

BOOK REVIEWS

The Lizards of Iran. Steven C. Anderson. (1999). vii+442 pp. Society for the Study of Amphibians and Reptiles, Ithaca, New York, USA. US \$65.00 (cloth).

This book is one of – if not the most – comprehensive disquisition of any group of reptiles from the middle or near east. It encompasses what is currently known about Iranian lizards and the biogeography of the region. It is long overdue since there is a great imbalance between, for example, the herpetological literature of Europe or North America and that of countries such as Iran and its neighbours. There are good reasons for this of course, the principal one being the exponential increase in herpetological activities in the Western Hemisphere in the last 20 years or so and the increasing political barriers between Iran and the West. Steven Anderson has gone some way to redress this situation with this first class treatise. It is the latest in a series of publications (volume 15) by The Society for the Study of Amphibians and Reptiles – a previous publication (volume 7) dealt with Iranian snakes (Latifi, 1991).

After an initial discourse on definitions and acknowledgements, the author gives a brief account of Iran's recent political history, a detailed account of its herpetological history and an introduction to the literature sources. On a point of pedantry, Samuel Gottlieb Gmelin is cited as the first European to have described the natural history of Iran in the 1770's but in fact Greek scientists in the service of the army of Alexander the Great had already surveyed the region in the fourth century BC. The botanical information from this expedition was incorporated into Theophrastus' *History of Plants* (Tarn & Griffith, 1966). However, since Gmelin's more recent survey a whole series of latter day field workers have provided detailed descriptions of the region's zoology and this chapter alone makes interesting reading. This is followed by an extensive and informative discussion on Iran's biogeography and ecology, particularly in the way that it is pertinent to lizards, in addition to a palaeogeographical history. Maps showing locations and illustrations of what Anderson defines as 'problematic specimens' accompany many of the species.

The lizard families covered are the *Agamidae*, *Anguidae*, *Eublepharidae*, *Gekkonidae*, *Lacertidae*, *Scincidae*, *Uromastycidae* and *Varanidae*. In his description of the *Uromastycidae* the author follows the classification of Moody (1987), who proposed that along with *Leiolepis*, *Uromastyx* is a monophyletic group related to – but distinct from – all other agamid genera. Similarly the *Eublepharidae* are treated as a monophyletic subgroup of the Gekkota after Kluge (1987) and Grismer (1988). There is a description of each species, i.e. its maximum size, colour and general morphology followed by what is known of its natural history. This includes – at least when information is available – behaviour patterns, reproduction, feeding

habits and predators. Obviously there are gaps in this type of information for certain species, whilst in others there is good detail. Despite the variation in detail, however, I found all the information interesting and useful.

The final sections provide maps of the region (based on a satellite photograph); a series of photographs (143) on 18 plates showing lizards, and 38 photographs of their habitats on six plates. Not all the species described have accompanying photographs but the standard of the photography is generally high and all are in colour. However, some of the specimens shown appear to be either dead or are museum material. There is an extensive bibliography and three appendixes that deal with the abbreviations used in the text, the localities and sources of the material examined, and finally an index.

This book is written by a herpetologist for herpetologists; it is not one of those coffee table publications that are far to general to be really useful to the serious herpetologist. By bringing together information about Iranian lizards – many of which we still know relatively little about – in one volume makes this book especially valuable. The work is another in a succession of publications published by The Society for the Study of Amphibians and Reptiles, in its *Contributions To Herpetology* series. It certainly merits such a title since it is far more than a simple list of Iranian lizards. The information on climate, biogeography and historical aspects, in addition to the ecological background of the lizards, provides a valuable overview from a herpetological perspective. On a final note, I have to confess that I was unaware of the efforts of the Iranian Government in wildlife protection and conservation, and in sponsoring the field research of visiting scientists to Iran, particularly during the 1960s and 1970s.

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Roger Meek.
Huddersfield Technical College, UK.