

**Book Review: *A Field Guide to Reptiles and Amphibians of Eastern and Central North America, Third Edition, Expanded* by Roger Conant and Joseph T. Collins. 1998. xviii + 616 pp. Houghton Mifflin Company. ISBN 0-395-90452-8. Softbound. \$20.00  
[Available to CHS members from Zoo Book Sales for \$16.00]**

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The expanded third edition of this popular field guide is being touted as a "must-have" and for some herpetologists, such a recommendation is valid. But all book buyers should be aware that the authors themselves refer to it as an EXPANDED rather than a REVISED edition. Except with regard to an explanation of new provincial nomenclature in northern Canada in the Introduction and some mostly grim updates about habitat destruction in the same section, there is very little new material in this work other than the inclusion of accounts of a handful of introduced exotic lizards. While the new plates and line drawings by Tom R. Johnson are excellent, as are the scattered photographs by a number of contributors, these enhancements are less than would be expected.

It may seem presumptuous or at least strange for a native Californian and virtual lifetime resident of the Golden State to tackle the review of a popular field guide whose geographical limit extends no closer to home than the Rocky Mountains. More daring perhaps is my restricted focus, limited to the turtle section of the new edition. I feel that a finely detailed review of textwide updates, or lack thereof, would be as annoyingly long-winded as a cursory review of the generally satisfactory contents would be bland, hollow praise.

To skeptics, I have been familiar with the turtle fauna of the Eastern seaboard firsthand since having stumbled upon three eastern box turtles near Media, Pennsylvania, in 1961 when I was barely a teenager. It was during that stay outside Philadelphia that I actually met the senior author of this field guide. Countless one- to three-week vacations taken between April and November since the late 1960s have focused on observing and photographing the regional turtle fauna and other herps of 16 eastern, southern and central states, often in the company of homegrown experts. I have faithfully carried a contemporary edition of the Peterson Field Guide on virtually all of these trips. I shall probably always wish to have this handy, concise reference in my possession for such excursions as long as I am able to make them. However, with regard to the third edition, I wonder why the authors skimmed so on the turtle section, limiting new information instead to the identification of established exotic species of other herps and drawings of certain larval amphibians. No new information on chelonians is contained in the 1998 edition. The most convenient justification for this "expanded" edition seems to be that most readers' copies of the 1991 edition have by now become a bit dog-eared, as has mine.

The new edition is not without its welcome modifications, however. Page numbers are more accessible, at the bottom of the page rather than the top and are shown in white, surround-

ed by a small black rectangle. The stunning color photos (including eight in the turtle section, most of them by Suzanne L. Collins) augment the excellent new illustrations by Tom R. Johnson as well as the familiar, impeccable color plates by the late Isabelle Hunt Conant. The plates themselves are grouped near the front, an improvement over the more awkward earlier placement in the middle of the book. By placing the range maps with the corresponding species accounts, and always near the top of the page, the editors will add to the life of this edition by not obliging the reader to thumb back and forth quite so much. A disadvantage of the new, colored maps is that most are much smaller than those of the 1991 edition.

The accounts of only three turtle species will be the yardsticks with which I measure the achievements of the new edition over the old. These three species are among those with which I have familiarity in the field. More importantly, I am reasonably up to date in the current literature on these chelonians and am well acquainted with experts who have logged hundreds of hours in field observations. The geographical distribution of at least three other turtle taxa as presented in the 1998 edition is probably inaccurate, in two cases owing to significant localized extinctions (*Kinosternon s. subrubrum* in northern Indiana, *Graptemys caglei* in the San Antonio River), and to range expansion in the other (*Trachemys scripta elegans* in southern Michigan). But only three examples will be discussed below.

The first turtle selected is the alligator snapping turtle, *Macroclmys temminckii*. Except for a good photo of an adult specimen, and the brightly colored but unmodified range map accompanying the species account, the text is identical verbatim to that of the 1991 edition. Ominously absent from the References section is Peter Pritchard's admittedly controversial 1989 work, *The Alligator Snapping Turtle, Biology and Conservation*. Had Conant and/or Collins familiarized themselves with this work, the new account might have expressed the woefully inevitable conclusion, spread out over several pages in Pritchard's work, that the alligator snapping turtle is hovering near extinction in Louisiana, and probably elsewhere, owing to excessive commercial exploitation. Arguably, reference to the de facto threatened status of this huge turtle in much of its range ought to have been mentioned in the 1991 edition. Perhaps RC and JTC are aware of the severely negative anthropogenic impacts on this species, the world's largest freshwater turtle by weight, but choose to remain silent rather than raise a troublesome political issue. However, in both the 1991 and 1998 editions the authors declare, with regard to the Texas horned lizard, that it "apparently has disappeared from much of its former range in Texas."

The second example I have chosen is the account of the Alabama map turtle, *Graptemys pulchra*. It was immediately evident that the authors have chosen to ignore the descriptions of the Escambia map turtle, *G. ernsti* Lovich and McCoy 1992, and of the Pascagoula map turtle, *G. gibbonsi* Lovich and McCoy 1992. Although Lovich is cited in the Acknowledgments, the References section does not include *Turtles of the United States and Canada* by Ernst, Lovich and Barbour (1994). However, the 1972 work by Ernst and Barbour is cited (incorrectly as 1973). That RC and JTC have overlooked the description of two full species of North American turtles is lamentable; even if they do not accept these (definitely placing themselves in a minority position), at the very least they ought to mention these distinctive “populations” of the Alabama map turtle. JTC’s record on thoroughness vis-à-vis chelonians is somewhat patchy: In his attractive 1981 book *Turtles in Kansas*, he and senior author Janalee P. Caldwell completely overlook the presence of the Missouri cooter, *Pseudemys concinna hieroglyphica*, in the Prairie State (Turtle Power 11[2]:1, book review by Bill Link, March 1982). That species’ unquestioned presence in the southeastern portion of Kansas is confirmed in every other regional work since Carr’s 1952 *Handbook of Turtles*, including all three editions of the Peterson Field Guide on eastern and central U.S. reptiles and amphibians.

My final comment involves the eastern box turtle, *Terrapene carolina*, and may indeed sound like hairsplitting to some readers. With regard to the northeastern limit of the nominate subspecies, both the second and third editions exclude coastal Maine and New Hampshire. Ernst, Lovich and Barbour (1994) do not, and there are unpublished reports of its

presence in southern Vermont as well. The species may be rare on the northeastern periphery of its range but to make no mention of its occurrence in two states is an oversight. Regarding the distribution of the Florida box turtle, *T. c. bauri*, all three editions have given, “Fla. peninsula and some of the Keys” (p. 162, 1998 edition). However, sharp-eyed readers scrutinizing the map will see the extreme southeastern corner of Georgia included for *T. c. bauri* in the range maps of both the second and third edition. The reader may wonder whether this redrawn line is due to error; if not, why is the text not modified to include southeastern Georgia? In response, I can aver that the state of Georgia lists the Florida box turtle as a protected species, voucher specimens reportedly exist in the Savannah Science Museum, and I have found and photographed specimens of “pure” *T. c. bauri* between the Okefenokee Swamp and St. Marys, Georgia. Regrettably, two identical copies of a polite letter on this matter, the second enclosing a SASE and both containing color slides, which I first mailed to a biologist at the Savannah Science Museum in 1989 have neither been answered nor acknowledged to date.

There is little doubt that the newest edition of the Peterson Field Guide to eastern and central North American herps will be eagerly purchased by neophyte herpetologists and by older hobbyists and academics alike, in need of replacing their worn-out 1991 editions. And by and large, the first-time owners of this book will have made a wise choice. However, the authors have revealed themselves to be less than thoroughgoing with regard to current literature on U.S. chelonians. One cannot help but wonder if the presses ought to have been stopped to give the authors one last look around before repackaging old information with new window dressing.

#### Literature Cited

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