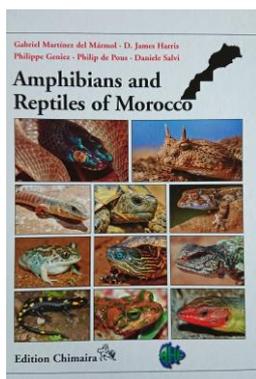


Book review



MARTÍNEZ DEL MÁRMOL, G., J.D. HARRIS, P. GENIEZ, P. DE POUS & D. SALVI, 2019. Amphibians and reptiles of Morocco. Frankfurt Contributions to Natural History Volume 74, Edition Chimaira, Frankfurt am Main. 478 pages, bound, colour photos. ISBN 978-3-89973-117-0 € 128.-

It has taken more than twenty years for a book to be written that completely covers the herpetofauna of Morocco, but we can now obtain one as a 2.5 kg(!) volume in A4 format in English. The collective of authors from Spain, Portugal, Italy, France and The Netherlands have different backgrounds but a similar passion for Moroccan herps and that is what makes the combination work.

In 1996 BONS & GENIEZ (1996) and SCHLEICH et al. (1996) put Morocco herpetologically on the map, while BONS & GENIEZ (1996) presented an atlas in three languages that inspired others to collect new information in this part of the world. Since that time a lot of research, especially genetic, has been conducted. Another example is GENIEZ et al.'s (2004) publication of an atlas and field guide to the Western Sahara. However, a complete Moroccan overview was still lacking. In cooperation with www.moroccoherps.com the authors of the book under review collected recent data and any changes concerning the Moroccan herpetofauna. The idea to publish a field guide was apparently initially conceived independently by the five authors, but as quite often happens, it took time before the idea was fully developed. And then it helps when a publisher, in this case Chimaira, pushes the plan into a proper publication. In this case, the end result is not a field guide but rather a hybrid between a field guide and a photo book.

The first forty pages of this book contain generalities, including a preface, biogeography, climate, threats, and conservation. This section also includes a justification of the choices

made in taxonomy and species selection, e.g. the sea turtles are omitted and the politically contested Western Sahara is included. Interestingly and to me positively, threats are discussed at the outset of this book rather than at the end, which is more commonly seen. Many different dangers are listed but, in my own experience, poverty combined with the flocks of sheep and goats that eat almost anything, are the main hazards.

In this massive tome, 117 species are described and pictured. While leafing through the book, my first impression was one of a photographic ode to the herpetological richness of the area, which is aided by the book's large format. Some of the photos are presented on a full two-page spread and only a few pictures are disappointing. Throughout the images, the choice was made to present details of larvae, or other typical morphological characters (like the black spatula in *Pelobates varaldii* or the scalation or limb structure in lizard species). Each species includes a head portrait with an explanation in the text or in the photo. The English, French, and Spanish names [but why not the Arabic names?] are included, similar to BONS & GENIEZ (1996), although their book was fully trilingual. Distributions are indicated on dot maps, instead of shading a general area as is so often uselessly done.

In the next portion of the book we find species characters, habitat, biology, and additional remarks. The Red List status of each animal is provided. The texts are short and limited to the essential, which I found disappointing. I had secretly hoped to see a review and survey of all pertinent literature, but alas, my



Scelarcis perspicillata.

Photo: Sergé Bogaerts

hopes were dashed as this is not included. Most taxonomic papers can be found, but few ecological ones. Because of this, the book does not have the same scientific impact as SCHLEICH et al. (1996) and BONIS & GENIEZ (1996). On the other hand, this book will probably appeal to a much wider target group, thereby attracting a wider audience.

The lay-out is clear, but I felt that the proper choices were not always made. For example, the colours in some of the photos are somewhat over-saturated. Sometimes the species

are pictured on the left page, while the description only starts on the right page. The distribution map does not have a consistent place throughout the book – sometimes it can be found under the name, at the end of the page or even on the following leaf.

The price of the hefty tome is considerable, which might deter a number of enthusiasts from purchasing it. But regardless of the cost, and as the authors state in the book, I too hope that young and old and professional and hobby herpetologists, will be attracted to Morocco, a country with so much left to discover.

LITERATURE

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