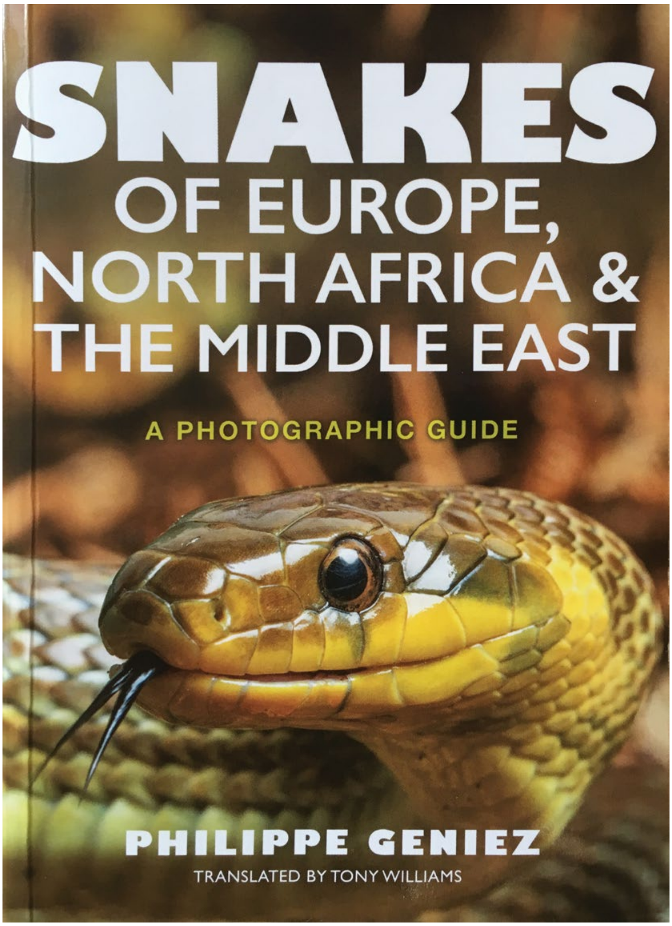
Recensión bibliográfica

Snakes of Europe, North Africa & the Middle East. A photographic guide.

Autor: Philippe Geniez. Princeton Univers. Press. 379 páginas. Idioma: Inglés. Precio aprox.: 28 euros.

This book was originally published in French with the name *Serpents d'Europe, d'Afrique du Nord, et du Moyen-Orient* (Delachaux et Niestlé, 2015). The present translation widens the readership of the work, which now fully covers both sides of the Mediterranean Sea. The bilingual nature of the full work is a clear advantage. In fact, the present work represents a much-needed update from a previous work of Ulrich Gruber, originally published in German with the name *Die Schlangen Europas und Rund ums Mittelmeer* (Franckh-Kosmos Verlags-GmbH & Co., 1989). The increasing knowledge in species distribution over the region and the profound changes in the taxonomic and systematics of the group over the last years demanded a rigorous revision and update. This book certainly has the merit of achieving successfully such revision.

The book is structured in three main sections. The first introductory section provides an overview of snakes, including concepts on morphology, diet, reproduction, taxonomy and systematics. This section is superbly illustrated with photographs and drawings that help understanding some key-features of snake biology. The text on Reproduction (pg. 16) is particularly appealing and excellently illustrated. The most relevant aspects of the chemical composition, the physical effects, and the cultural uses of snake venom are given (pg. 25), as well as a very useful instruction list of immediate care following a snakebite incident from a venomous snake. There is also information about habitat use, community ecology, and conservation, but contrarily to the initial texts of this section, these parts are less well developed. For instance, it would have been important to include information (in a headed



text) about where and when to find snakes in the wild, to help beginners finding easily animals. The need for the development of measures that ensure the conservation of snakes and that contribute for a general change of public attitude towards snakes is highlighted, which is a very relevant and timely subject to which the present book adds another useful contribution. However, the text is relatively short and misses some key information: how many threatened snakes are found among the 123 species presented in the book? Which are the ones most threatened and by which factors? Data on Red List status could have been added to the final summary table (pg. 366). The book also explores basic concepts around keeping snakes in captivity. The colour scheme used to group snakes according to taxonomic properties in the book contents is very useful to find relevant information easily.

The second section is naturally the most extensive of the book and presents a detailed account of snakes of Europe, North Africa and the Middle East. Species accounts are ordered following the phylogenetic relationships of the seven snake families recorded in the region. Although an alphabetical order within each family was not strictly necessary, still it was desirable for the sake of readability. In fact, the use of a phylogenetic ordering requires the preliminary presentation of the phylogenetic position of each species. This should have been done either presenting a phylogenetic tree or a simple table with the species order along the book. Without such information, the inexpert reader will need to search around until finding a specific species or to resort constantly to the index of names in the end of the book. For each species, it is provided information on Latin and common names, as well as former designation that were used for many years. This is especially useful to the older readers, who were familiarised with designations that have been discontinued in the meantime. The book also provides information about the systematic position of each species, identification features, venom properties (when it applies), ecological requirements, general information about biological traits, including activity, behaviour, diet, reproduction, and distribution. When relevant, information is also given on geographic variation and subspecific status of populations. Distribution maps depict the extent of occurrence of each species as range polygons. The scale of maps varies across species and depends on the range size, with smaller ranges being depicted with zoomed distributions. Although this solution maximizes the visible range area, it forces a continuous identification of map location within the region across species. A standard baseline map, pointing the overall location of the range within the region, accompanying the zoom maps would have facilitated map reading. In most cases, the zooms could even increase over the range. In some cases, the range maps are relatively coarse, as in the Atlas dwarf viper (pg. 306), and depict unsuitable areas for the species inside the range polygon. The use of range polygons is understandable given the nature of the photographic guide, but in some cases suggests extensive continuous areas of species occurrence that are not realistic, such as in the case of the Horned viper (pg. 339) or the Sahara sand viper (pg. 345). Readers should take the range maps as general guiding indications to where the species may be found. Almost all species (with few exceptions of very rare species, e.g. pg. 280) are superbly illustrated by clear photographs that support the identification. Photographs of distinct phenotypes allow visualising the described geographic variation, as in the case of the Lataste's viper (pg. 304) or the Nose-horned viper (pg. 308). As a photographic guide, the quality of the photographs is outstanding and will likely generate the desire in the reader to actually see these beautiful animals in the wild. Supplementary illustrations highlight key anatomical features relevant for species identification.

The third section provides a useful summary table of all species, country by country, with detailed information on status of observations per country regarding: native, endemic, extinct, introduced, sea snakes, and uncertain. The order of the countries in the columns of the table follows the geographic distribution of countries within the region, which has the advantage of allowing comparisons among neighbouring countries but forces the reader to search around for a specific country. In fact, the last line of the table, providing the total number of species recorded in each country is useful but a second line weighting number of species by the area of each country would allow a much more interesting comparison of snake diversity among countries. This section also offers a selection of bibliographic references for the readers willing to extend knowledge, indexes of English and scientific names, and the list of photographers.

The book provides a fully up-to-date and comprehensive photographic field guide to the snakes of Europe, North Africa and the Middle East, generously illustrated with colour photographs, and certainly deserves its place with both the passionate snake fan and the occasional naturalist.

José Carlos Brito[1, 2]

[1] CIBIO/InBIO, Centro de Investigação em Biodiversidade e Recursos Genéticos. Universidade do Porto. Rua Padre Armando Quintas, 11. 4485-661 Vairão. Portugal. C.e.: jcbrito@cibio.up.pt
[2] Departamento de Biologia da Faculdade de Ciências. Universidade do Porto. Rua Campo Alegre. 4169-007 Porto. Portugal.

Snakes of Europe, North Africa & the Middle East. A photographic guide.

Autor: Philippe Geniez. Princeton Univers. Press. 379 páginas. Idioma: Inglés. Precio aprox.: 28 euros.

Philipe Geniez, conocido biólogo y herpetólogo francés, autor de varios atlas y guías de referencia sobre la herpetofauna de Europa y el norte de África, así como de multitud de artículos científicos, es autor del libro *Snakes of Europe, North Africa & the Middle East. A photographic guide*. La obra, publicada anteriormente en francés en el año 2015, se presenta ahora en lengua inglesa, traducida por Tony Williams, contando con casi 380 páginas a color, en formato pequeño (19 x 13,5 cm).

Geniez repasa 123 especies de serpientes distribuidas en el Paleártico occidental, introduciendo varias generalidades sobre los ofidios y, posteriormente, listando las especies y detallando diversos aspectos de su historia de vida, biogeografía y ecología. En la parte gráfica, el autor incorpora varios dibujos, mapas de distribución y, tal y como dice el título del libro, multitud de fotografías ilustrando los ofidios. Muchas de las fotografías son autoría del propio Geniez, mientras que otras han sido cedidas por una veintena de colaboradores.

En el primer apartado sobre generalidades se explican brevemente diferentes aspectos relacionados con la morfología, la locomoción, los órganos de los sentidos, la dieta, la fisiología, la reproducción y el comportamiento de las serpientes. Existen a continuación breves apartados sobre el veneno de las serpientes, los biotopos donde se encuentran, sus depredadores, así como otros dos apartados sobre medidas de conservación y el mantenimiento en cautividad. Justo antes de la parte principal del libro, esto es el listado detallado de especies, Geniez explica de manera sucinta la clasificación taxonómica de las serpientes. El autor se basa principalmente en el trabajo filogenético de Pyron *et al.* (2013); es por ello que el número de especies, así como las relaciones entre ellas, se pueden considerar actualizadas hasta la fecha de esta publicación.

El listado detallado de especies se hace por orden taxonómico, primero explicando las características de la familia, subfamilia o género, y después pasando a cada especie. El apartado dedicado a cada especie consta de un encabezado con el nombre vernáculo en inglés, el nombre científico y autor de la especie, la familia y subfamilia, y los nombres vernáculos en francés y alemán. También se incluye un pequeño mapa donde se representa un polígono con el rango de distribución de cada especie, delimitado a partir del libro de Sindaco *et al.* (2013). Cada apartado cuenta con información, variable en extensión para cada caso, sobre la identificación morfológica, el veneno, el hábitat, los hábitos, la dieta, la reproducción, el rango de distribución y la variación geográfica de las especies en cuestión, incluyendo algunas veces un texto final con observaciones. Varias fotografías ilustran la especie en cuestión; muchas veces se trata de fotografías de diferentes coloraciones o las típicas de las subespecies, en otros casos detalles de la cabeza o el cuerpo.

Tras los textos de las especies, Geniez incluye una tabla señalando los países en los que aparece cada especie, un breve listado de referencias bibliográficas recomendadas por el autor y dos índices con las especies detalladas en la obra, uno con los nombres científicos y otro con los vernáculos en inglés.

Estamos ante una obra con gran valor didáctico, útil como libro de consulta en el campo, particularmente para aquellos aficionados que quieran moverse de manera ligera a lo largo de una región tan extensa como lo es el Paleártico occidental. La tabla final con las especies por países parece especialmente diseñada para este propósito. Los textos de identificación y las excelentes fotografías que los acompañan nos permitirán tener una idea inmejorable sobre la variabilidad morfológica de las especies de serpientes. El resto de la información presentada en cada apartado es adecuada, aunque se echa de menos una clave dicotómica para la identificación de las especies y un listado de referencias donde se pueda contrastar y ampliar la información detallada a lo largo del libro.

Fernando Martínez-Freiría

CIBIO/InBIO, Centro de Investigação em Biodiversidade e Recursos Genéticos. Universidade do Porto. Rua Padre Armando Quintas, 11. 4485-661 Vairão. Portugal. C.e.: fmartinez-freiria@cibio.up.pt