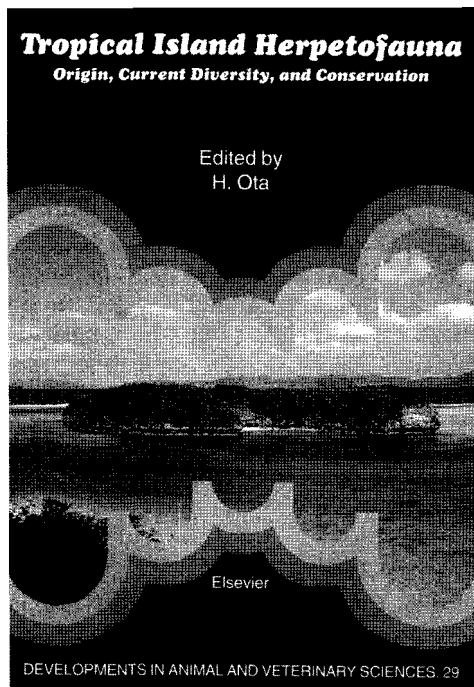


BOOK REVIEW



Tropical Island Herpetofauna: Origin, Current Diversity, and Conservation. Ota, Hidetoshi (Editor), 1999. Elsevier, Amsterdam, xiv + 353 pp. ISBN 0-444-50195-9.

A good number of tropical islands have enjoyed basking in the attention afforded them from herpetologists. Their potentially high biodiversity, variable land area above water, variable distance from mainland, variable topography are ideal ingredients for attempts at answering biogeographical, evolutionary and ecological questions. In June 1998, the International Symposium, "Diversity of Reptiles, Amphibians, and other Terrestrial Animals on Tropical Islands: Origin, Current Status, and Conservation", was held at the University of the Ryukus, Okinawa, Japan. A total of 15 papers, organised into three parts, were compiled in the proceedings.

There are four papers in Part I, "Origin and Taxonomic Diversity", with contributions by Aaron Bauer - high endemism (86%) in terrestrial lizards of New Caledonia, Ilya Darevsky - lizards and snakes from nine Vietnamese islands, Indraneil Das amphibian and reptile biogeography of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, James Lazell - herpetofaunal evolution of South China continental shelf islands. Comprehensive species checklists are

included in the first three, with endemic species marked with asterisks. In Part II, "Ecological Diversity, Dispersal, and Conservation", the papers are more specialised, but give an insight into some lesser known species. For example, Akira Mori et al. reveal the stealthy feeding behaviour of a Colubrid snake on sea turtle eggs and hatchlings. Using molecular biology techniques, Christopher Austin examined island colonization by a Scincid lizard in Melanesia. Also looking at colonization questions is Ivan Ineich, who studied ectodermal parasites of Pacific island geckos. In Part III, "Biogeography of the Ryuku Herpetofauna", the focus is on amphibia and reptilia from the Ryuku Archipelago. Taxa discussed in the papers include: *Eumeces* skinks, *Trimeresurus* pit vipers, geoemydine turtles, the cosmopolitan frog *Rana limnocharis* and the feral soft-shelled turtle *Pelodiscus sinensis*. At the end of the book (pp. 335-353), a comprehensive Taxonomic and Geographic Index is provided. This facilitates quick referrals to all the taxa and localities discussed among all the papers.

Without a doubt, this book deserves a place in the shelves of science/natural history libraries at established tertiary institutions/museums. Although other exciting herpetological topics, such as bioacoustics or amphibian larvae, were not covered in the book, both practicing and potential herpetologists based in the tropics will find a stimulating variety of ideas and avenues for further research. In his abstract, James Lazell, contributor in Part I, noted, "there are more than a thousand small islands, most as yet unexplored by herpetologists. The opportunity to discover many more endemics and relicts is wonderfully great". That should be sufficient to whet our appetites for an island 'getaway'.

Tzi Ming Leong
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