

WRANIK, W. (2003): Fauna of the Socotra archipelago: field guide. With contributions by O.S. AL-SAGHIER, S. ASPINALL, R.F. PORTER & H. RÖSLER. – Rostock (Universität Rostock), 542 pp. ISBN 3-86009-263-4.

The Socotra archipelago off the Somalian coast, being geographically a continuation of the Horn of Africa, but politically a part of Yemen, has a unique flora and fauna that attracted biologists since long. However, until recently, the political situation made working difficult on the islands. This situation has greatly improved during the past decades, and the impressive voluminous monograph compiled and presented by WOLFGANG WRANIK testifies the considerable increase of knowledge of this biogeographically so important area.

It is obvious that for a herpetological journal my review will concentrate on the chapter on reptiles (there are no amphibians known from the archipelago) coauthored by HERBERT RÖSLER, one of the four main contributors to this book mentioned also on the title page, and by WOLFGANG WRANIK. It is embedded in a series of chapters on other animal groups such as mammals, birds, fishes, arachnids, crustaceans, myriapods, insects, “worm-like animals”, molluscs, and “marine life”. The insects are subdivided in apterygotans and no less than 20 pterygotan orders. This “Introduction to the fauna” with ca. 400 pages, the main part of the book, is preceded by introductory chapters on physical features, climate, vegetation, evolutionary history and biogeography, human population, nature conservation and management, and the history of biological exploration. All important aspects are covered by this book, and after this, the Socotra archipelago can certainly be considered as one of the better known and better documented island groups.

The reptile fauna of four differently-sized islands composing the archipelago, viz. Socotra, Darsa, Samha, and – separated by a deeper sea trench – Abdel Kuri is not rich in species, but has a very high percentage of endemics. Percentage is highest on species level, but there also several endemic genera recognized, however, the definition of genera is usually less objective than that of species. Geckos are represented by the NE African/Arabian genus *Pristurus* (7 endemic species, two discovered by the authors), *Haemodracon* (endemic: 2 species, and the cosmopolitan *Hemidactylus* (8 species, 7 of them endemic, 1 discovered by the authors). Skinks are represented by the endemic and monotypic genus *Hakaria* and by the pan-African genus *Trachylepis* (*Mabuya*

auct.) with one endemic species.

Lacertids have two endemic species of the otherwise Saharo-Sindian genus *Mesalina*, and the Afro-Saharo-Sindian genus *Chamaeleo* has one endemic species. Tropidophid amphisbenians, with their disjunct relict distribution in North Africa and Arabia have a monotypic genus (*Pachycalamus*) endemic in Socotra. Scolecophidian snakes have one endemic species of the cosmopolitan genus *Typhlops* and 3 likewise endemic ones of *Leptotyphlops*. Finally, colubrids are represented by two endemic and monotypic genera (*Ditypophis*, *Hemerophis*) the latter having been assigned to *Coluber* until recently.

Whereas crocodiles have not been recorded from the archipelago (Why even *Crocodylus porosus* is hypothesized to possibly have reached Socotra from the Seychelles in the past is not quite clear to me), the chelonians are represented by marine forms only, thus naturally no endemics. Recorded are *Chelonia mydas*, *Caretta caretta*, *Eretmochelys imbricata*, and *Dermochelys coriacea*. Of these, only *Caretta caretta* has been proven to nest on the islands. Here, the lack of deeper studies is most obvious, and many questions regarding Socotra’s marine turtles remain still open.

But also the recent discoveries of new species of lizards, including those made by the authors, throw light on the still incomplete knowledge of the Socotran reptile fauna. However, this book not only documents the great progress on the exploration of Socotra’s reptiles – and of course all other animal groups mentioned above! –, but is also most useful by giving the present state of art and naming the gaps of knowledge where future research should start with. The chapter on reptiles, moreover, by summarizing the relevant information for the identification of the species and the entire knowledge available on distribution, ecology, and biology, elucidates also the much broader competence of HERBERT RÖSLER who is otherwise known mainly for his great expertise in geckos.

The book is accompanied by 94 colour plates consisting of many more photos, and the reptiles alone account for 13 plates. This means, that the majority of species is figured by more than one colour photograph, so that morphological variation, habitats, behavioural traits etc. could well be documented. I suspect that this rich colour illustration was the reason for WOLFGANG WRANIK to give this voluminous monograph the title “a field guide”! What we associate with the term field guide is a much smaller book suitable for pockets to be taken in the field. This book is much too big

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and heavy to serve as a field guide in the classic sense, but it also exceeds the information of a field guide many times, wherefore I regard the title a typical understatement. Also if I am far away from being a specialist for any of the animals groups treated in this book (each with the same wealth

of details and photos!) I nevertheless feel that they are all treated with the same thoroughness and competence as it is the case with the reptiles. Authors and publisher have to be applauded for this splendid monograph.

WOLFGANG BÖHME, Bonn