauna of Indonesia has long been of special interest to zoologists due to the collision of different biogeographic regions. However, knowledge of Indonesian biodiversity has remained poor due to the difficulties faced by collectors, both in the past and present. Snakes follow the same pattern as other groups: a greatly scattered literature of locality records and taxonomic papers, few data on habitat preferences or ecology, and few modern systematic studies. The most recent complete guide to the Indonesian snake fauna is Volume 2 of Nelly de Rooij's *The reptiles of the Indo-Australian Archipelago* (1917), long out of print and very much out of date.

To partially fill this vacuum, David and Vogel have compiled this checklist and key to the snakes of Sumatra, to which they append notes on distribution and ecology. While the book must be considered preliminary in that it does not involve much field research and does not fully revise the fauna, it provides the valuable service of drawing together the extensive yet scattered literature and highlighting problem areas, in preparation for the next generation of field and laboratory herpetologists. Hopefully, it will be as stimulating in this respect as the first edition of Cogger's *Reptiles and Amphibians of Australia* was to herpetologists of the day.

The *Snakes of Sumatra* opens with a brief historical introduction to Indonesia and its present political divisions, a geographical description of Sumatra and a history of discovery of the Sumatran snake fauna. Individual species are then covered, with an attempt to list all relevant literature on Sumatran populations of the species. Each species account includes any known data on ecology and distribution. Sadly, although there are 127 snake species recorded for Sumatra, with 22 endemic to the island, 41 species are known from Sumatra from only one or two specimens or localities. A few black and white drawings of generally good quality, mostly of heads, accompany some accounts.

Following the species accounts is a preliminary key to all species and subspecies recorded from Sumatra, a block of eight pages of colour plates (four or five illustrations per plate), illustrating a few species and habitats, a summary (in English, French and German) of the few nomenclatural and taxonomic decisions made in the volume, and an extensive bibliography and gazetteer of localities. While the book will be of great use to future workers, I was disappointed by three features. Firstly, the almost complete lack of morphological data.

Although the authors explain that much of this would simply be repeating what has previously been published, it would still have been useful to incorporate. Secondly, although type localities and original references are included, the current repository and registration number for type specimens could have been included with little extra effort.

Finally, David and Vogel follow the trend in several recent guides to exclude sea snakes, although they do include Homalopsines and other aquatic species. These complaints aside, this book is a worthy addition to any herpetological library.