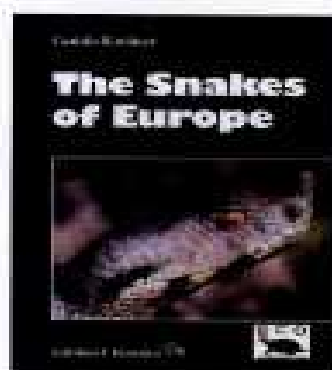


The latest additions to our library

Book Reviews

The Snakes of Europe – All Species from West of the Caucasus Mountains*

G. KREINER, 2007. Edition
Chimaira, Frankfurt am Main. 317
pp. ISBN: 978-3-89973-475-1.



Another high-quality book from Edition Chimaira, this one presents the snakes of Europe. The territory covered is based on zoogeographic boundaries, and thus excludes Russia. The color photographs throughout the book are large and gorgeous. The snakes on this continent are cryptic in coloration, so the pages of the book could seem rather dull compared to those of books on tropical species, for example. Nonetheless many of these European snakes are undeniably beautiful in a subdued, elegant way.

Following a brief introduction and a paragraph on the origins of snakes, the book begins with a short chapter on biology. Subsections are on anatomy, venomous snakes, melanism, sensory organs, reproduction, development and growth, acquisition of prey, natural habitats, hibernation, and natural predators and defense. This organization seems a little odd to me, but the information is clear and sound.

The next chapter, on snakes and humans, is also very short. Subsections are on myths and legends (a single paragraph), snake venoms, snakebites, conservation, and snakes in the terrarium. This last section is limited to pointing out that people do keep snakes in terrariums, that these European species may not be taken from the wild so must be obtained from breeders, and that getting information from breeders or herp associations is of great value. A list of more than a dozen European herp associations is provided.

The rest of the book is dedicated to species accounts, introduced with a five-page section on identification — including labeled diagrams of scalation and keys to the families and genera. The species accounts consist of subsections on characteristics, distribution (with map), natural habitats, ecology, and key literature. The part on ecology discusses all aspects of behavior including daily activity patterns, basking, hunting and diet, hibernation, reproduction, predators and other threats, and interaction with humans. Again, the photos are excellent.

The book ends with a practical chart showing which species of snakes are found in which countries, a glossary of terms, and an extensive bibliography. There is no alphabetical index.

A worthwhile addition to the libraries of herp enthusiasts worldwide, this book is especially recommendable for anyone living in Europe — these snakes are our neighbors, and they merit a proper introduction.

Steven Winchell